

THE GOSPEL OF THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF MATTHEW

JESUS THE MESSIAH-KING EXERCISING KINGDOM AUTHORITY

Paul Apple (Aug. 2023, revised Dec. 2023)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Matthew 16:16 -- "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

BACKGROUND NOTES

GENERAL:

Drew Hunter: The Old Testament story ends with longing for a King to come establish God's kingdom. This kingdom will bring reconciliation to God for sinners and restoration to flourishing for creation. Matthew announces the arrival of this King and the dawn of this kingdom through Jesus's message and ministry. Jesus's words declare how his people will be ethically transformed (**Matt. 5–7**) and his works display how his creation will be physically healed (**Matt. 8–9**). This is a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Yet Matthew shows us, especially in **chapter 13**, that this kingdom does not arrive all at once.

The mystery of the kingdom is that while it has already dawned in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, it will not arrive in its fullness until Jesus returns.

Ray Stedman: Beginning in the New Testament we move from the realm of shadow, type, and prophecy, into the full sunshine of the presentation of the Son of God. The Old Testament speaks of him on every page, but speaks in shadows, in types, in symbols, and in prophecies -- all looking forward to the coming of Someone. You cannot read the Old Testament without being aware of that constant promise running through every page -- Someone is coming! Someone is coming!

Leon Morris: "In grandness of conception and in the power with which a mass of material is subordinated to great ideas no writing in either Testament, dealing with a historical theme, is to be compared with Matthew. In this respect the present writer would be at a loss to find its equal also in the other literature of antiquity." (**Zahn**) In these words a great scholar of an earlier day brought out something of the majesty of our first Gospel. . .

To disparage Matthew is a great mistake. Nobody should minimize the importance of the Gospel that contains the infancy stories, the Sermon on the Mount, and a rich collection of parables (many of which we find in this Gospel only), to name but a few of its contents.

Mark Dever: The Message of Matthew: Jesus, the Son of David

Christianity traced back to Jesus Christ. Most influential figure in human history. Matthew: Jewish by birth and Roman by employment. Writing about mission and message of Jesus as with the other gospels. Unified portrait in the gospels with unique focus in each book.

Connectivity to OT history. Deeply textured portrait of Christ.

Always referred to as the gospel written by Matthew. Authorship not really disputed.

What was Jesus all about? Not some religious innovator.

1) What does this book say?

7 sections of Jesus' ministry. Introduction (1-4) and Concluding Climax (26-28); Chaps. 5-25 constitute main portion – each of 5 sections has a long teaching block and then some narrative.

- (5-9) Sermon on the Mount – Jesus' authority as teacher and healer
- (10-12) Rising Opposition to Jesus' ministry
- (13-mid 16) Two Opposed Camps – Polarizing effect – teaching block has parables
- (16:16 – confession of Jesus as Messiah = hinge point of book thru chap 18 – Teaching on Discipleship and church
- (19-25) Judgment coming on Israel for rejecting her Messiah

2) Was Jesus more New or more Jew?

Faithful Jew who knew His scriptures; respected Rabbi; expected fulfillment of OT passages; inheritor and interpreter of God's special telling of Himself to His special people.

Many things here new about person of Jesus and His mission. But the emphasis is on continuity.

The temple would be destroyed; huge implications; animal sacrifices ended; His body becoming the new temple. Considerable change. Ending of the priesthood; decline of significance of city of Jerusalem; including the Gentiles in the kingdom. Great Commission directed to making disciples in the world.

But still not how Jewish this Jesus is. Starts with **1:1** – *Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

After destruction of temple, only 2 strains of Judaism survived:

- Rabbinic – after the tradition of the Pharisees
- Jewish Christianity

27:25 – reaction of the Jews to Jesus – “*Crucify Him*” – Matthew is honest about the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders.

Fulfilled OT predictions: (not a comprehensive list)

- **1:22** – Virgin birth
- **2:15** – Flight from Egypt
- **2:17** – Slaughter of innocents
- **2:23** – Jesus being from Nazareth
- **4:14** – Jesus' ministry in Galilee
- **8:17** – Jesus' healings fulfilled prophecy
- **12:17** – the fact Jesus did not talk a lot about His healings publicly

- **13:14** – the peoples’ lack of understanding
- **13:35** – teaching in parables
- **21:4** – Jesus riding on a donkey’s colt for Triumphant Entry
- **26:54-56** – Regarding circumstances of his arrest
- **27:29** – betrayal by Judas for 30 pieces of silver

Not an innovator; He was the answer;

Not an inventor; He was the fulfillment – the key to understanding the OT.

He is the authoritative interpreter of Israel’s religious writings and teachings.

3) Who is Jesus?

OT figures teach us about Jesus – we see the fruition of these lives in Jesus:

- Abraham – in the genealogy; progenitor of the faith
- Moses – always there in the background; Transfiguration scene; his teaching is the reference point for Jesus’ teaching; possible parallel to 5 books of Law of Moses = 5 major discourses in Matthew?
Jesus understood himself as new lawgiver in Israel
- David – planned the temple; wrote many Psalms; greatest of the kings; prefigured Jesus more than anyone; Jesus teaches using comparative statements –
 - o **Matt. 12:1ff** – *one greater than the temple is here* –
 - o **vs. 38** – *one greater than Jonah is here* –
 - o **vs. 42** – *one greater than Solomon is here* --Prophet, Priest and King to end all

Who called Jesus the Son of David?

9:27 – 2 blind men

12:23 – blind, mute man

15:22 -- Canaanite woman

20:30-31 – 2 blind men crying out to Jesus

21 – crowds cry and the children take up the cry **21:15**

22 – Pharisees; interesting exchange **vs. 41ff.**

Quoting **Ps. 110:1** where David is speaking – Messiah will be a descendent of David but is referenced as greater than David (“*my Lord*”)

9:36 – Greatest Shepherd – compassionate

16:13-20 – confession of Peter – **Jesus is the Messiah**

Matthew introduces Jesus as the Christ throughout the book (track these references):

- Matthew and the magi, John the Baptist wonderingly, Peter certainly, the priests and Pilate all calling Jesus the Christ, the Messiah
- Did Jesus Himself ever call Himself the Messiah? Absolutely
 - o **16:20** -- Jesus admits it to His disciples
 - o **22:42** -- Jesus talking to the Pharisees and explaining from **Ps. 110**
 - o **23:10** -- There is only one true Messiah
 - o **24:5, 23** -- There will be many false claims
 - o **26:63** -- When He is directly asked by the High Priest

Disciples were very limited in their faith and understanding of who Jesus was;
Who really understood Who Jesus Is? a very strange assortment of people:

11:25 – understanding depends on revelation to whom the Father chooses

Only 2 people commended in the gospel for their great faith:

A Roman centurion (**8:8**) and a Canaanite woman (**15:27**)

Look at who worshipped Jesus:

- Wise men (**2:11**)
- Disciples in the boat (**ch. 14:33**)
- Women at the tomb (**ch. 28:9**)
- Disciples upon seeing the resurrected Jesus – but still some doubted (**28:17**)

Practical Application: **20:28** – “*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many*”

Matt. 9:12 – to understand Jesus, you must understand something about yourself; the doctor came for the sick; for sinners

Grant Osborne: **Special hermeneutics** recognizes the elements of **narrative** that go into understanding how Matthew’s stories function. Literary theorists realize that stories contain **point of view** (the perspective taken by the author, the “shape” given to the story, and the intended effect on the readers), narrative or **story time** (not chronological because it relates to the order of events in the developing work as a whole rather than the historical progression of them in the life of Christ), **plot development** (the sequence of events in terms of conflict and climax), **characterization** and **dialogue** (the way the characters in a story relate to each other and to the events of the story), and the implied reader (the original audience the author had in mind when writing the story). The goal of analyzing biblical narrative is to see how the stories function at each of these levels and then to put them together in terms of their message and effect on the reader.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING

Warren Wiersbe: **Comparison of the Four Gospels**:

Portrait of Jesus

1. Matthew: Promised King
2. Mark: Suffering Servant
3. Luke: Perfect Man
4. John: God the Son

Original Audience

1. Matthew: Jews
2. Mark: Romans
3. Luke: Greeks
4. John: The World

Author

1. Matthew: Tax collector, one of the twelve disciples
2. Mark: Close associate of and assistant to the disciples
3. Luke: Gentile physician, early convert
4. John: Fisherman, one of the twelve disciples

Theme

1. Matthew: The messianic King has come, fulfilling Old Testament promises.
2. Mark: The Son of God has come to seek, to serve, and to save.
3. Luke: The Son of Man has come to redeem all of humanity.
4. John: The eternal Son of God has become incarnate.

Response

1. Matthew: Worship Him!
2. Mark: Follow Him!
3. Luke: Imitate Him!
4. John: Believe in Him!

Chuck Swindoll: The apostle Matthew, a Jew himself, offered a decidedly **Jewish perspective** on the ministry of Jesus. He included more than fifty direct citations—and even more indirect allusions—from the Old Testament. This exceeds any of the other gospels and indicates that Matthew had the Jewish population in mind when he sat down to write. Matthew’s extensive connections between Jesus and the Old Testament provide ample prophetic evidence for Jesus’s ministry but also give contemporary readers a glimpse into how first-century readers approached the Old Testament with a Christ-centered mind-set.

In addition, Matthew’s gospel answers the question on the mind of every Jewish reader: “*If Jesus is the King of the Jews, then where is God’s promised kingdom?*” Matthew reveals that Jesus did offer the kingdom to Israel, but the offer was rejected (**Matthew 4:17; 16:13–28; 21:42–43**). God’s primary work in the world is now accomplished through the building of Christ’s church, after which Jesus will come again to earth and establish His kingdom—ruling the world from Israel.

John MacArthur: Matthew, meaning “*gift of the Lord*,” was the other name of Levi (**9:9**), the tax collector who left everything to follow Christ (**Luke 5:27, 28**). Matthew was one of the 12 apostles (**10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13**). In his own list of the 12, he explicitly calls himself a “*tax collector*” (**10:3**). Nowhere else in Scripture is the name Matthew associated with “*tax collector*”; the other evangelists always employ his former name, Levi, when speaking of his sinful past. This is evidence of humility on Matthew’s part. As with the other 3 gospels, this work is known by the name of its author.

Ray Stedman: As you know, this Gospel was written by Matthew, otherwise known as Levi. He was a publican, and publicans were those men who took the taxes from the people. His name means “*the gift of God*,” and to call a tax collector by that name

obviously indicates that he was converted. It was perhaps our Lord himself who designated him Matthew, just as he changed Simon's name to Peter, and perhaps the names of others of the disciples as well. Tradition tells us that Matthew lived and taught in Palestine for 15 years after the crucifixion, and then he began to travel as a missionary, first to Ethiopia and then to Macedonia, Syria, and Persia. Finally he died a natural death in either Ethiopia or Macedonia, but this is not certain. It is one of the legends or traditions that have come down to us about Matthew.

William Barclay: There was one gift which Matthew would possess. Most of the disciples were fishermen. They would have little skill and little practice in putting words together and writing them down; but Matthew would be an expert in that. When Jesus called Matthew, as he sat in the office where he collected the customs duty, Matthew rose up and followed him and left everything behind him except one thing – his pen. And Matthew nobly used his **literary skill** to become the first man ever to compile an account of the teaching of Jesus.

The Gospel Coalition: The earliest traditions of the church are unanimous in attributing the first Gospel to Matthew, the former tax collector who followed Jesus and became one of his 12 disciples. The earliest and most important of these traditions comes from the second century in the writings of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (c. A.D. 135), and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul (c. 175). Because these early church leaders had either direct or indirect contact with the apostolic community, they would have been very familiar with the Gospels' origins. Moreover, no competing traditions now exist (if they ever did) attributing Matthew's Gospel to any other author. If Matthew did not write the book, it is hard to see why the false ascription would bear the name of a relatively obscure apostle when more well-known and popular figures could have been chosen (e.g., Philip, Thomas, or James).

Daniel Wallace: A number of factors and presuppositions affect the **date** of this book. Among the most important are:

- (1) authorship;
- (2) the solution to the synoptic problem;
- (3) the date of Acts;
- (4) whether the Olivet Discourse was truly prophetic or a *vaticinium ex eventu*;
- (5) the theological development, especially related to ecclesiology; and
- (6) the significance of the Jewish nature of the work, especially its anti-Sadducean approach.

Though most scholars date the book c. 80-90, our conclusion is that it should be dated substantially earlier. . .

In conclusion, the following points can be made:

- (1) Matthew depends on Mark and therefore probably should not be dated earlier than the 50s CE.
- (2) Luke neither knew of Matthew's work, nor Matthew of Luke's. If Luke is dated c. 62, then Matthew was probably written within two or three years of Luke

(60-65). Thus, regardless of when Mark was written, the independence of Matthew and Luke argues for a date of close proximity to the other.

(3) Matthew was written before the start of the Jewish War because his appeal to the reader to flee from Jerusalem is too late in 67 CE since the Romans had shut off that possibility at that time.

The best guess as to date would therefore be the **early 60s** (i.e. **60-65**). And for what it is worth, this is confirmed by Irenaeus' statement that Matthew composed his work when both Peter and Paul were in Rome (c. 60-64).

PURPOSE OF WRITING

John MacArthur: His purpose is clear: to demonstrate that Jesus is the Jewish nation's long-awaited Messiah. His voluminous quoting of the OT is specifically designed to show the tie between the Messiah of promise and the Christ of history. This purpose is never out of focus for Matthew, and he even adduces many incidental details from the OT prophecies as proofs of Jesus' messianic claims (e.g., **2:17, 18; 4:13–15; 13:35; 21:4, 5; 27:9, 10**).

David Malick: When Jesus was presented and rejected as Israel's Messiah, He prepared His disciples to follow His teachings in His upcoming absence as the crucified, and then risen, obedient Servant/Messiah, while Israel slipped toward judgment.

Chuck Swindoll: Matthew wrote his account of Jesus's ministry to show that Jesus was and is indeed the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah. He reflected this concern in his opening line, "*The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (**Matthew 1:1**). From there, Matthew consistently took his readers back to the Old Testament, providing Old Testament testimony regarding the birth of Jesus, Bethlehem as the location of Jesus's birth, the flight to Egypt, Herod's slaughter of the infants, and the beginning of Jesus's ministry. In a world where many in the Jewish community had claimed the role of Messiah for themselves, Matthew's commitment to grounding the life of Jesus in the Old Testament raised Jesus above the multitude of these false messiahs.

David Malick: The Purposes of Matthew are Many:

A. He desires to show that the major events in the life of Jesus took place in fulfillment of prophecy--He is Messiah

B. He desire to show the comprehensiveness of the message of salvation to include the Gentiles

C. He desires to provide an apologetic for the many questions which would have been raised against Jesus--illegitimacy of birth, residence of Jesus in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem, stealing of the body of Jesus

D. He desires to teach the commandments of Jesus by recording five major discourses throughout the book

E. He desired to demonstrate the reason the message moved from the Jews to the Gentiles (their apathy and rejection of the King)

F. He desired to prove to the Jews that the kingdom program of God had not failed, and was still in effect

Daniel Wallace: In sum, Matthew first proves that Jesus was the Messiah. Second, he shows that Jesus did not fail to establish the kingdom (the failure was the nation's—and the kingdom was inaugurated, though not consummated in the coming of the Messiah). Finally, he wishes to show that because the nation failed to respond, the gospel was now open to Gentiles. But even in this final point Matthew walks a tightrope between giving his audience a rationale for the Gentile mission and making sure that they do not offend their Jewish neighbors by abandoning the Law. In this respect, **5:17-20** and **28:16-20** stand out as the theological cornerstones of this book, and they stand in some tension.

David Platt: "*Gospel*" literally means "*good news*," and Matthew's purpose in this book is to write an account of the good news of Jesus Christ—how Jesus came, what Jesus did, what Jesus said, and what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection. These truths are intended to change our lives and the entire world.

In order for us to rightly interpret Matthew's Gospel, we need to understand what it is and what it is not. First, as we consider this Gospel, we need to remember that it is **not a congregational letter**. Matthew is not like 1 Timothy, a letter written by Paul sent to Timothy and the church at Ephesus. This Gospel is not primarily addressing a certain congregation in a certain situation; rather, it is presenting Jesus Christ—who He is and what He has done—to all people.

Second, as you read through Matthew you will also notice that it is **not a comprehensive biography**. Matthew was not trying to include every minute detail of Jesus' life. There are many things that have been left out. Matthew chose various stories and abbreviated teachings from Jesus' life in order to accomplish a specific purpose. This Gospel includes what it does because the author wants to say something specific about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, concerning the purpose of Matthew's Gospel, we see that it is **not a chronological history**. Obviously, time plays a role in Matthew's arrangement, since he begins with Jesus' birth and ends with Jesus' death and resurrection. However, within this broad framework, Matthew has intentionally arranged his material around specific emphases. In particular, Matthew organizes his Gospel around five distinct teaching sections, and in between sections he tells us different stories, or narrative accounts.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

Daniel Wallace: All four gospels emphasize a different facet of Jesus Christ, though Matthew's emphasis is easily the clearest to perceive. **He presents Jesus as Messiah, Son of David, King of the Jews.**

E. Michael Green: The Life of Discipleship

Matthew's Gospel is strong on discipleship. He is clear that to decide for Jesus means repudiating old ways of behaviour. The law of the kingdom must mark the lives of the members of the kingdom. God's love brings us into the kingdom in the first place; that same love must have a practical outworking in our lives. We are the recipients of the love of God, who accepts us just as we are, unqualified tax collectors, sinners and the like. And that love transforms us. The practical outworking is delineated in the Sermon. That is how disciples are called to reflect the *agapē* which won them. The indicative of what members of the kingdom are in Christ is followed by the imperative of how they must behave. It is the outworking of what God works within them. Decision for Christ inevitably leads into discipleship of Christ. The Sermon assumes the indicative: it spells out the imperative. The gospel and ethics cannot be separated. And the ethic of the kingdom is spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount. It is meant to be lived out by the church in the midst of a secular society. We are not to expect everybody else to behave like that, but disciples are called to nothing less. That is the outworking of the love that has reached us in Jesus the Messiah. So discipleship is a major concern of Matthew throughout his Gospel. And undoubtedly he intends the readers of his work to apply this truth to themselves. If Jesus is our rabbi, then discipleship is the name of the game.

Van Parunak: Prophecies of the Passion

16:21	17:22-23	20:17-19	26:1-2
From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,	And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them,	And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,	he said unto his disciples,
how that he must go unto Jerusalem,		18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem;	2 Ye know that after two days is <i>the feast of the passover</i> ,
and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes,	The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:	and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes,	and the Son of man is betrayed
and be killed,	23 And they shall kill him,	and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify <i>him</i> :	to be crucified.
and be raised again the third day.	and the third day he shall be raised again.	and the third day he shall rise again.	

The Gospel Coalition: Themes

1. Portrait of Jesus.
Jesus is the true Messiah, Immanuel (God incarnate with his people), Son of God, King of Israel, and Lord of the church.
Matthew 1:1, 23; 2:2; 14:33; 16:16; 18:20; 21:5–9
2. The bridge between Old and New Testaments.
Jesus fulfills the hopes and promises of the OT through his messianic genealogy, fulfillment of OT prophecies, and fulfillment of the OT law. These bridging qualities may have been one reason Matthew was chosen to begin the NT canon. Another possible reason is that many in the early church thought that Matthew was the first Gospel written, and another is that it was personally written by an apostle, in contrast to Mark and Luke.
Matthew 1:1–17, 22–23; 2:4–5, 15, 17, 23; 5:17–20
3. Salvation-historical “particularism” and “universalism.”
Matthew’s Gospel traces God’s continuing work of salvation within Israel (“particularism”) and extends this saving work to all the peoples of the earth (“universalism”), through the person and work of Christ.
Matthew 10:5–6; 28:19
4. The new community of faith.
The early church included both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Matthew’s Gospel would have encouraged them to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers to find unity in service to Jesus the Messiah as members of his universal church.
Matthew 11:28; 16:18–19; 28:19
5. The church is built and maintained by Jesus’ continuing presence.
God’s saving work in the present age is carried out chiefly by and through the church, which Jesus continues to build and inhabit. Anyone who responds to Jesus’ call—whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, slave or free—is brought into the fellowship of his church to enjoy him and participate in the community of his kingdom.
Matthew 16:18; 18:15–20; 22:10; 28:20
6. A “great commission” for evangelism and mission.
Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations” is found only in Matthew and has motivated countless believers to reach out to the lost with the good news of the gospel. As Jesus made disciples in his earthly ministry, he commissions his church to follow his example.
Matthew 28:19
7. Jesus’ five discourses recorded in Matthew can be viewed as a manual on discipleship.

The presentation of five of Jesus' major discourses, addressed at least in part to his disciples, forms the most comprehensive collection of Jesus' instructional ministry found anywhere in Scripture. They paint a holistic picture of life lived in obedience to Christ, and the church has used them to instruct disciples through the ages.

Matthew chs. 5–7; 10; 13; 18–20; 24–25

Donald Hagner: Themes

- OT promises related to Jesus being **fulfilled**.
- Narrative related to the **kingdom of heaven** – new relationship between God and humanity.
- **Passion-narrative** material – Jesus came primarily to die. The basic story of Jesus is the cross – the Messiah comes to die for the sins of the people.
- **Modern relevance of ancient texts like Matthew** – trappings of the culture very different, but the longings, fears, frustrations, etc. of humanity are common down thru the ages. God has an answer for these same problems that has not changed.

William Barclay: Matthew is especially interested in **the Church**. It is in fact the only one of the synoptic gospels which uses the word Church at all. Only Matthew introduces the passage about the Church after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (**Matthew 16:13–23**; cf. **Mark 8:27–33**; **Luke 9:18–22**). Only Matthew says that disputes are to be settled by the Church (**18:17**). By the time Matthew came to be written, the Church had become a great organization and institution, and indeed the dominant factor in the life of the Christian.

Matthew has a specially strong **apocalyptic interest**. That is to say, Matthew has a specially strong interest in all that Jesus said about his own second coming, about the end of the world, and about the judgment. **Matthew 24** gives us a fuller account of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse than any of the other gospels. Matthew alone has the parables of the talents (**25:14–30**), the wise and the foolish virgins (**25:1–13**), and the sheep and the goats (**25:31–46**). Matthew has a special interest in the last things and in judgment.

Leon Morris: Matthew also has a strong polemic against the Pharisees. These men formed a highly regarded sect among the Jews and were insistent that the traditions that came from the great ones of the past must be adhered to. They could not recognize the hand of God in what Jesus was doing, but opposed him at every turn. Matthew reports Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees as well as the attempts of these Jewish leaders to defeat the purposes of God he discerned in what Jesus taught and did.

Michael Wilkins: Matthew's Gospel, according to citations found in early Christian writers, was the most widely used and influential of any of the Gospels. It has retained its appeal throughout the centuries and has exerted a powerful influence on the church. Its popularity is explained at least in part because of the following distinctives that are found throughout this gospel.

(1) The bridge between Old and New Testaments.

From the opening lines of his story, Matthew provides a **natural bridge** between the Old Testament and New Testament. He demonstrates repeatedly that Old Testament hopes, prophecies, and promises have now been fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus, beginning with the “fulfillment” of the messianic genealogy (**1:1**), the fulfillment of various Old Testament prophecies and themes, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament law. The early church likely placed Matthew first in the New Testament canon precisely because of its value as a bridge between the Testaments.

(2) Salvation-historical “particularism” and “universalism.”

These terms emphasize that Matthew’s Gospel lays striking emphasis on both the fulfillment of the promises of salvation to a particular people, Israel, and also the fulfillment of the universal promise of salvation to all the peoples of the earth. Matthew’s Gospel alone points explicitly to Jesus’ intention to go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (**10:5–6; 15:24**), showing historically how God’s promise of salvation to Israel was indeed fulfilled. Yet the promises made to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the nations are also fulfilled as Jesus extends salvation to the Gentiles (cf. **21:44; 28:19**). The church throughout the ages has found assurance in Matthew’s Gospel that God truly keeps his promises to his people.

(3) The new community of faith.

Facing the threat of gathering Roman persecution within a pagan world, Matthew addresses a church that is representative of the emerging community of faith. The community apparently has a large membership of Jewish Christians, familiar with temple activities and the Jewish religious system. But it also has a large contingent of Gentile Christians, who are discovering their heritage of faith in God’s universal promise of salvation. The church has consistently found in Matthew’s Gospel a call to a new community that transcends ethnic and religious barriers to find oneness in its adherence to Jesus Messiah.

(4) The church is built and maintained by Jesus’ continuing presence.

Matthew alone among the evangelists uses the term *ekklēsia*, which later became the common term to designate the church. He emphasizes explicitly that God’s program of salvation-history will find its continuation in the present age as Jesus builds his church and maintains his presence within its assembly. Whoever responds to his invitation (**22:10**)—whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, slave or free—are brought within the church to enjoy his fellowship and demonstrate the true community of faith.

(5) A “great commission” for evangelism and mission.

The form of Jesus’ commission to “*make disciples of all the nations*” (**28:19**) is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, providing continuity between Jesus’ ministry of making disciples in his earthly ministry and the ongoing ministry of making disciples to which the church has been called. This “*great commission*” has been at the heart of evangelistic and missionary endeavor throughout church history.

(6) The structure of five discourses contributes to a manual on discipleship.

They provide a wholistic presentation on the kind of discipleship that was to be taught to disciples as the basis for full-orbed obedience to Christ and became the basis for Christian catechesis within the church throughout its history.

STRUCTURE

The Gospel Coalition: The most notable literary feature of the book's format is the **alternating pattern** around which the book is organized. The material in Matthew's Gospel is based on a rhythmic, back-and-forth movement between blocks of narrative material and blocks of discourse material. There are five passages of discourse, which can be viewed as corresponding to the five digits on the human hand and can be easily remembered if one lists the questions that Jesus in effect answers in each unit:

1. How are citizens of the kingdom to live (**chs. 5–7**)?
2. How are traveling disciples to conduct themselves on their evangelistic journeys (**ch. 10**)?
3. What parables did Jesus tell (**ch. 13**)?
4. What warning did Jesus give about not hindering entrance into the kingdom and on forgiveness (**chs. 18–20**)?
5. How will human history end (**chs. 24–25**)?

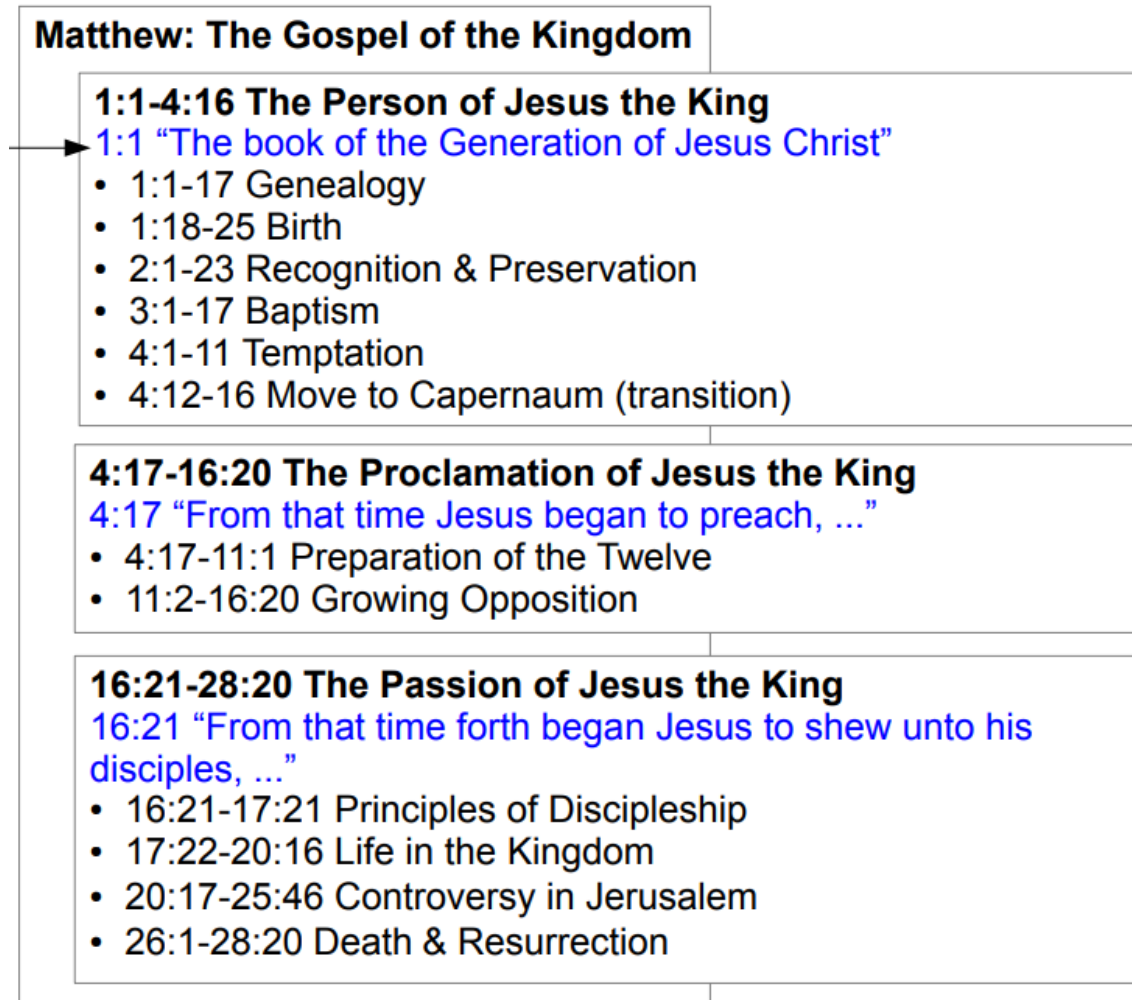
Matthew even used a set formula to signal these units, ending them with the statement “*when Jesus had finished [these sayings]*” (**Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1**).

E. Michael Green: Perhaps the heart of the matter lies in **chapter 13**. It is the **hinge** on which the Gospel turns. It is the break in the middle of the book, and the emphasis thereafter moves from the crowds to the Twelve. It may well reflect the theme of the Gospel, too. For here in **chapter 13** we see the different responses to the planting of God's seed in the hearts of men and women: it is both reflective and challenging. And if **chapter 13** is the hinge of the Gospel, we find two carefully balanced discourses on either side. Discourses 1 and 5 are similar in length and not dissimilar in subject matter. Both are about entry into the kingdom (now, and at the end-time). Discourses 2 and 4 are also similar in length and subject matter. They are concerned with the sending out of people, and the receiving of people, in the mission of the church and in the name of Jesus. Clearly, some care has been taken over the **parallelism**.

Craig Blomberg: We are more interested here in the significance of the structure for the theology Matthew wishes to communicate. The most obvious thrust of the sequence of topics in the Gospel is that Matthew is tracing the events of Jesus' life in terms of a **growing hostility** on the part of the Jewish leaders that increasingly leads Jesus himself to turn to the Gentiles and to anticipate a later, widespread ministry on the part of his disciples among them. Theologians often refer to the development of this theme as the tension between **particularism** and **universalism** in Matthew. Few have elevated it to the role of the most foundational or overarching theme of the book, but our structure

suggests that it should be so identified. Above all, Matthew thus wants to demonstrate **God's work in Jesus to bring the fulfillment of his promises to his chosen people, the Jews, and, through (or even in spite of) their reaction, to offer identical blessings and judgments to all humanity.**

Van Parunak: Overview of Matthew



So, in broad outline, in Matthew we learn:

- of the Person of Jesus the king, that he is the promised king from the line of David who bears the title “the Son of God”;
- of the Proclamation of Jesus the king, in both word and act (his healings), and the growing opposition to which that Proclamation leads;
- of the Passion of Jesus the king, in which he dies to redeem his people, then rises from the dead

Warren Wiersbe: Being accustomed to keeping systematic records, Matthew gave us a beautifully organized account of our Lord's life and ministry. The book can be divided into ten sections in which “**doing**” and “**teaching**” alternate. Each teaching section ends

with “*When Jesus had ended these sayings*” or a similar **transitional statement**. The chapters can be divided like this:

<u>Narrative</u>	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Transition</u>
1—4	5—7	7:28
8:1—9:34	9:35—10:42	11:1
11:2—12:50	13:1—52	13:53 1
3:53—17:27	18:1—35	19:1
19:1—23:39	24:1—25:46	26:1
26:1—28:20 (the Passion narrative)		

J. Sidlow Baxter: The Promised King – Attested Yet Rejected; Slain Yet Risen (1:1 – 4:11) Introduction

- A. (1:1-17) Genealogy
- B. (1:18 – 2:23) Nativity
- C. (3:1-17) Baptism
- D. (4:1-11) Temptation

I. (4:12 – 18:35) The Detour in Galilee

A. (5:1 – 7:29) What Jesus Taught – the tenfold message

1. (5:3-16) Beatitudes
2. (5:17-48) Morals
3. (6:1-18) Motives
4. (6:19-24) Mammon
5. (6:25-34) Cares
6. (7:1-6) Discernment
7. (7:7-11) Encouragements
8. (7:12) Summary
9. (7:13-14) Alternatives
10. (7:15-27) Warnings

B. (8:1 – 10:42) What Jesus Wrought – the ten “*mighty works*”

1. (8:1-4) Leper cleansed
2. (8:5-13) Palsied healed
3. (8:14-15) Fever cured
4. (8:23-27) Storm calmed
5. (8:28-34) Demoniacs
6. (9:1-8) Palsy cured
7. (9:18-22) Hemorrhage
8. (9:23-26) Girl raised
9. (9:27-31) Sight given
10. (9:32-34) Demoniac

C. (11:1 – 18:35) What People Thought – the ten reactions

1. (9:2-15) John the Baptist – undecided (11:3)
2. (9:16-19) “*This generation*” -- unresponsive (11:17)

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| 3. (9:20-30) | Galilean cities -- | unrepentant | (11:20) |
| 4. (12:2,10,14,38) | Pharisees -- | unreasonable | (12:10,14,24) |
| 5. (13:1-52) | Multitudes -- | undiscerning | (13:13-15) |
| 6. (13:53-58) | Nazarethites -- | unbelieving | (13:58) |
| 7. (14:1-13) | Herod the king -- | unintelligent | (14:2) |
| 8. (15:1-20) | Jerusalem Scribes -- | unconciliatory | (15:2,12) |
| 9. (16:1-12) | Sadducees -- | unrelenting | (16:1) |
| 10. (16:16) | The Twelve Apostles -- | glad recognition | (16:16) |

III. (19:1 – 28:20) The Climax in Judea

A. (19-25) The Presentation

1. (19-20) The journeying up to Jerusalem
2. (21:1-17) The triumphal entry into Jerusalem
3. (21:18-23) The collisions inside of Jerusalem
4. (24-25) The resultant prophecy on Olivet

B. (26-27) The Crucifixion

1. (26:1-56) Jesus among His own disciples
2. (26:57-75) Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin
3. (27:1-26) Jesus before the Roman governor
4. (27:27-66) Jesus crucified, dead, and buried

C. (28) The Resurrection

1. (28:1-7) The intervention of the angel
2. (28:8-10) The reappearance of the risen Lord
3. (28:11-15) The lying invention of the Jews
4. (28:16-20) The new outsending of the Eleven

David Malick: Argument of the Book

I. PROLOGUE:

Through the genres of genealogy and narrative Jesus is identified as the Messiah, chosen by God to fulfill the Kingdom promises for Israel and the blessing promises for the world, but he is only received by a remnant (Joseph), He is rejected and persecuted by the nation (Herod), He is worshiped by those outside of the nation (the wisemen), and He is protected by God as the fulfillment of Scripture (1:1 - 2:23)

II. JESUS IS INTRODUCED WITH FOUNDATIONS OF THE KINGDOM:

Having been identified with the prophetic message of John, Jesus is demonstrated to be the true son of God who obeys his word, who proclaims in word and miracles the gospel of the Kingdom, and exhorts His disciples to submit to His rule for enrichment, usefulness to God, greatness in the Kingdom, and temporal life (3:1 - 7:29)

III. JESUS MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

to Israel as Messiah through miraculous works which are characteristic of Messiah and the Kingdom, and through proclamation by Himself and His twelve disciples that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand for Israel if she will receive Him (8:1 - 11:1)

IV. OPPOSITION TO THE KING:

From an initial questioning of the work of Jesus by John the Baptizer, to more intense opposition which led to the rejection of Jesus by the leaders of the nation, Jesus continued to minister as the suffering servant by identifying the evil of the religious leaders and by proclaiming the gospel message for those who would hear in the form of parables about the interim form of the Kingdom which must take place in view of Israel's rejection of her King (11:2 - 13:53)

V. JESUS' REACTION TO OPPOSITION:

Jesus withdrew from the leadership within the nation who rejected Him only to continue to minister to those (outside of and within the nation) who would follow Him, and to train His disciples for their future ministry to people in His absence as He began to move toward Jerusalem (13:53 - 19:2)

VI. AS JESUS CAME TO JERUSALEM HE CONTINUED TO INSTRUCT HIS DISCIPLES:

He presented Himself as King, and was rejected by the nation, whereupon, He rejected the nation, and explained to His disciples the signs which will precede His second coming, as well as the need for everyone to be personally ready at His second coming (19:3 - 25:46)

VII. THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF THE KING:

Jesus was falsely accused, brutally crucified, and gloriously resurrected in accordance with the Scripture and then commissioned his disciples to tell the nations of his authority over heaven and on earth (26:1 - 28:20)

Phillip Kayser:

Other authors have pointed out that Matthew clearly structures the entire book around sections of Isaiah. And it is true. But he does so as an overlay to other structures. But wow, does Isaiah ever open up the book of Matthew!

My proposed structure of Matthew's Gospel:

- 1) 1:1-2:23 - 'The virgin shall bear a son' [Mt 1:23 = Isa 9:6]
- 2) 3:1-4:11 - 'The way of the Lord in the wilderness' [Mt 3:3 = Isa 40:3]
- 3) 4:12-7:29 - 'A great light in Galilee' [Mt 4:15-16 = Isa 9:1-2]
- 4) 8:1-10:42 - 'He carried away our diseases' [Mt 8:17 = Isa 53:4]
- 5) 11:1-12:45 - 'Bruised reeds & Gentile judgement' [Mt 12:17-21 = Isa 42:1-4]
- 6) 12:46-13:58 - 'Hearing and understanding' [Mt 13:14-15 = Isa 6:9-10]
- 7) 14:1-16:12 - 'Teaching the traditions of men' [Mt 15:8-9 = Isa 29:13]
- 8) 16:13-21:11 - 'The King coming to Zion, gentle' [Mt 21:5 = Isa 62:11 & Zec 9:9]
- 9) 21:12-25:46 - 'House of prayer' or 'robbers' den' [Mt 21:13 = Isa 56:7 & Jer 7:11]
- 10) 26:1-28:20 - 'Shepherd and sheep' (& Galilee) [Mt 26:31 = Zec 13:7 & Isa 53:4-6]

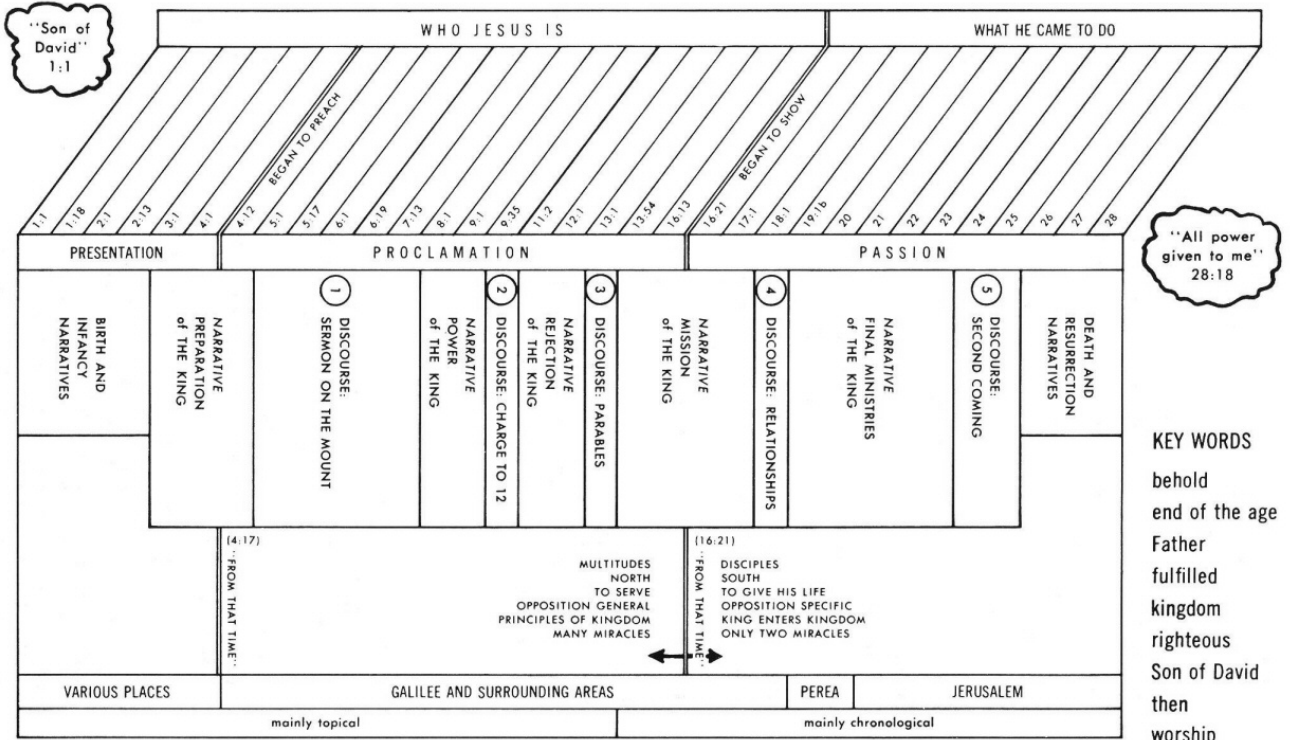
<https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/BibleSurvey/37Matthew.md>

Jensen's Survey of the NT:

MATTHEW CONTAINS
15 PARABLES
20 MIRACLES

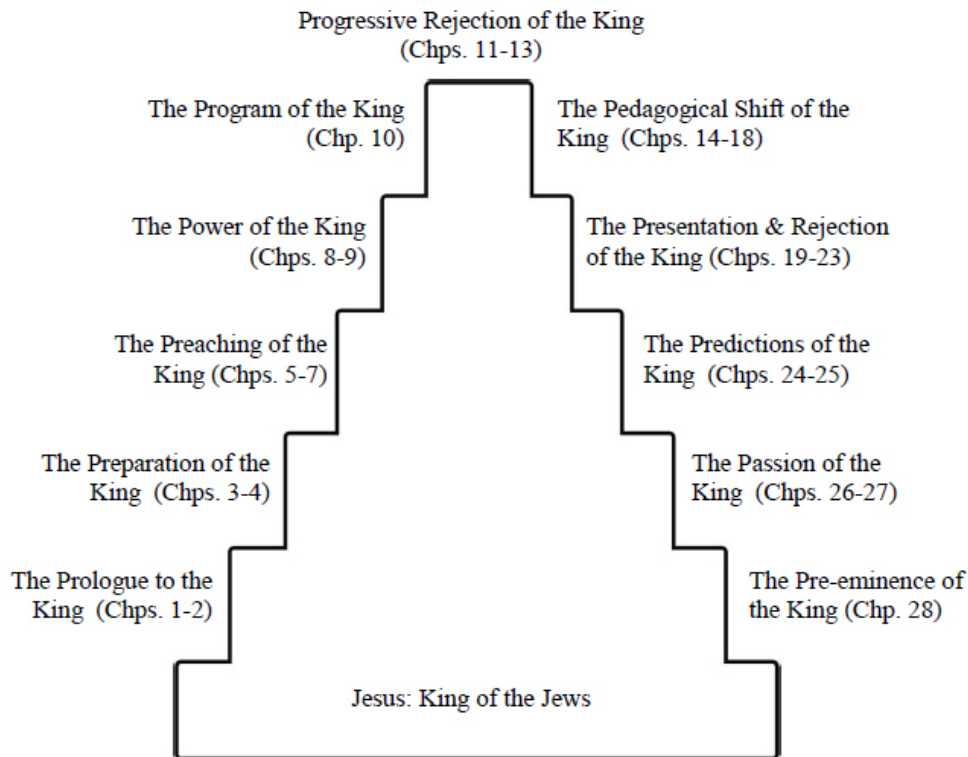
KEY VERSES: 1:1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
 2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."



Grace Gospel Press:

THE BASIC OUTLINE OF MATTHEW



Charles Swindoll:

MATTHEW

	Announcement and Arrival of the King Main Emphasis: His Credentials Birth Baptism Temptation CHAPTERS 1-4	Proclamation and Reception of the King Main Emphasis: His Message Sermon on the Mount Miracles Discourses Parables CHAPTERS 5-15	Opposition and Rejection of the King Main Emphasis: His Suffering and Death Spread of opposition Preparation of disciples Final predictions Crucifixion CHAPTERS 16-27	Resurrection and Triumph of the King Main Emphasis: His Conquest God's power Great Commission CHAPTER 28
The King	His identity: Israel's promised King		His destiny: "Crucify Him!"	
Scope	Teaching the vast multitudes		Teaching the Twelve	
Location	Bethlehem and Nazareth	Ministry in Galilee	Ministry in Judea	
People's Reaction	Increased popularity		Increased hostility	
Theme	Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.			
Key Verses	16:16-19; 28:18-20			
Christ in Matthew	Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the prophecies, promises, types, and expectations of the Old Testament Scriptures (16:16-19; 28:18-20).			

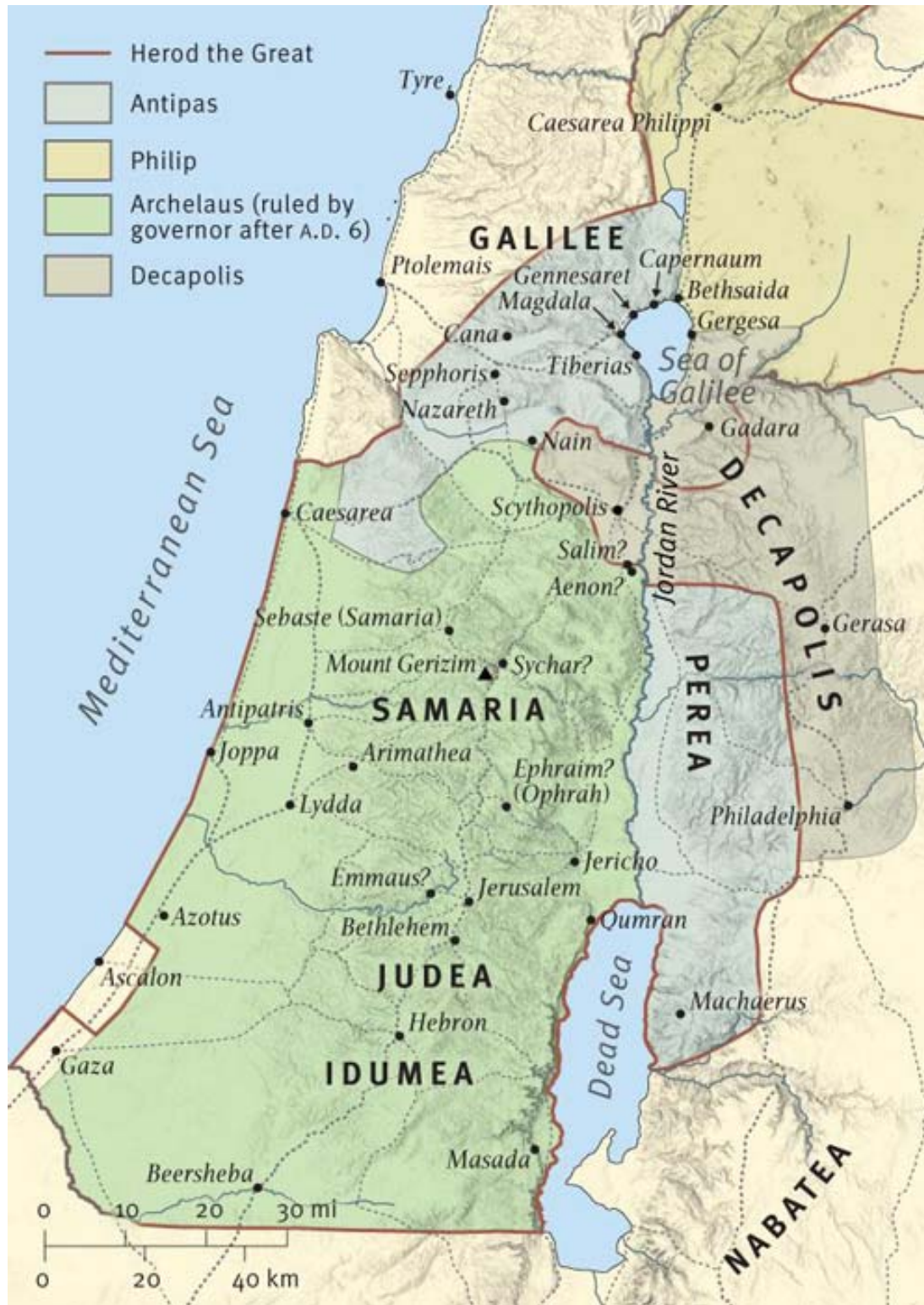
<https://parsoncraft.blogspot.com/2013/02/>

Outline of the Gospel according to St. Matthew

Outline	Citation	Summary	Discourse	Concluding Motif:
<i>Prologue</i>	1:1 – 2:23	Genealogy & Infancy Narrative		(και ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ ἰησοῦς)
Book I	3:1 – 7:29	The Law & its right interpretation	#1, 5:1 – 7:29, Sermon on the Mount	7:28 “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine”
Book II	8:1 – 11:1	Jesus heals, and commissions to heal	#2, 10:5 – 42, The commission of the disciples	11:1 “And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities”
Book III	11:2 – 13:53	Jesus and the confrontation of contemporary religiosity	#3, 13:1-53, Parables of the kingdom	13:53 “And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence”
Book IV	13:54 – 19:1	The manifestation of Jesus’ identity and its implication of service	#4, 18:1-35, Childlike character of those who receive the kingdom	19:1 “And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan”
Book V	19:2 – 26:1	The last days and the final judgment	#5, 24:1 – 25:46 The judgment to come	26:1 “And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples”
<i>Conclusion</i>	26:2 – 28:20	Crucifixion, Resurrection & Commission		

Warren Wiersbe: **The Gospel of Matthew at a Glance**

SECTION	ANNOUNCEMENT AND ARRIVAL OF THE KING	PROCLAMATION AND RECEPTION OF THE KING	OPPOSITION AND REJECTION OF THE KING	PASSION AND TRIUMPH OF THE KING
PASSAGE	1:1-4:25	5:1-15:39	16:1-25:46	26:1-28:20
THEMES	Jesus’ Credentials	Jesus’ Message	Jesus’ Suffering	Jesus’ Victory
	Birth Baptism Temptation	Miracles Discourses Parables	Opposition Rejection Second Coming	Passover and Arrest Suffering and Death Resurrection Ascension
KEY TERMS	Baptize Christ Proclaim	Righteousness Authority Blessed Parable	Tribulation Woe Stumble	Hand Over Suffer



OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

THE GOSPEL OF THE KING AND THE KINGDOM

JESUS THE MESSIAH-KING EXERCISING KINGDOM AUTHORITY

I. (1:1 – 4:11) JESUS' ORIGIN AND PREPARATION FOR KINGDOM MINISTRY

A. (1:1 – 2:23) The Birth and Infancy of Jesus

1. (1:1–17) The Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham
2. (1:18–25) The Virgin Conception of Jesus Christ
 - (1:18a) Prologue – Circumstances Surrounding Birth of Jesus
 - a. (1:18b-19) Virgin Conception Created a Troubling Dilemma
 - b. (1:20-21) Virgin Conception Confirmed by Angelic Revelation
 - c. (1:22-23) Virgin Conception Fulfilled OT Prophecy
 - d. (1:24-25) Virgin Birth Protected by the Obedience of Joseph
3. (2:1–12) The Adoration of the Magi vs Antagonism from King Herod
 - a. (2:1-2) Advent of Christ Prompts the Magi to Seek Him Out
 - b. (2:3-8) Antagonism and Opposition from King Herod and the Jewish Religious Leaders
 - c. (2:9-12) Adoration and Worship of the Magi
4. (2:13–23) Divine Protection of the Messiah against the Treachery of Herod
 - a. (2:13-15) Called Out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1)
 - (2:16-18) Aside: Wailing Over Herod's Massacre of Infants Around Bethlehem (Jer. 31:15)
 - b. (2:19-23) Called a Nazarene – Out of Galilee

B. (3:1 – 4:11) Inaugural Events in Jesus' Ministry

1. (3:1–12) The Ministry of John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Jesus
 - a. (3:1-4) Entering Ministry
 - b. (3:5-10) Exposing Hypocrisy
 - c. (3:11-12) Elevating Christ
2. (3:13–17) The Commissioning of the King – Baptism, Anointing and Approval
 - a. (3:13-15) Appropriateness of Baptism of Jesus by John
 - b. (3:16) Anointed with God the Spirit for Ministry
 - c. (3:17) Approved by God the Father as Worthy Sacrifice for Sin
3. (4:1–11) The Temptation of Jesus Christ
 - (4:1) Prologue – Setting for Spiritual Combat
 - a. (4:2-4) Temptation #1 -- Failure to Trust God's Provision
 - b. (4:5-7) Temptation #2 -- Failure to Trust God's Providence
 - c. (4:8-10) Temptation #3 -- Failure to Trust God's Kingdom Program
 - (4:11) Epilogue

II. (4:12 – 7:29) THE KINGDOM MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (4:12–25) Summary of Powerful Impact of Early Galilean Ministry

1. (4:12–17) Beginning the Capernaum Ministry
2. (4:18–22) Radical Call to Total Discipleship Commitment and Soul Winning
3. (4:23–25) Summary of Powerful Impact of His Initial Ministry

B. (5:1 – 7:29) First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount

- (5:1–2) Prologue to the Sermon on the Mount
1. (5:3–12) The Beatitudes

- a. (5:3–9) The 7 Beatitudes Stressing Blessings Associated with Righteous Character
- b. (5:10-12) The Final Beatitude Stressing Blessing Associated with Enduring Persecution
- 2. (5:13–16) The Salt and Light Sayings – Impacting the World Around Us
 - a. (5:13) Salt
 - b. (5:14-15) Light
 - (5:16) Conclusion: Our Motivation = That Others May Glorify God Also
- 3. (5:17–48) The Relationship of the Law to the New Covenant in Jesus
 - a. (5:17–20) Jesus Fulfilling the Law—Continuity – Sharpening the Focus . . . Raising the Bar
 - b. (5:21–48) Examples—Six Antitheses on the New Righteousness
 - (1) (5:21–26) Dealing with Anger as Related to Murder
 - (2) (5:27–30) Dealing with Lust as Related to Adultery
 - (3) (5:31–32) Dealing with Divorce/Remarriage as Related to Adultery
 - (4) (5:33–37) Integrity Should Make Oaths Unnecessary in Normal Speech
 - (5) (5:38–42) Going the Extra Mile Instead of Retaliation for Personal Wrongs
 - (6) (5:43–48) Love for Enemies Without Partiality
- 4. (6:1–18) Practice Righteousness the Right Way from the Right Motivation
 - a. (6:1–4) Example of Giving Alms
 - b. (6:5–15) Example of Prayer
 - c. (6:16–18) Example of Fasting
- 5. (6:19 – 7:12) Social Ethics
 - a. (6:19–34) God and Possessions
 - (1) (6:19–24) Kingdom Perspective Towards Wealth – What Do You Treasure?
 - (2) (6:25–34) Kingdom Perspective Towards Worry – Whom Do You Trust
 - b. (7:1–12) Social Relationships
 - (1) (7:1–6) Prohibition against Censorious Judging Balanced by the Need to Exercise Discernment
 - (2) (7:7–11) Our Heavenly Father Answers Prayer
 - (3) (7:12) The Golden Rule of Relationships
- 6. (7:13–27) Challenges to Implement Kingdom Righteousness
 - a. (7:13–14) The Two Gates (Narrow and Wide)
 - b. (7:15–20) Beware of False Prophets
 - c. (7:21-23) Denouncing False Professors
 - d. (7:24–27) The Two Foundations (Rock and Sand)
- 7. (7:28–29) Epilogue to the Sermon – Crowd Amazed at Jesus’ Authoritative Teaching

III. (8:1 – 11:1) THE KINGDOM MISSION FACES OPPOSITION TO JESUS’ AUTHORITY

A. (8:1 – 9:34) Authority and Discipleship in Jesus’ Ministry

- (8:1) Transition: From Authority in Teaching to Authority in Healing
- 1. (8:2–17) Three Healing Miracles to Confirm His Authority
 - a. (8:2–4) Healing the Leper – Cleansing the Unclean
 - b. (8:5–13) Healing the Centurion’s Servant – Mercy for Gentiles
 - c. (8:14–15) Healing Peter’s Mother-In-Law – Dealing with Infirmities
 - (8:16-17) Epilogue – General Healing in Fulfilment of OT Prophecy
- 2. (8:18–22) The Demands of Discipleship – Radical Commitment
 - (8:18) Transition
 - a. (8:19-20) Demands Costly Commitment and Forsaking of Earthly Comforts and Security
 - b. (8:21-22) Demands Urgency of Commitment and Primacy of Allegiance
- 3. (8:23 – 9:8) Three Miracles Showing His Authority
 - a. (8:23–27) Authority over Nature -- Calming of the Storm
 - b. (8:28–34) Authority over Demonic Spirits -- Exorcism of Two Demon-Possessed Men
 - c. (9:1–8) Authority to Forgive Sins -- Healing of the Paralytic

4. (9:9–17) Discipleship and the Reality of the New Kingdom
 - a. (9:9–13) Consorting with Sinners and the Reality of the New Kingdom
 - (1) (9:9) Call of Matthew – Sinner Par Excellence
 - (2) (9:10–13) Confrontation with the Pharisees over Consorting with Sinners
 - b. (9:14–17) Fasting and the Reality of the New Kingdom
5. (9:18–34) Three Impressive Healing Miracles Earn Jesus a Mixed Reputation
 - a. (9:18–26) Healing a Woman and Raising a Young Girl
 - b. (9:27–31) Healing Two Blind Men
 - c. (9:32–34) Exorcizing a Demon from a Dumb Man

B. (9:35 – 11:1) Second Discourse: Mission and Opposition

1. (9:35 – 10:4) Introduction – Mission of Jesus Delegated to the Apostles
 - a. (9:35–38) The Call for Workers – Help Wanted for the Mission
 - b. (10:1–4) The Commissioning of the Twelve
2. (10:5–15) Instructions for the Jewish Prioritized Mission
3. (10:16–31) Persecution in the Evangelistic Mission
 - a. (10:16–23) Inevitability of Persecution
 - b. (10:24–31) Reassurance Not to Fear While Experiencing Persecution
4. (10:32–42) Cost and Compensation of Discipleship
 - a. (10:32–39) Cost of Discipleship
 - (1) (10:32–33) Fearless Confession
 - (2) (10:34–36) Conflicts Produced
 - (3) (10:37–39) Counting the Cost
 - b. (10:40–42) Compensation of Discipleship
5. (11:1) Conclusion

IV. (11:2 – 13:52) THE KINGDOM AGENDA MUST TRANSITION DUE TO REJECTION

A. (11:2 – 12:50) Revelation and Rejection

1. (11:2–30) Revelation Clarifies Identity of Jesus and Extends Universal Invitation
 - a. (11:2–19) Clarification of Identity of Jesus – No Bypassing the Cross
 - (1) (11:2–6) Confusion of John the Baptist
 - (2) (11:7–10) Commendation of John the Baptist
 - (3) (11:11) Contrast between Present Suffering and Future Fulfilment
 - (3) (11:12–19) Rejection by Israel – Wisdom Vindicated by Her Deeds
 - b. (11:20–24) Woes against Unrepentant Privileged Cities Who Rejected the King
 - c. (11:25–30) Universal Personal Invitation as the Father Reveals the Son
2. (12:1–21) Rejection of the Beloved, Humble Servant
 - a. (12:1–14) Two Sabbath Controversies
 - (1) (12:1–8) Harvesting Grain on the Sabbath
 - (2) (12:9–14) Healing the Man with the Withered Hand
 - b. (12:15–21) Messiah Characterized as the Beloved, Humble Servant
3. (12:22–50) Confrontation, Controversy and Warning
 - a. (12:22–37) Confrontation over Source of Jesus' Power
 - (1) (12:22–23) The Healing of the Demon-Possessed Man
 - (2) (12:24–30) The Conflict with the Pharisees
 - (3) (12:31–32) The Unforgivable Sin
 - (4) (12:33–37) Good and Evil Speech – Exposing the Source of Evil
 - b. (12:38–42) Controversy over the Sign of Jonah
 - c. (12:43–45) Warning Regarding Failure of Humanistic Reformation Attempts
 - d. (12:46–50) By Contrast, True Disciples Prioritize Spiritual Family Relationships

B. (13:1–52) Third Discourse: 7 Kingdom Parables Anticipating the Mystery of the Interim Age

1. (13:1–23) Germination of the Kingdom -- #1 -- Parable of the Soils – Different Responses
 - a. (13:1–9) Introductory Parable of the Soils Presented
 - b. (13:10–17) Intent of Parables
 - c. (13:18–23) Interpretation of the Soils
2. (13:24–43) Growth of the Kingdom – Both Positive and Negative
 - a. (13:24–30) #2 -- Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (False Believers with True)
 - b. (13:31–32) #3 -- Parable of the Mustard Seed (Impressive Growth from Small Beginnings)
 - c. (13:33) #4 -- Parable of the Yeast (Permeating Influence of False Doctrine)
 - d. (13:34–35) Parables Fulfilling Prophecy
 - e. (13:36–43) Parable of the Weeds Explained
3. (13:44–52) Greatness of the Kingdom – Its Value and Appropriation
 - a. (13:44) #5 – Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Joy of Discovery)
 - b. (13:45–46) #6 – Parable of the Costly Pearl (Precious Value)
4. (13:47–50) Gathering the Harvest of the Kingdom (Good and Evil) -- #7 – Parable of the Dragnet
5. (13:51–52) Gold Nuggets of Kingdom Truth Include both New and Old Revelation

V. (13:53 – 18:35) REJECTION, SUFFERING AND GLORY

A. (13:53 – 17:27) Jesus’ Deeds: Rejection, Discipleship, and Glory

- (13:53) Transition
1. (13:53 – 16:20) Rejection and Discipleship
 - a. (13:54–58) Teaching and Rejection at Nazareth – Familiarity Breeds Contempt
 - b. (14:1–12) Beheading of John the Baptist – Speaking Truth to Depraved Power
 - c. (14:13–21) Feeding of the 5,000 – Messianic Provision
 - d. (14:22–33) Walking on the Water – Growing Insight into the Identity of Jesus
 - e. (14:34–36) Healings at Gennesaret
 - f. (15:1–20) Defilement is a Heart Issue
 - g. (15:21–31) Further Healings – Compassion Extended to Gentiles
 - (1) (15:21–28) The Faith of the Canaanite Woman
 - (2) (15:29–31) Summary Healings
 - h. (15:32–39) Feeding of the 4,000 – Extension of Messianic Provision to the Gentiles
 - i. (16:1–12) The Signs of the Time and the Leaven of False Teaching
 - (1) (16:1-4) Demand for a Sign
 - (2) (16:5–12) Warning about Leaven of False Teaching
 - j. (16:13–20) Peter’s Confession Regarding the Identity of Jesus and Jesus’ Blessing
 2. (16:21 – 17:27) The Movement to the Cross
 - a. (16:21–28) First Passion Prediction and the Price of Discipleship
 - b. (17:1–13) Transfiguration – Suffering is the Path to Glory
 - c. (17:14–21) Rebuking the Disciples for “Little Faith” -- Healing of the Epileptic Child
 - d. (17:22–23) Second Prediction of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection
 - e. (17:24-27) Paying of the Temple Tax -- Accommodation to Avoid Offense

B. (18:1–35) Fourth Discourse: Life and Relationships in the Community

1. (18:1–14) Relationships in the Community
 - a. (18:1–4) True Greatness in the Kingdom
 - b. (18:5–9) Guard against Dangerous Stumbling Blocks – Don’t Cause Others to Sin
 - c. (18:10–14) Parable of the Lost Sheep
2. (18:15–35) Discipline and Forgiveness
 - a. (18:15–20) Confronting Sin in the Believing Community
 - b. (18:21–35) Unlimited Forgiveness to Fellow Believers
 - (1) (18:21–22) Posing the Question of the Extent of Forgiveness

- (2) (18:23–34) Putting Forgiveness in Perspective –
The Parable of the Unmerciful Slave
- (3) (18:35) Application of the Parable – Failure to Forgive Disqualifies You as a
Genuine Disciple

VI. (19:1 – 25:46) THE MOVEMENT TO THE CROSS

A. (19:1 – 22:46) Jesus' Deeds: Opposition and Discipleship

- 1. (19:1 – 20:34) The Road to Jerusalem
 - a. (19:1–12) Permanency of Marriage
 - b. (19:13–15) Jesus Blesses the Little Children
 - c. (19:16 – 20:16) Wealth and Kingdom Rewards
 - (1) (19:16–26) Rich Young Ruler – Salvation Is for Those Who Forsake
Everything and Follow Jesus
 - (2) (19:27 – 20:16) Rewards for Spiritual Service
 - (a) (19:27-30) Promise of Reward
 - (b) (20:1-16) Parable of the Workers – God Rewards in Accordance with His
Justice, Discretion and Grace
 - d. (20:17–19) Jesus' Third Prophecy of His Passion and Resurrection
 - e. (20:20-28) Squashing Selfish Ambition
 - (1) (20:20-23) The Arrogance of Selfish Ambition
 - (2) (20:24-28) The Antithesis to Selfish Ambition
 - f. (20:29–34) Restoring Sight to the Blind
- 2. (21:1 – 22:46) Beginning Events of Passion Week
 - a. (21:1–22) The Messiah Enters Jerusalem
 - (1) (21:1–11) Public Entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah King
 - (2) (21:12–17) Cleansing Temple Corruption
 - (3) (21:18–22) Cursing of the Fruitless Fig Tree
 - b. (21:23–22:46) Controversies and Judgment Parables in the Temple Court
 - (1) (21:23–27) Dispute Regarding the Source of Jesus' Authority
 - (2) (21:28 – 22:14) 3 Judgment Parables
 - (a) (21:28–32) The Parable of the Two Sons
 - (b) (21:33–46) The Parable of the Wicked Tenant Farmers
 - (c) (22:1–14) The Parable of the Wedding Banquet and
the Illegitimate Guest
 - (3) (22:15-46) 4 Controversies with Jewish Religious Leaders
 - (a) (22:15–22) The Tax Trap
 - (b) (22:23–33) Marriage in the Resurrection
 - (c) (22:34–40) The Greatest Commandment
 - (d) (22:41–46) Son of David and Lord of David

B. (23:1 – 25:46) Fifth Discourse: Guilt and Judgment of Israel

- 1. (23:1–39) Guilt—Woes upon the Leaders
 - a. (23:1–12) Beware of Hypocritical Religious Leaders
 - (1) (23:1–7) Beware of the Phoniness of Religious Leaders
 - (2) (23:8–10) Avoid Titles of Spiritual Distinction
 - (3) (23:11-12) Embrace a Spiritual Lifestyle of Servanthood and Humility
 - b. (23:13–36) The Seven Woes
 - (1) (23:13) Corrupting the Entrance to Heaven
 - (2) (23:15) Corrupting the Process of Discipleship
 - (3) (23:16–22) Corrupting Integrity by Evasive Priorities of Allegiance
 - (4) (23:23–24) Corrupting the Essence of Godliness by Majoring on the Minors

When It Comes to God's Righteous Requirements

- (5) (23:25–26) Corrupting the Process of Sanctification
- (6) (23:27–28) Corrupting the Testimony of Righteousness
- (7) (23:29–336a) Corrupting the Treatment of God's Prophets
(23:36b) Imminency of Certain Judgment
- c. (23:37–39) Christ's Lament over Jerusalem
- 2. (24:1–25:46) Judgment—Olivet Discourse
 - a. (24:1–35) Destruction of Jerusalem and the Events of the End Time
 - (1) (24:1–3) Questions Prompting the Olivet Discourse
 - (2) (24:4–28) The Destruction and the End-Time Events
 - (a) (24:4–14) Signs of Christ's Coming and the End of the Age
 - (i) (24:4–8) False Indicators of the End of the Age
 - (ii) (24:9–14a) Future Events Signaling the End of the Age
 - (iii) (24:14b) Final Arrival of the End
 - (b) (24:15–28) Signs That Point to the End
 - (i) (24:15–20) The Abomination and the Need to Flee
 - (ii) (24:21–22) The Abomination Triggers the Great Tribulation
 - (ii) (24:23–28) The Great Tribulation Ends with the Coming of Christ
 - (3) (24:29–31) The Sign of the Son of Man – Christ Returns in Power and Great Glory
 - (4) (24:32–35) Learn from the Fig Tree – End Time Events Quickly Lead to Final Fulfilment
 - b. (24:36–25:30) Parables on Readiness
 - (1) (24:36–44) The Need for Spiritual Vigilance
 - (2) (24:45–51) The Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Slaves
 - (3) (25:1–13) The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
 - (4) (25:14–30) The Parable of the Talents (or Bags of Money)
 - c. (25:31–46) Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats at the Return of Christ

VII. (26:1 – 28:20) THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

A. (26:1 – 27:61) The Passion Narrative

- 1. (26:1–16) Preliminary Events
 - a. (26:1–5) The Prediction of Jesus and the Plot to Kill Him
 - b. (26:6–13) Anointing of Jesus for Burial – Waste or Worthy of Worship?
 - c. (26:14–16) Betrayal of Jesus Arranged by Judas
- 2. (26:17–30) Celebration of Passover and Institution of the Lord's Supper
 - a. (26:17–19) Preparation for the Supper
 - b. (26:20–25) Prediction of Judas's Betrayal
 - c. (26:26–30) Presentation of the Bread and Wine in the Institution of the Lord's Supper
- 3. (26:31–56) Events in Gethsemane
 - a. (26:31–35) Jesus Predicts the Failure and Restoration of His Disciples
 - b. (26:36–46) Three Cycles of Agonizing Prayer in Gethsemane – “Your Will Be Done”
 - c. (26:47–56) Shocking Betrayal, Sword-Wielding Resistance and Shameful Arrest
- 4. (26:57–27:26) The Trials of Jesus and Peter's Denials
 - a. (26:57–68) Jesus Taken Before Caiaphas the High Priest
 - b. (26:69 – 27:2) Three Denials of Peter – Escalating in Intensity
 - c. (27:3–10) Aftermath of Betrayal – Demise of Judas and Disposition of Blood Money
 - d. (27:11–26) The Trial before Pilate
 - (1) (27:11–14) Roman Trial – Surprising Silence of the King of the Jews before Pilate
 - (2) (27:15–26) Crazy Choice of Barabbas Over Jesus
- 5. (27:27–56) The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus
 - a. (27:27–31) Mockery by the Roman Soldiers – “Hail King of the Jews”

- b. (27:32–37) The Crucifixion of King Jesus
 - c. (27:38–44) The Shame of the Cross – Jesus Mocked by All Parties
 - d. (27:45–56) Cosmic Testimony to Jesus’ Identity at His Death
6. (27:57-66) The Burial of Jesus and Securing His Grave

B. (28:1-20) The Resurrection and Appearances

- 1. (28:1-15) Reactions to the Empty Tomb
- 2. (28:16–20) The Great Commission

TEXT: Matthew 1:1-17

TITLE: GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF DAVID, THE SON OF ABRAHAM

BIG IDEA:

THE HISTORIC JESUS FULFILLS ALL THE GENEALOGICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH, THE SEED OF ABRAHAM, WHO WOULD SIT ON THE THRONE OF DAVID

INTRODUCTION:

D. A. Carson: Matthew's chief aims in including the genealogy are hinted at in the **first verse**—namely, to show that **Jesus Messiah is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the messianic promises, the one who brings divine blessings to all nations**. Therefore the genealogy focuses on King David (**1:6**) on the one hand, yet on the other hand includes Gentile women. Many entries would touch the hearts and stir the memories of biblically literate readers, though the principal thrust of the genealogy ties together **promise** and **fulfillment**.

J. Ligon Duncan: But Gospels are not written simply to give us a biographical account, they are written for a **redemptive purpose**. A gospel is a record of what God has done to save sinners. Through the incarnation, the earthly life, the mighty acts and the suffering and death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. That is what a Gospel is.

R. T. France: The "*book of origin*" thus holds many puzzles, both as to its intended scope and as to how Matthew has arrived at his list of names and its pattern. But its main aim is clear enough: to locate Jesus within the story of God's people, as its intended climax, and to do it with a special focus on the **Davidic monarchy** as the proper context for a theological understanding of the role of the person whom Matthew, more than the other gospel writers, will delight to refer to not only as "*Messiah*" but also more specifically as "*Son of David*."

Richard Gardner: The most important thing to note in the list of names in this section is that it is **a list of kings**. Unlike Luke (cf. **Luke 3:23-38**), Matthew traces Jesus' descent from David through a **line of royalty**. The list begins with the greatest of Israel's rulers and concludes with the last free king before the exile. Such a lineage serves to underscore the **messianic role** which Matthew ascribes to Jesus and invites the reader to think of Jesus as one **destined for kingship**.

Michael Wilkins: The **genuineness**, and **unlikeliness**, of this genealogy must have stunned Matthew's readers. Jesus' ancestors were humans with all of the foibles, yet potentials, of everyday people. God worked through them to bring about his salvation. There is no pattern of righteousness in the lineage of Jesus. We find adulterers, harlots, heroes, and Gentiles. Wicked Rehoboam was the father of wicked Abijah, who was the father of good King Asa. Asa was the father of the good King Jehoshaphat (**v. 8**), who was the father of wicked King Joram. God was working throughout the generations, both good and evil, to bring about his purposes. Matthew shows that God can use anyone—however marginalized or despised—to bring about his purposes. These are the very types of people Jesus came to save. . .

Matthew gives a **descending genealogy** of Jesus in the order of succession, with the earliest ancestor placed at the head and later generations placed in lines of descent. This is the more

common form of genealogy in the Old Testament (e.g., **Gen. 5:1–32**). Luke gives an **ascending** form of genealogy that reverses the order, starting with Jesus and tracing it to Adam (**Luke 3:23–38**; cf. **Ezra 7:1–5**). This reverse order is found more commonly in Greco-Roman genealogies.

Warren Wiersbe: When you read the genealogy in **Genesis 5**, the repeated phrase *and he died* sounds like the tolling of a funeral bell. The Old Testament illustrates the truth that “*the wages of sin is death*” (**Rom. 6:23**). But when you turn to the New Testament, that first genealogy emphasizes birth and not death! The message of the New Testament is that “*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (**Rom. 6:23**). . .

It shows that Jesus Christ is a part of history, that all of Jewish history prepared the way for His birth. God in His **providence** ruled and overruled to accomplish His great purpose in bringing His Son into the world.

Van Parunak: “*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ*” establishes our Lord as the **legal descendant of David**, qualified to occupy the throne God promised to his royal ancestor. The whole structure of the list emphasizes this relation to David and his kingdom. **That kingdom was the goal to which Israel’s history moved** from its beginning with Abraham. Due to the sin of the nation, it unraveled during the very monarchy that should have expanded it, leading to the Babylonian captivity. But now God is raising it up, as the prophets promised, and Jesus the son of Mary is the fulfillment of the ancient promises.

(:1) INTRODUCTION TO THE INCARNATION OF JESUS THE SON OF GOD

A. Record of His Origins

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,”

D. A. Carson: The first two words of Matthew, *biblos geneeseōs*, may be translated “*record of the genealogy*” (NIV), “*record of the origins*,” or “*record of the history*.” The NIV limits this title to the genealogy (**1:1–17**), the second could serve as a heading for the prologue (**1:1 – 2:23**), and the third as a heading for the entire gospel. . . Matthew rather intends his first two chapters to be a coherent and unified “record of the **origins of Jesus Christ**” (rightly, **Blomberg** [NAC]).

R. T. France: The first two words of Matthew’s gospel are literally “*Book of genesis*”. The effect on a Jewish reader is comparable to that of John’s opening phrase, “*In the beginning . . .*” The theme of the **fulfillment of Scripture** is signaled from the very start, and these opening words suggest that a **new creation** is now taking place. That particular concept of fulfillment is not clearly developed elsewhere in the gospel, which is concerned rather with how Jesus brings the history of God’s people to its climax, but this passing echo of the beginning of the world’s history adds a further allusive dimension for those who wish to think it through, perhaps particularly in the light of the creative act of God which will result in Jesus’ birth. . .

The colorless translation “*Jesus Christ*” here and in **v. 18** in many English versions does not do justice to the excitement in Matthew’s introduction of Jesus under the powerfully evocative title “*Messiah*,” the long-awaited deliverer of God’s people, in whom their history has now come to its climax. In **v. 16** he will draw attention to the titular force of Christos by using the phrase “*Jesus who is called the Messiah*.”

David Platt: By applying this title to Jesus, Matthew is telling us that He is the **Messiah**. It is important to keep in mind that "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. No, "Christ" literally means "*Messiah*" or "*Anointed One*." Throughout the Old Testament there were promises of a coming anointed one, a Messiah, who would powerfully deliver God's people. Here Matthew says of Jesus, "**This is He, the One we've waited for!**"

Grant Osborne: Vv. 1 and 17 frame the genealogy and center on the three names in a **chiastic** arrangement (Christ/David/Abraham in v. 1; Abraham/David/Christ in v. 17; see **Hagner**, 5). The phrase in **1:1a** is taken from **Gen 2:4; 5:1** (cf. **Gen 6:1; 10:1; 11:10, 27** etc.), where it introduces genealogies or historical narrative and hints here that Jesus fulfills these events and brings a new beginning or new creation.

B. Relation to David

“the son of David,”

D. A. Carson: “*Son of David*” is an important designation in Matthew. Not only does David become a turning point in the genealogy (**1:6, 17**), but the title recurs throughout the gospel (**9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45**). God swore covenant love to David (**Ps 89:28**) and promised that one of his immediate descendants would establish the kingdom—even more, that David’s kingdom and throne would endure forever (**2Sa 7:12–16**).

S. Lewis Johnson: It’s evident as you compare these four Gospels that they are not contradictory to one another, but they are **complementary**. And the purpose of the genealogy of the Gospel of Matthew is to present to us the Lord Jesus as a **royal figure** connected by blood and by life with the line that has gone before him. Now we shall see that the Lord Jesus Christ’s connection with the regal line is not by blood, because he is connected with Joseph. And it’s Joseph who possesses the regal rights to the throne of David, and the Lord Jesus is not the natural son of Joseph the carpenter. . .

So, the Lord Jesus, then, is **legally of Joseph, physically of Mary**. Because he is legally of Joseph who had the legal right to the throne, he is able to sit upon the throne and inherit that throne. Because he is of Mary, he possesses his rightful relationship to David physically through her. So he is truly Son of David, both physically and legally. Physically of Mary; legally of Joseph—he is the one, of whom, was born Jesus.

C. Relation to Abraham

“the son of Abraham.”

D. A. Carson: “*Son of Abraham*” may have been a recognized **messianic title** in some branches of Judaism (cf. T. Levi 8:15). The covenant with the Jewish people had first been made with Abraham (**Ge 12:1–3; 17:7; 22:18**), a connection Paul sees as basic to Christianity (**Gal 3:16**). More important, **Genesis 22:18** had promised that through Abraham’s offspring “*all nations*” (*panta ta ethnē*, LXX) would be blessed; so with this allusion to Abraham, Matthew is preparing his readers for the final words of this offspring from Abraham—the commission to make disciples of “*all nations*” (**Mt 28:19**, *panta ta ethnē*). Jesus the Messiah came in fulfillment of the kingdom promises to David and of the Gentile-blessings promised to Abraham (see **Mt 3:9; 8:11**).

Leon Morris: Jesus was also *the son of Abraham*, “to whom the divine promises were first given and with whom ‘sacred history’ may be said to have begun” (**Tasker**). It was Abraham with whom God made the covenant that set Israel apart in a special sense as the people of God (**Gen. 12:2-3; 15:17-21; 17:1-14**). All Israelites took pride in being descendants of the great patriarch, and the Christians were especially fond of him as the classic example of one who believed (Paul brings this out particularly in Romans). His Hebrew name means “*father of a multitude*” (**Gen. 17:5**), and it had been prophesied that all nations would be blessed through him (**Gen. 12:3**). We find the idea of a universal blessing at the end of this Gospel as well as at the beginning (**28:19**). In combining David and Abraham Matthew is drawing attention to two strands in Jesus’ Hebrew ancestry and implying that he fulfilled all that would be expected in a Messiah with such connections.

I. (:2-6a) GENEALOGY FROM ABRAHAM TO DAVID

A. (:2) From Abraham to Judah

*“To Abraham was born Isaac;
and to Isaac, Jacob;
and to Jacob, Judah and his brothers;”*

B. (:3) From Judah to Ram

*“and to Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar;
and to Perez was born Hezron;
and to Hezron, Ram;”*

D. A. Carson: Probably Perez and Zerah (v.3) are both mentioned because they are twins (**Ge 38:27**; cf. **1Ch 2:4**); Judah’s other sons receive no mention.

Grant Osborne: Matthew mentions both Perez and Zerah because they were twins (**Gen 38:27–30**). The book of Ruth ends with the genealogy of Perez to David (**Ruth 4:18–22**), showing that a major purpose of that book was to trace the Davidic line and to show that Ruth through her faithful devotion was a worthy ancestress to David.

C. (:4) From Ram to Salmon

*“and to Ram was born Amminadab;
and to Amminadab, Nahshon;
and to Nahshon, Salmon;”*

Grant Osborne: Approximately four hundred years are covered from Perez to Amminadab, demanding the omission of several names from the list. This follows the genealogical lists in **1 Chr 2:10–11; Ruth 4:19–20**.

D. (:5) From Salmon to Jesse

*“and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab;
and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth;
and to Obed, Jesse;”*

Grant Osborne: Rahab was the prostitute who saved the spies at Jericho by hiding them in her house (**Josh 2; 6**), and this is almost certainly the same Rahab. The problem is that she lived two

hundred years earlier, but as in vv. 3–4 there are likely several generations **omitted** from the list. It means she is the ancestress of Boaz.

E. (:6a) Birth of David the King

“and to Jesse was born David the king.”

II. (:6b-11) GENEALOGY FROM DAVID TO THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

A. (:6b-7) From David to Asa

*“And to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah;
7 and to Solomon was born Rehoboam;
and to Rehoboam, Abijah;
and to Abijah, Asa;”*

S. Lewis Johnson: And furthermore, you’ll also notice that not only is it taught here that the Lord Jesus Christ’s coming is **no unpremeditated accident**, but we are also taught that **man’s willfulness cannot hinder the purposes of God**. One of the things that we are told in the Old Testament is that the Israelite should not marry outside of Israel, but we see that in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, there is that violation of the Word of God. And furthermore, we are also taught—in the Old Testament as well as the New—that adultery is one of the heinous sins of Holy Scripture. And yet, our Lord Jesus Christ’s coming is related to the act of adultery of David and Bathsheba, because the Lord Jesus has his right to the throne through Solomon, who was the product of that union. Man’s willfulness cannot hinder the purposes of God. How important that is to remember.

B. (:8) From Asa to Uzziah

*“and to Asa was born Jehoshaphat;
and to Jehoshaphat, Joram;
and to Joram, Uzziah;”*

C. (:9) From Uzziah to Hezekiah

*“and to Uzziah was born Jotham;
and to Jotham, Ahaz;
and to Ahaz, Hezekiah;”*

D. (:10) From Hezekiah to Josiah

*“and to Hezekiah was born Manasseh;
and to Manasseh, Amon;
and to Amon, Josiah;”*

E. (:11) From Josiah to the Babylonian Captivity

*“and to Josiah were born Jeconiah and his brothers,
at the time of the deportation to Babylon.”*

Craig Blomberg: The Babylonian exile appears centrally as well, perhaps because Jesus is seen as the climax of the restoration of the nation of Israel from exile.

E. Michael Green: Just as David represented the high-water mark of Israel's hopes and development and pointed forward to his descendant, Jesus, so the Babylonian captivity represented the nadir of Israel's fortunes, the frustration of her hopes, and the end of the royal line; and it too points forward to Jesus the Messiah and his people in whom those fortunes will be restored and those promises fulfilled.

III. (:12-16) GENEALOGY FROM THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY TO CHRIST

A. (:12) From the Babylonian Captivity to Zerubbabel

*“And after the deportation to Babylon, to Jeconiah was born Shealtiel;
and to Shealtiel, Zerubbabel;”*

B. (:13) From Zerubbabel to Azor

*“and to Zerubbabel was born Abihud;
and to Abihud, Eliakim;
and to Eliakim, Azor;”*

C. (:14) From Azor to Eliud

*“and to Azor was born Zadok;
and to Zadok, Achim;
and to Achim, Eliud;”*

D. (:15) From Eliud to Jacob

*“and to Eliud was born Eleazar;
and to Eleazar, Matthan;
and to Matthan, Jacob;”*

S. Lewis Johnson: And as we look at this genealogy, we should reflect upon the fact that that is precisely our destiny. We shall soon be but names in the memory of our posterity, and then less than names. It brings home to us and points out to us the fact that we are here for a limited time.

E. (:16) From Jacob to the Birth of Jesus, called Messiah

*“and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary,
by whom was born Jesus,
who is called Christ.”*

Leon Morris: Matthew will tell us a little later that the child was conceived as a result of the activity of the Holy Spirit (v. 20). The passive form here is probably the “divine passive,” indicating an **activity of God**; it certainly points to something different from what precedes and it prepares us for the narrative of the virgin birth. That the virginal conception is in mind in the genealogy is probably another way of bringing out the truth that Jesus was the “*son of David*.” There is another passive in **verse 20**, and twice Matthew speaks of Jesus' conception as due to the Holy Spirit (**vv. 18, 20**). He also cites prophecy to show the real significance of the child who was to be born (**vv. 22-23**); further, he tells us that Mary was a virgin (v. 23) and that Joseph had no sexual relations with her before the birth of Jesus (v. 25). All this combines to make it clear that Matthew is writing about the coming into the world not simply of another baby, but of the very **Son of God**.

(:17) SUMMARY – 3 GROUPINGS OF 14 GENERATIONS EACH

A. From Abraham to David

Therefore all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations;”

Michael Wilkins: The number fourteen may be a subtle reference to David, because the numerical value of the Hebrew consonants of his name is fourteen (d w d = 4+6+4). The Jewish practice of counting the numerical value for letters is called *gematria*. Some forms of Jewish mysticism took the practice to extremes, but its most basic form helped in **memorization** and for encoding theological meaning.

David Platt: In addition, David's name is the fourteenth in Matthew's list (**Blomberg**, 53)! Clearly, Matthew intended to connect Jesus to King David.

B. From David to the Babylonian Captivity

“and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations;”

C. From the Babylonian Captivity to Christ

“and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations.”

Leon Morris: A feature of Matthew’s genealogy is his arrangement, as he tells us, in three groups of fourteen (v. 17). The reason for this is not clear, but it must have been important because Matthew has to omit some names to get his numbers. His second group lacks Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah after Joatham (v. 9), and his third group has only thirteen (since it covers some 500 years, there have clearly been omissions). The omissions need not worry us since “father” might be used when speaking of any descendants and not only those in the immediate family (e.g., 3:9).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What should we conclude about the role of women in the church as we study the women included in this critical genealogy account?
- 2) Why should the prevalence of sin and degradation throughout this historical overview of key Jewish figures bring hope to those burdened with their own sin?
- 3) How does Matthew emphasize that the salvation that the Messiah will bring is inclusive of Gentiles and should stimulate worldwide outreach?
- 4) How does God demonstrate the sovereignty of His purposes, the orderliness of His providence and the wisdom of His timeline down through history?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Deffinbaugh: The differences so far are merely matters of style. But these two Gospel genealogies also differ over some of those who are named in the genealogy:

The difficulty comes in Luke's first section, in which the names are different from those found in Matthew. This would be all right if we were dealing with the ancestries of two entirely different people, but these are both genealogies of Jesus. What is more, while both books trace Jesus' line through his adopted father Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom our Lord was born, Matthew says that Joseph was the son of Jacob who descended from David through David's son and successor King Solomon (Matt. 1:16), and Luke states that Joseph was the son of Heli who had descended from David through Nathan, who was also David's son but Solomon's brother (Luke 3:23).

While some have concluded that there is no solution to this problem, many have thought otherwise. **James Montgomery Boice** outlines the two most likely solutions. The first is that which was posed years ago by **J. Gresham Machen**:

Reconciliation might conceivably be effected in a number of different ways. But on the whole we are inclined to think that the true key to a solution to the problem ... is to be found in the fact that Matthew, in an intentionally incomplete way, gives a list of incumbents (actual or potential) of the kingly David throne, whereas Luke traces the descent of Joseph back through Nathan to David. Thus the genealogies cannot properly be used to exhibit contradiction between the Matthean and the Lukan accounts of the birth and infancy of our Lord.

I am inclined to follow **Boice**, who opts for a second solution, namely that Matthew's genealogy is of **Joseph's family lineage**, while Luke's genealogy provides us with **Mary's ancestry**.

In my judgment, a better solution involves viewing the two lines as the lines of Joseph and Mary respectively, each thereby identified as a descendant of King David... . According to this view, the distinction between the two lines of descent is not between the 'legal' line and the 'paternal' line, as Machen suggests, but between the 'royal' line of those who actually sat on the throne and the 'legal' line of descent from the one oldest son to the next, even though these did not actually rule as kings.

It is not my intention to offer a dogmatic solution to this problem, but only to point out that there is a discrepancy in the two genealogies, and that sound, evangelical scholars have posed some reasonable solutions. My purpose is to show that Matthew's genealogy is very carefully crafted to teach us some very important truths, truths which are foundational to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and thus to our lives. . .

I find **Bruner's** comments on the **structure** and **organization** of this genealogy very insightful. .

Bruner suggests that the first section, from Abraham to David, is an upwardly ascending order. Things just seem to get better and better. David, followed by his son Solomon, are as good as it gets in this genealogical sequence. And thus **Bruner** believes that this section portrays the grace and mercy of God. We see this, for example, in the inclusion of the Gentile women in the genealogy.

The second section plummets from the kingdom at its best (under David and Solomon) to the very depths – Israel's Babylonian captivity. After Solomon the United Kingdom is divided. The northern kings are consistently evil, and the kings of Judah are a mixture of good and bad. The

Babylonian captivity is the consequence of Judah's persistent rebellion. From a human point of view it looks as if Israel's hopes for the fulfillment of God's Old Testament covenants have been dashed on the rocks of reality.

The third section is once again ascending. God delivers His people from Babylon and brings a remnant back to the land of Israel. There are dangers and disappointments, but Israel has good cause for hope. . .

By the way Matthew structures this genealogy, everything appears to be neat and tidy, precise and orderly. There are three sections, each with 14 generations. Does this not convey to the reader a picture of a calm, precise, and orderly administration? Things may have looked chaotic when viewed from a human perspective, but the outcome was certain. God is in complete control. His purposes and promises are always fulfilled.

D. A. Carson: Inclusion of these **four women** in the Messiah's genealogy instead of an all-male listing (which was customary)—or at least the names of such great matriarchs as Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah—shows that Matthew is conveying more than merely genealogical data. **Tamar** enticed her father-in-law into an incestuous relationship (**Ge 38**). The prostitute **Rahab** saved the spies and joined the Israelites (**Jos 2; 6**). **Hebrews 11:31** and **James 2:25** encourage us to think she abandoned her former way of life. She is certainly prominent in Jewish tradition, some of it fantastic (see **A. T. Hanson**, "Rahab the Harlot in Early Christian Tradition," *JSNT* 1 [1978]: 53–60). **Ruth**, **Tamar**, and **Rahab** were aliens. **Bathsheba** was taken into an adulterous union with David, who committed murder to cover it up. Matthew's peculiar way of referring to her, "*Uriah's wife*," may be an attempt to focus on the fact that Uriah was not an Israelite but a Hittite (**2Sa 11:3; 23:39**). **Bathsheba** herself was apparently the daughter of an Israelite (**1Ch 3:5** [variant reading]), but her marriage to Uriah probably led to her being regarded as a Hittite.

Several reasons have been suggested to explain the inclusion of these women. Some have pointed out that three were Gentiles and the fourth probably regarded as such (**Lohmeyer; Maier; Schweizer**). This goes well with the reference to Abraham; the Jewish Messiah extends his blessings beyond Israel, even as Gentiles are included in his line. Others have noted that three of the four were involved in gross sexual sin; but it is highly doubtful that this charge can be legitimately applied to Ruth. . .

A third interpretation (favored by **Allen; Fenton; Filson; Green; Hill; Lohmeyer; Brown**, *Birth of the Messiah*) holds that all four reveal something of the strange and unexpected workings of **providence** in preparation for the Messiah and that as such they point to Mary's unexpected but providential conception of Jesus.

Craig Blomberg: Why are the first four of these women included? Suggestions have included viewing them as examples of sinners Jesus came to save, representative Gentiles to whom the Christian mission would be extended, or women who had illicit marriages and/or illegitimate children. The only factor that clearly applies to all four is that suspicions of illegitimacy surrounded their sexual activity and childbearing. This suspicion of illegitimacy fits perfectly with that which surrounded Mary, which Matthew immediately takes pains to refute (**vv. 18-25**).

Grant Osborne: God in his providence saw fit to include women who were foreigners and sinners in the royal lineage of Jesus so as to show that he is God not only of righteous Jews but of all humanity and that he has come to bring salvation to the whole world of humanity. Moreover,

they foreshadow Mary and provide a rationale for God's choice of an unwed mother to bear the Messiah.

R. T. France: That Matthew's three fourteens are not simply a matter of historical observation is indicated by the imbalance between the three periods in terms of the actual historical time-scale involved. While there is debate about the possible date of Abraham, he is likely to have been at least seven or eight hundred years before David, which, even given the reported longevity of the patriarchs, is a lot to cover in fourteen generations. From David to the exile is about four hundred years, and as we shall see even that relatively modest period has been fitted into fourteen generations only by the omission of four members of the dynastic succession. From the exile to the birth of Jesus is a further six hundred years, so that Matthew's thirteen names for that whole period (compared with Luke's 22 for the same period) again give improbably long "generations." It seems then that Matthew's list, like some other biblical genealogies, is **selective**, and that the scheme of three fourteens is doing something other than recording statistical data.

The effect of the division into three sets of fourteen generations is to highlight the two turning points in the time of David and the exile. The specific mention that David was "*King*" (v. 6) indicates the significance of these divisions, as the central section of the list runs from the foundation of the united monarchy of Israel under David to the final dissolution of the monarchy of Judah at the time of the Babylonian exile. David and Jehoiachin thus represent the first and last kings of the dynasty of Judah (Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, **2 Kgs 24:17**, being treated as an irrelevant appendix while the true king was in exile in Babylon), whose historical throne-succession makes up the central section of the genealogical list. Matthew thus signals that this is **a royal list**, with the probable implication that the throne-succession has continued while the actual monarchy has been in eclipse, until it reaches the destined "*son of David*" in the birth of the Messiah from this royal line. . .

Perhaps it is more likely that his focus on the number fourteen derives from his observation that there were in fact fourteen names in the genealogical list from Abraham to David as recorded in the OT, and his realization that a little adjustment of the king-list would allow him to produce a symmetrical pattern with the period of the monarchy highlighted as its central phase. In that case the theological focus of Matthew's "book of origin" is not so much on the number fourteen itself as on the royal dimension which his symmetrical structure has brought to light by tracing the line of succession which finds its culmination in the coming of Jesus, the "*son of David*," and thus potentially in the restoration of the monarchy.

Charles Swindoll: The present royal family of England can trace their lineage back over thirty-five generations through numerous Georges, Edwards, Williams, Fredericks, Charleses (that's my favorite), Jameses, Henrys, Johns, and others. **For royal families, genealogy is everything**, because in monarchies, political power isn't conferred by vote or achieved by victory . . . it's inherited by birth. . .

For these opening verses, put yourself in the place of a first-century Jewish skeptic — arms folded, eyes narrowed in suspicion, doubt written on your face. You want to see for yourself whether this Jesus of Nazareth is even worth considering as a candidate for the Messiah. You want to see documented proof.

Daniel Doriani: Matthew's Gospel gradually reveals that Jesus was anointed for a far greater victory than that, a victory he accomplished by taking all three of the main leadership offices of

Israel. He is the **king**, anointed to defeat our greatest foes—sin and death. He is the **priest**, anointed to offer a sacrifice to remove the guilt of sin. He is the **prophet**, anointed to tell the truth about humanity and himself. The greatest truth is that he defeated sin for us because we cannot defeat sin. He offered himself to remove our guilt because we cannot atone or compensate for our sin.

But Jesus is not just anointed to fulfill the three main offices in Israel. He fulfills other tasks, as Matthew will show us. He fulfills the **role of the Sabbath**, by giving true rest to his people. He fulfills the **role of the temple**, for in him God and mankind meet. He **judges mankind**, knowing every thought and deed, and forgiving every misdeed if we ask for mercy, believing he can grant it.

The title “*Christ*” signifies a man who is anointed with oil to consecrate him for a special office. He is **commissioned by God for a special task**. It is vital that we let God define what that task is. In Jesus’ day, most Israelites believed God’s Messiah would free them from Roman domination and, somehow, triumph over unrighteousness and purify the nation.

We now know that these hopes were partly right and partly wrong. Jesus did triumph over sin and purify the nation, but he did not liberate Israel from Rome. And when Jesus failed to deliver them the way they expected, some adjusted their expectations, but many others concluded that he must not be the Messiah.

The problem of **misguided expectations** is common to mankind. We regularly trust the wrong people or expect them to provide what they cannot or should not give. Some Americans expect our superior armed forces to keep us perfectly safe. Some expect their skills to make them prosperous and secure. Jesus says the wise man builds his house upon the rock—not “a” rock, but “the” rock, that is, Jesus, the Christ (**Matt. 7:24**).

Still, even those who try to build on the rock can suffer disappointment, if they remake Jesus in their image. How so? They may expect Jesus to make their life easy. They may think they can know Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, but we must let him define himself. He is both Savior and Lord.

G. Campbell Morgan: The relationship between Abraham and Christ is first that of **identity of principle**. The principle on which Abraham acted when he left Ur of the Chaldees, and throughout the whole of his life, in so far as it was in accord with the Divine will, was that of **faith**. The whole life and ministry of Jesus, on the plane of His humanity, was true to the selfsame principle; and as it has often been pointed out, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives Him precedence of Abraham in this matter, as he declares him to be the Author or File-leader of faith. . .

The relationship between David and Christ is first that of identity of principle in the matter of kingship. David’s loyalty to Jehovah was the condition of his royalty. It was because of his fidelity to Him in circumstances of difficulty that he came at last to full and glorious crowning. In the case of Jesus all that was imperfectly foreshadowed in the experience of David was absolutely fulfilled. Loyalty to the will of God was the master passion of His life, and created the majesty and might of his regal authority. . .

The relationship between the carrying away into captivity and Christ is again that of identity of principle. These people passed under the yoke of a nation full of pride and rebellious against God's government. . . The final fact of relationship between Christ and the captivity is that of his breaking of all the bonds resulting from sin, and leading the exodus of all such as trust Him.

Thus in this genealogical paragraph humanity's aspirations and incompetencies are represented in these generations; and aspirations and incompetencies alike look wistfully to Him. The founder and the king look to Him as Son for the fulfilment of purpose. Faith, which by comparison with sight has seemed feeble through the passing of the centuries, waits His vindication. Government which has perpetually failed waits His administration. Captivity which has sighed and sobbed in its agony waits His emancipation.

J. C. Ryle: Look again at these sixteen verses and you will see in them useful and instructive lessons.

- Learn from this list of names that God always keeps His word.
- Learn next from this list of names the sinfulness and corruption of human nature.
- Learn lastly from this list of names how great is the mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grant Osborne: Theology in Application

The main idea is the arrival of the royal Messiah. We must realize that this is Matthew's prologue, similar to those in Mark (**Mark 1:1–15**) and John (**John 1:1–18**). In this Jewish gospel, a **royal genealogy** is the perfect way to begin, since genealogies indicated one's position in society. The Davidic Messiah was the subject of much longing in Jesus' day, so Matthew wants to tell his readers the major thing he is saying in his gospel, that in Jesus God's promises in the OT have come true. We will see this time and again in Matthew's gospel, especially in the early chapters. Within this there are several subthemes that stand out.

1. The Messiah Is Now Here

For the Jewish people (and the disciples during Jesus' life) that meant he would come as a conquering king. David was the great warrior-king who won great battles for his people. So when they thought of the royal Messiah, what they contemplated was the destruction of the Romans with the Jewish people as the new world rulers. Yet for Matthew this is not the main point; Jesus would first come as **suffering Servant**, dying for the sins of humankind (the Jews understood **Isaiah 52–53** as referring to the nation rather than the Messiah), and would not return to defeat his enemies until his second coming (**Rev 19:11–21**). The genealogy here has both aspects in mind. The Christ has arrived, and the time of fulfillment is here. At the same time, Matthew has a great interest in the return of Christ (cf. **13:24–30, 36–43; 20:1–16; 22:1–14; 25:1–46**). For the church today this means that we are living in the last days. Our Messiah, the divine warrior, is near, and the great victory is coming soon.

2. The Kingdom Is Here

The entire hope for the Jewish people centered on the Davidic reign. Since David's actual reign ceased, they were awaiting the coming of God's Messiah to fulfill the promise of an eternal Davidic reign (**2 Sam 7:11–16**). This is fulfilled in the presence of the kingdom that Jesus has inaugurated, and that is a major Matthean theme. "*Kingdom*" means simply "God reigns," and the purpose of the church today is to allow God to reign in every aspect of its life—its mission, its community, its ethics. We celebrate in every aspect of church life the reign of God, and Jesus'

teaching in Matthew can be called “the ethics of the kingdom.” More than anything else we are the children of the kingdom, citizens of heaven and resident aliens in our earthly home (cf. **Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20; 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11**).

[Editor: although an earthly kingdom still remains for Israel.]

3. Divine Providence at Work

Matthew is interested in salvation history and wants to show how God is in sovereign control of world history and guides it for his own purposes. This will be carried out in the infancy narratives, when every attempt to thwart God’s will (e.g., by Herod) is overturned as God supernaturally intervenes, first in the dream to the Magi (**2:12**) and then in the angelic messages to Joseph in the dreams of **2:13, 19**. This, of course, is one of the primary messages of Scripture, but the average Christian shows all too little awareness of this in his or her daily life. For example, consider trials and faith. Most of the time we trust ourselves more than God to take care of life’s difficulties, yet we claim to believe that he is sovereign. The same God who has guided the process of the coming of the Messiah guides the progress of our lives.

4. God’s Focus on the Outcasts and Downtrodden

The four women mentioned in **1:3, 5, 6** prepared for God’s choice of Mary to bear his Son. All were outsiders, many encased in scandal, yet all were chosen by God and made an essential part of the greatest story in all of history. This same truth was evident in Jesus’ choice of his twelve disciples; he did not select the great teachers like Gamaliel or leaders like Nicodemus. He turned to peasant fishermen (Simon and Andrew, James, and John), despised tax collectors (Levi), and insurrectionists (Simon the Zealot). For the mother of the Messiah, God chose a peasant in a small town, and then had her give birth in suspicious (scandalous) circumstances as an unwed mother. This genealogy tells us that God has worked in this way throughout history. Paul catches it well: “*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness*” (**2 Cor 11:30**). The point is that when God works through our low status and weakness, the glory goes to him. None of us should ever feel inferior or inadequate. Rather, we should rejoice in such, for God turns human weakness into divine strength.

5. A Worldwide Mission

The four women were all Gentiles or related to Gentiles, and this leads into a major motif in the first gospel, the preparation of the new community of God to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (to be a blessing to all nations) by taking the gospel directly to the Gentiles. The Jewish people had no concept of direct mission to the Gentiles. When they “*travel[ed] over sea and land*” to make converts (**23:15**), they went only to the synagogues to talk God-fearers into becoming full proselytes. Jesus introduced a whole new movement in salvation history, the universal mission to all nations (**28:19**). Yet it took a decade for the disciples to understand its implications, and only after the lengthy process of Spirit-inspired events in the steps to the Gentile mission of **Acts 7–11**. In our time this lesson has been learned, but it is still a lengthy process in turning believers today into “world Christians.”

TEXT: Matthew 1:18-25

TITLE: VIRGIN CONCEPTION OF JESUS CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

THE VIRGIN CONCEPTION IN FULFILLMENT OF OT PROPHECY AS CONFIRMED BY ANGELIC REVELATION WAS ESSENTIAL TO CHRIST'S ULTIMATE MISSION AS JESUS AND INCARNATE PRESENCE AS IMMANUEL

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: There are two major ideas here—the sovereign control of all history by God, who works out his plan of salvation in history “*when the set time had fully come*” (**Gal 4:4**), and the virgin birth of Jesus as the typological fulfillment of **Isa 7:14**.

David Platt: In the latter half of **Matthew 1** we encounter the most **extraordinary miracle** in the whole Bible, and the most **remarkable mystery** in the whole universe. This miraculous mystery is described in eight simple verses. Referring to this miracle, **J. I. Packer** said, “It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie” (**Packer**, “*For Your Sakes He Became Poor*,” 69). Our souls ought to be captivated with fascinating glory in the midst of a familiar story.

Leon Morris: Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus from the standpoint of Joseph rather than that of Mary, as Luke does. Luke accordingly has such stories as the appearance of the angel to Mary, but Matthew simply says that Mary became pregnant due to an activity of the Holy Spirit and goes on to tell his readers what Joseph did. It would have been expected that he would have divorced Mary, but an angelic visitor told him not to do so. Matthew tells us how Joseph obeyed the angel. Matthew’s account is clearly quite independent of that of Luke, but it emphasizes equally the virgin birth. We should notice

- (a) the emphasis on the place of Joseph,
- (b) the important place of divine guidance given in dreams, and
- (c) the repeated references to the fulfillment of prophecy.

Craig Blomberg: Though Matthew expounds nothing of its significance here, the virginal conception has regularly been understood as a way by which Jesus could be both **fully human** and **fully divine**. His father, in essence, was God, through the work of the Holy Spirit; his mother was the fully human woman, Mary. As fully God, Jesus was able to pay the eternal penalty for our sins (**v. 21**) for which finite humanity could not atone. As fully human he could be our adequate representative and substitutionary sacrifice.

John MacArthur: Don’t ever base your theology on majority rule. There may be people who deny the virgin birth. There may be people who flagrantly and blatantly fight against the deity of Jesus Christ, but maybe even more subtle than that are the people who ignore the virgin birth. Reading a quote by someone that you all know, **Robert Schuller** at Garden Growth Community Church, this is a quote from *The Wittenberg Door*, January, 1976. He said, “I could not imprint or in public deny the virgin birth of Christ, but when I have something I can’t comprehend, I just don’t deal with it.”

Well, maybe that is the most serious error of all. Because that's very subtle, to just ignore the virgin birth. We cannot doubt it and we cannot deny it and we cannot ignore it if we simply open our eyes and look at **Matthew 1:18-25**. It's there. **Dr. Walvoord**, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, says – and I quote - “The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends.” The whole essence of Christianity, people, is predicated on the fact that Jesus is God in human flesh. And that is something made clear at the very birth of Christ, an essential doctrine.

You see, if Jesus had a human father, then the Bible is untrustworthy, because the Bible claims he did not. And if Jesus was born simply of human parents, there is no way to describe the reason for his supernatural life. His virgin birth, his substitutionary death, his bodily resurrection and his second coming are a **package of deity**. You cannot isolate any one of those and accept only that one and leave the rest or vice versa, accept them all but one. . .

First of all, the virgin birth conceived, then confronted, then clarified, then connected, and then consummated.

(:18a) PROLOGUE – CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING BIRTH OF JESUS

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows.”

John MacArthur: The virgin birth is an underlying assumption in everything the Bible says about Jesus. To throw out the virgin birth is to reject Christ's deity, the accuracy and authority of Scripture, and a host of other related doctrines that are the heart of the Christian faith. No issue is more important than the virgin birth to our understanding of who Jesus is. If we deny that Jesus is God, we have denied the very essence of Christianity. Everything else the Bible teaches about Christ hinges on the truth we celebrate at Christmas—that Jesus is God in human flesh. If the story of His birth is merely a fabricated or trumped-up legend, then so is the rest of what Scripture tells us about Him. The virgin birth is as crucial as the resurrection in substantiating His deity. It is not an optional truth. Anyone who rejects Christ's deity rejects Christ absolutely—even if he pretends otherwise

I. (:18b-19) VIRGIN CONCEPTION CREATED A TROUBLING DILEMMA

A. (:18b) Surprise

“When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

Grant Osborne: The key term is “pledged in marriage” (μνηστευθείσης), which means a great deal more than the “engagement” today. It was legally binding (a contract signed by witnesses) and could be broken only by a writ of divorce. If the “husband” (he was considered such) were to die, the engaged woman would be considered a widow. Still, the marriage was not consummated until the wedding night, when the bride ritually went from her parent's home to her husband's home. Betrothal usually happened about the age of twelve (arranged by the two sets of parents), with the wedding a year later. The husbands were usually about eighteen (in order to be established financially).

Charles Swindoll: In his account of the birth of Jesus, Matthew places us squarely within the point of view of Joseph. Remember, Joseph was the one who stood in the line of succession for the Davidic kingship according to the genealogy, so Jews would have been particularly interested in the story of Jesus' birth from Joseph's perspective. But as we, the readers, are placed in Joseph's sandals, we immediately sense the uncomfortable situation: Sometime during the approximately one-year period of betrothal between Joseph and Mary, "*she was found to be with child*" (1:18). Matthew clarifies for the reader that this unexpected pregnancy was "*by the Holy Spirit,*" but the account makes it clear that Joseph didn't know this.

D. A. Carson: That Mary was "*found*" to be with child does not suggest a surreptitious attempt at concealment ("*found out*") but only that her pregnancy became obvious. This pregnancy came about through the Holy Spirit (even more prominent in Luke's birth narratives). There is no hint of pagan deity-human coupling in crassly physical terms. Instead, the power of the Lord, manifest in the Holy Spirit who was expected to be active in the messianic age, miraculously brought about the conception.

B. (:19) Solution

"And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly."

Grant Osborne: Joseph's righteous character placed him in a dilemma: he had to divorce Mary because of her pregnancy, yet he did not "*want*" (a second causal participle) to "*disgrace*" her (δειγματίζω means to make an example by disgracing her publicly, often used of an adulteress, see BAGD, 172). So he compromised by deciding to do so privately. According to Jewish tradition, this would be done by giving her a writ of divorce (see **Deut 24:1**) privately in front of two witnesses rather than in front of the whole town.

Charles Swindoll: From Joseph's perspective, he had three options in dealing with this dilemma.

- First, he could accept her as a scandalous liar and marry her anyway. But to do so would be to overlook offenses that God condemns.
- Second, Joseph could publicly condemn Mary as an adulteress, and she would be stoned to death under the Law (see **Deut. 22:23-24**).
- Or third, Joseph could divorce Mary privately and quietly, finding a way to deflect attention from the embarrassing situation.

Perhaps Joseph thought her extended stay with her relative Elizabeth in Judea would be a perfect opportunity to "*send her away secretly*" (**Matt. 1:19**). He could just send word that Mary should stay in Judea and not return to Nazareth. Perhaps Joseph could move out of town himself and relocate to his family's ancestral land in Bethlehem. Before long, nobody would remember that he had been betrothed to Mary. Or by the time they realized she had given birth out of wedlock, nobody would care . . . maybe. But even this strategy to maintain his own righteousness and save her from public disgrace had its risks. Was it a realistic possibility that the truth wouldn't surface in a small town like Nazareth?

John MacArthur: At the start of his life, the Jews said Jesus was the son of a man who seduced Mary. At the end of his life, they said the disciples stole his body and faked the resurrection. And Matthew begins with the answer to the first slander and ends his Gospel with the answer to the last slander and spends the rest of the middle of it fighting all the other slanders against the dear Lord Jesus Christ.

Van Parunak: **Deuteronomy 22** lays out a detailed set of rules for what was to be done in the case of sexual impurity, either before or within marriage. **Table 3** Shows the possible cases. The only case that leaves the women neither dead nor married to her illicit lover is **22:25-27**, which must be the case that Joseph assumes here.

Section	Woman's Status	Woman Guilty?	Consequences
22:13-21 The Wife Accused	Married		
15-19		No	Husband fined; may never put her away
20-21		Yes	Wife executed by stoning.
22:22 The Adulteress Discovered		Not Stated	Wife and illicit partner executed.
22:23-24 Defiled in the City	Engaged	Presumed Yes	Man and woman both executed.
22:25-27 Defiled in the Country		Presumed No	Only man executed; woman goes free.
22:28-29 Single Girl Defiled	Single	Not Stated	Man must marry woman; can never put her away.

Table 3: Cases of fornication in Deuteronomy 22

II. (:20-21) VIRGIN CONCEPTION CONFIRMED BY ANGELIC REVELATION

A. (:20a) Recalibration of How to Respond

*“But when he had considered this,
behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying”*

Daniel Doriani: The Lord let Joseph struggle to solve his problem for a season before he revealed a better plan. He often works this way. He lets us make plans, then reveals a better way. When this happens, we must change our plans, as Joseph did. We must test our plans and purposes against God’s will, as revealed in Scripture and in the counsel of the wise. Sometimes, circumstances unfold in ways that suggest what God’s will may be. Even plans that look sound must be open to revision.

B. (:20b) Revelation of the Virgin Conception

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife;
for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”*

D. A. Carson: The angel’s opening words, “*Joseph son of David,*” tie this pericope to the preceding genealogy, maintain interest in the theme of the Davidic Messiah, and, from Joseph’s perspective, alert him to the significance of the role he is to play.

Leon Morris: *Don’t be afraid* does not necessarily indicate *fear*; the word may be used in the sense “*shrink from doing something,*” and it is this sense that is required here (cf. BAGD, φοβέω, 1.c).

Richard Gardner: Most striking of all is the language we find in the Fourth Gospel. There the author describes believers as those who are “*born from above*” or “*bom of the Spirit*” (**John 3:3, 6**). In another place he refers to those whom Jesus has given “*power to become children of God,*” asserting that they have been born “*not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*” (**John 1:12-13**). If we consider **Matthew 1:18-25** alongside texts such as these, we see that the theme of **conception by the Spirit** applies to believers’ origins as well as Jesus’ origins. In a somewhat different but real sense, we too are “*conceived by the Holy Ghost.*”

C. (:21) Reason for the Virgin Conception

1. Significance of the Virgin Birth of This Son

“And she will bear a Son;”

2. Essential for his Ultimate Mission = Salvation

*“and you shall call His name Jesus,
for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”*

Richard Gardner: For Matthew, however, it is important that Joseph carry out this responsibility. **Naming the child** will signify that Joseph accepts the child as his own, and this in turn will secure Jesus’ claim to Davidic ancestry.

D. A. Carson: There was much Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would “*redeem*” Israel from Roman tyranny and even purify his people, whether by fiat or appeal to law (e.g., Pss Sol 17). But there was no expectation that the Davidic Messiah would give his own life as a ransom (20:28) to save his people from their sins. The verb “*save*” can refer to deliverance from physical danger (8:25), disease (9:21-22), or even death (24:22); in the NT it commonly refers to the **comprehensive salvation** inaugurated by Jesus that will be consummated at his return. Here it focuses on what is central, viz., **salvation from sins**; for in the biblical perspective sin is the basic (if not always the immediate) cause of all other calamities. This verse therefore orients the reader to the **fundamental purpose of Jesus’ coming** and the essential nature of the reign he inaugurates as King Messiah, heir of David’s throne.

III. (:22-23) VIRGIN CONCEPTION FULFILLED OT PROPHECY

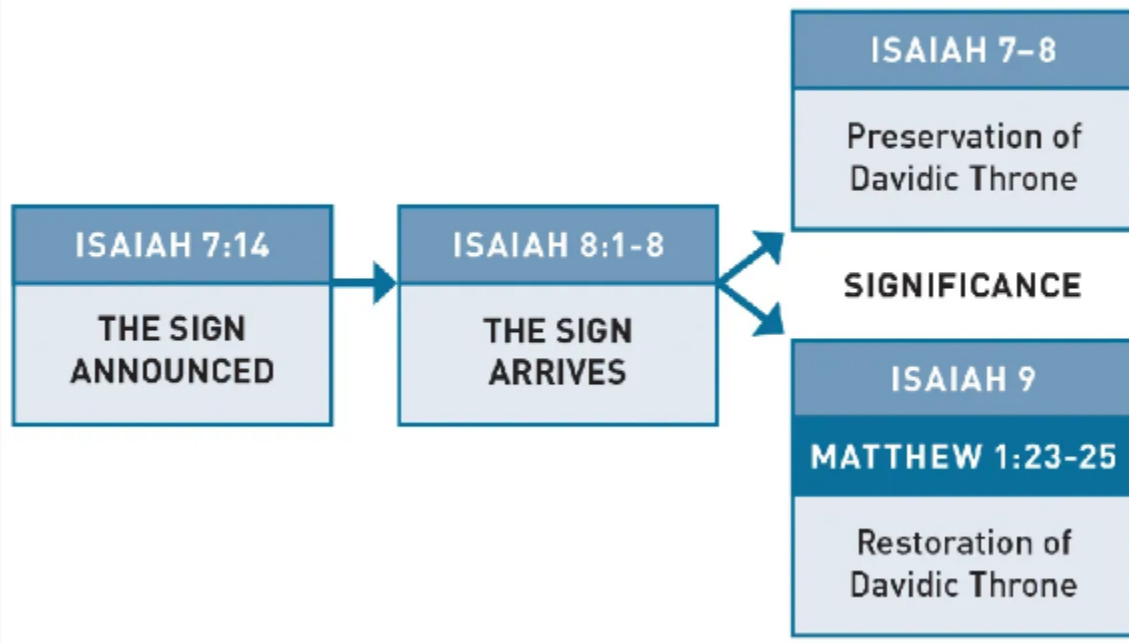
A. (:22) Prophetic Statement

“Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,”

Grant Osborne: There is emphasis upon ὅλον, the “*whole*” set of events that surrounded the birth of the Messiah. God controlled every aspect of the situation to fulfill his will. The use of “*to fulfill*” (πληρωθῆναι) is Matthean, found in ten particular fulfillment passages (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Four are in the infancy narratives and establish the theme for the rest of the book, namely, that **God sovereignly controls all events in conformity with his plan**. The primary method Matthew uses is **typology**; that is, the events of Jesus’ birth are analogous to the way God has worked during the old covenant. Yet there is also a direct relationship between promise and fulfillment here. God has sovereignly controlled salvation history in order to prepare for his Messiah.

Charles Swindoll: At this point in the dramatic narrative, Matthew pushes the pause button and makes an editorial comment for the benefit of his intended Jewish audience —especially those who would be likely to roll their eyes and say, “Gimme a break! Conceived by the Holy Spirit? Born of a virgin? Who’s ever heard of such a thing?” Matthew knew his skeptical audience well. To preempt their objections, he asserted that the virgin conception of the Messiah was, in fact, in keeping with a prophecy in the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

Fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14



B. (:23) Prophetic Substance

1. Virgin Conception and Birth of a Son

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son,”

Michael Wilkins: Isaiah prophesied that a woman who was a virgin at the time of Ahaz (734 B.C.) would bear a son named Immanuel. Since neither the queen nor Isaiah’s wife was a virgin, this most likely was some unmarried young woman within the royal house with whom Ahaz was familiar. The woman would soon marry and conceive a child, and when it was born give it the name Immanuel—perhaps as a symbolic hope of God’s presence in these dark times of national difficulty. Before the child was old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, Judah would be delivered from the threat of invasion from King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Aram (**Isa. 7:14–17**). The northern alliance was broken in 732 B.C., when Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria destroyed Damascus, conquered Aram, and put Rezin to death. All this was within the time-frame miraculously predicted as the sign to Ahaz, plenty of time for the virgin to be married and to carry the child for the nine months of pregnancy, and for the approximately two years it would take until the boy knew the difference between good and evil. Thus there was immediate fulfillment of a miraculous prediction.

Grant Osborne: The prophecy was given to Ahaz and introduced by *“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign.”* In other words, it was mainly intended for Ahaz that God would destroy the kings he dreaded (**Isa 7:14–17**). So at least a **partial fulfillment** is indicated for Ahaz’s time. Yet the larger Isaianic context indicates also that a greater picture was envisaged as well. This promised *“Immanuel”* would bring a dawning of a great light (**9:2–3**) and would be called *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (**9:6**). He is the *“shoot from the stump of Jesse,”* the *“Branch”* on which the Spirit rests (**11:1–11**), showing a distinct messianic longing.

The LXX recognized this greater thrust and chose to interpret *almâ* with the narrower “*virgin*” (παρθένος), thus emphasizing the supernatural manifestations of the child’s birth. Matthew utilized this Septuagintal emphasis and applied it to the virgin birth of Jesus. As **Blomberg** says, “So it is best to see a partial, proleptic fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in his time, with the complete and more glorious fulfillment in Jesus’ own birth.”

2. Recognition of the Child as Immanuel –
Virgin Conception Essential for Christ’s Incarnate Presence as Immanuel

“*and they shall call His name Immanuel,*
which translated means, ‘God with us.’”

Walter Wilson: Coming to terms with both the meaning and the relationship of the two birth names (“*Jesus*” and “*Immanuel*”) juxtaposed through this pattern is held up as a priority for the reader in comprehending the significance of the gospel’s central character.

Daniel Doriani: This is a surprise. The people had been looking for a **son of David**, but not for **Immanuel**. Perhaps no one genuinely heard the prophecy; nonetheless, one was given (the fact that we are deaf does not mean God fails to speak). The birth of Jesus, God’s Immanuel, fulfills several prophecies, some clear, others veiled.

Richard Gardner: Joseph will call Mary’s child **Jesus**, because he will save his people from their sins. The people whom Jesus saves from sin, however, will hail him as **Emmanuel**—for only someone in whom God is present can deliver from sin! At the end of his Gospel, Matthew will return to this theme of divine presence and reaffirm it in a new way: As God is with us in Jesus, so Jesus promises to be with his community at all times until the very end (**28:20**).

R. T. France: The phrase “*God with us*” which thus marks the beginning of Matthew’s presentation of Jesus will have its arresting counterpart at the end of the gospel when Jesus himself declares “*I am with you always*” with reference not to a continuing life on earth but a spiritual presence (28:20). Cf. also the remarkable words of **18:20**, “*Where two or three have come together in my name, I am there among them.*” At this point it would be possible to read Immanuel only in its probable OT sense as a statement of God’s concern for his people, “*God is with us,*” but the name as applied to one who has just been declared to owe his origin to the direct work of the Holy Spirit was probably in Matthew’s mind a more direct statement of the presence of God in Jesus himself, so that Jesus’ declaration in **28:20** is only drawing out what has already been true from the time of his birth, that **God is present in the person of Jesus**. Matthew’s overt interpretation of “*Immanuel*” thus takes him close to an explicit doctrine of **incarnation** such as is expressed in **John 1:14**.

Craig Blomberg: The church in every age should recognize here a clear affirmation of **Jesus’ deity** and cling tightly to this doctrine as crucial for our salvation. At the same time, Matthew wants to emphasize that Jesus, as God, is “*with us*”; **deity is immanent**. Too often those who have rightly contended for Jesus’ full deity have created a God to whom they do not feel close rather than one who became human in every way like them but without sin (**Heb 4:15**). As God “*with us,*” Jesus enables us to come boldly before God’s throne (**Heb 4:16**) when we accept the forgiveness of sins he made available (**Matt 2:21**) and develop an intimate relationship with him.

IV. (:24-25) VIRGIN BIRTH PROTECTED BY THE OBEDIENCE OF JOSEPH

A. (:24) Married Mary

“And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife,”

Charles Swindoll: Joseph not only behaved as Mary’s faithful protector, but he presumably also took on the role of her advocate. He adjusted his life in a totally new direction once he realized what God was doing in their lives and what part he was meant to play. Together Mary and Joseph would likely bear the brunt of whispered rumors, backbiting gossip, and ugly condemnation—from friends, family, and especially enemies. But Joseph knew the truth, and he made a tough, life-altering decision based on that truth. Being a righteous man, he did what was right, regardless of the personal cost.

Van Parunak: Joseph and Mary were both called upon to make difficult personal choices in bringing the Messiah into the world. Both of them had to suppress their personal goals and their concern for their own reputations, in the face of obedience to the Lord. But in neither case do we sense any hesitation. Confronted with Gabriel’s announcement, Mary said (**Luk 1:38**), *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”* In response to the instruction from the angel of the Lord in his dream, when Joseph woke up, he *“did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him”* (Matt 1:24). We should thank God for giving both of them this spirit of obedience, and seek to yield ourselves just as willingly to the revelations that he makes clear to us day by day, that he might form Christ in us, and through us bring him to the world around us.

B. (:25a) Kept Her a Virgin

“and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son;”

D. A. Carson: Matthew wants to make Jesus’ virginal conception quite unambiguous, for he adds that Joseph had no sexual union with Mary (lit., he did not *“know”* her, an OT euphemism) until she gave birth to Jesus (**v.25**). The *“until”* clause most naturally means that Mary and Joseph enjoyed normal conjugal relations after Jesus’ birth. Contrary to **McHugh** (*Mother of Jesus*, 204), the imperfect *eginōsken* (*“did not know [her],”* GK 1182) does not hint at continued celibacy after Jesus’ birth but stresses the faithfulness of the **celibacy until Jesus’ birth**.

C. (:25b) Named the Child Jesus

“and he called His name Jesus.”

Daniel Doriani: This portion of Matthew offers a picture of faith, but more than that it is an account of the acts of the triune God. The Father’s **plan of redemption** has come to the beginning of its climactic phase. The Spirit’s prophecy to Ahaz and through Ahaz set up the Immanuel principle that now comes to fulfillment. The Spirit also fashioned life in the womb of Mary and moved the hearts of Mary and Joseph to accept their role in the divine drama. Finally, the eternal Son has entered the world of humanity.

May the Spirit work in us to receive what God began to accomplish in the birth of Jesus. May we also submit our plans and our emotions to him, as Joseph did. May we give our hearts and minds to him as Mary and Joseph did. May we know that God is with us, to bless us, in every season of life. In every distress, let us turn to God for comfort. In joy and in blessing, let us not ascribe it to good fortune or hard work, but to Immanuel, who is present to bless. God is with us in the person of Jesus. May we have the faith, trust, love, and obedience to receive the blessings of Immanuel.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the implications of denying the historicity of the virgin birth of Jesus?
- 2) When have you wrestled through a problem and come to your own course of action only to have the Lord overrule your agenda and cause you to revise your plans?
- 3) What aspects of this account help to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God sent to save us from sin?
- 4) How do you respond when God calls you to make a tough faith decision that might involve significant personal cost or rejection?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Gardner: Similar annunciation stories are found in **Genesis 16:7-14; 17:15—18:15; Judges 13:2-25; Luke 1:18-23; and Luke 1:26-38** (cf. **Isa. 7:10-17**). If we compare these narratives, we find a number of common elements:

- (1) An appearance of the Lord or the angel of the Lord.
- (2) A greeting by the one who appears, sometimes addressing the recipient by name.
- (3) A message that a child has been or soon will be conceived.
- (4) The giving of a name for the child and an explanation of the name.
- (5) Information on the future role or destiny of the child.

Sometimes (though not in Matthew's account), the recipient questions how all this can happen and receives a sign of reassurance.

Central to the good news in annunciation stories is the word that God has intervened or will intervene to make possible the birth of someone important for God's purposes. . .

Kingsbury: Jesus, the son born to Mary, is the kingly Messiah of Israel in whom Israel's entire history, begun in Abraham, reaches its eschatological conclusion. Adopted by Joseph into the line of David, Jesus can legitimately be called the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. Ultimately, however, **Jesus has his origin in God**, which means he is the **Son of God**, for he was conceived in Mary, a virgin, by the creative act of God's Holy Spirit. As Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham, and Son of God, Jesus' mission will be to save his people, the disciples who will constitute his Church, from their sins. By so doing, Jesus will inaugurate the eschatological age of salvation.

Grant Osborne: The Spirit is not a major theme in Matthew, unlike Luke and John. However, here the Spirit is central, and Matthew does want his readers to realize his presence in Jesus' birth and in our world. While simplistic, there is truth in the Trinitarian saying, "The Father proclaims, the Son performs, the Spirit perfects." The Spirit is the presence of the Father and the Son in this world. Jesus makes clear in John's Farewell Discourse (**John 14-17**) that he must depart so the Spirit may come (**John 16:7**). This is the age of the Spirit, the final stage in God's

plan to prepare this world for the eschaton, when the eternal age will be inaugurated. Bruner says:

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings Jesus to birth in persons, the one who makes Jesus alive in human life, who makes Jesus historical and real. The Genesis of Jesus inside human life is the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit, the Creator Spiritus, who began the world's creation (Gen 1:2) and now generates the world's salvation.

Charles Swindoll: The Jewish marriage process can be divided into three stages.

- First, a man and woman were **matched together**, usually by their fathers. The couple and their families then took time to become acquainted and approve the match, after which they entered a formal contractual agreement that included some kind of dowry or exchange of property passed from the woman's family to the man's family.
- Once the contract was signed and sealed, the man and woman entered the second stage: **betrothal**. Betrothal essentially amounted to a waiting period, somewhat similar to what we might call engagement, but with the important distinction that a contract had already been signed, making betrothal final in a sense similar to what we think of as marriage itself.
- When the waiting period had elapsed and the groom's new living quarters had been prepared to receive the bride, the third stage transpired: the **wedding ceremony**. This included a public presentation of the bride and groom before family and friends, the sealing of their union, and a celebration with a grand feast.

The severing of an arrangement of betrothal would have been a big deal in Jewish culture — essentially a **breach of contract!**

Walter Wilson: The formal profile of the first scene (**1:18–25**) is achieved through the blending of three different revelatory genres,

- the angelic annunciation of birth,
- the angelic dream appearance,
- and the fulfillment quotation, the last of which doubles as an oracle of divine name-giving.

Having situated the origins of the Messiah within a broad sweep of salvation history, attention now turns to events surrounding his conception and birth. The narrative in **1:18–25** is linked to the gospel's introduction (**1:1–17**) both linguistically and logically. Most conspicuous in this regard is the use of γένεσις in the pericope's initial verse, matching the use of the same word in the initial verse of the previous unit: the account of Jesus's "*birth*" (**1:18**) will be a continuation of the account of his "*genealogy*" (**1:1**), the references to Mary and Joseph in **1:18** picking up on **1:16**. The reference to Joseph as "*son of David*" in **1:20**, meanwhile, recalls the identification of Jesus with the same title in **1:1** (cf. **1:6, 17**). By explaining how the latter came to be formally adopted by the former, the story elucidates the anomaly with which the genealogy concluded (**1:16**). In addition, the use of γεννηθέν ("*begotten*") in **1:20** recalls the repeated use of γεννάω ("*beget*") in the genealogy, especially ἐγεννήθη ("*was born*") in **1:16**. The Messiah's derivation from the house of David is established through his father, while his derivation from the Holy Spirit is established through his mother.

David Thompson:

JESUS CHRIST IS THE KING OF THE JEWS AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD AND HIS VERY BIRTH AND JOSEPH'S RESPONSE PROVES IT.

SPECIFIC FACT #1 – The specific time of the pregnancy that led to the birth of Jesus Christ. **1:18**

(Time Related Fact #1) - Mary became pregnant during her betrothal period to Joseph. 1:18a

(Time Related Fact #2) - Mary became pregnant before she had any physical intimacy with Joseph. **1:18b**

SPECIFIC FACT #2 – The specific character of Joseph is revealed by his reaction to Mary’s pregnancy. **1:19**

But what we learn from this verse is that Joseph was a **righteous man**, but he was not a rigid man. He was a righteous man, but he was also a **gracious** and **merciful** man. He desired to do what was right before God which meant he could not go ahead with the wedding because if he did he would:

1) Violate Roman and Jewish law which forbid one to marry an immoral woman but expose her and even stone her (**Deut. 22:13-21**), and

2) He would violate his own integrity– people would think he had committed immorality.

However, he did not want to destroy Mary’s reputation by publically exposing her to the religious leadership. Joseph decided he would handle the matter privately–privately divorce her and send her away. The Scriptures call Joseph a “*righteous man*” in that he would not put up with immorality and decided to privately divorce Mary.

SPECIFIC FACT #3 – The specific truth concerning Jesus’ conception is revealed to Joseph by an angel, proving who Jesus Christ is. **1:20-21**

SPECIFIC FACT #4 – The specific truth concerning Jesus’ prophetic fulfillment is revealed to Joseph and proves who Christ is. **1:22-23**

SPECIFIC FACT #5 – The specific response of Joseph to this angelic revelation proves who Jesus is. **1:24-25**

Peter Wallace: The **Council of Chalcedon** put it this way in the year 451 regarding how Jesus is “recognized” in two natures. In other words, you can see that he is true God and true man. He is **one person** who acts according to the properties of two distinct but inseparable natures.

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and

our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

If you ever get confused by how to think or speak of the two natures, just remember this:

- persons act,
- natures are.

Jesus is one person who acts according to the properties of two natures.

- His divine nature he has from the Father from all eternity.
- His human nature he has from the Virgin Mary,

together with the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit – a nice, mysterious way of putting it!

Wayne Grudem - The **doctrinal importance of the virgin birth** is seen in at least three areas.

1. It shows that salvation ultimately must come from the Lord.

Just as God had promised that the “*seed*” of the woman (**Gen. 3:15**) would ultimately destroy the serpent, so God brought it about by his own power, not through mere human effort. The virgin birth of Christ is an unmistakable reminder that salvation can never come through human effort, but must be the work of God himself. Our salvation only comes about through the supernatural work of God, and that was evident at the very beginning of Jesus’ life when “*God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*” (**Gal. 4:4–5**).

2. The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person.

This was the means God used to send his Son (**John 3:16; Gal. 4:4**) into the world as a man. If we think for a moment of other possible ways in which Christ might have come to the earth, none of them would so clearly unite humanity and deity in one person. It probably would have been possible for God to create Jesus as a complete human being in heaven and send him to descend from heaven to earth without the benefit of any human parent. But then it would have been very hard for us to see how Jesus could be fully human as we are, nor would he be a part of the human race that physically descended from Adam. On the other hand, it probably would have been possible for God to have Jesus come into the world with two human parents, both a father and a mother, and with his full divine nature miraculously united to his human nature at some point early in his life. But then it would have been hard for us to understand how Jesus was fully God, since his origin was like ours in every way. When we think of these two other possibilities, it helps us to understand how God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary’s womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

3. The virgin birth also makes possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin.

All human beings have inherited legal guilt and a corrupt moral nature from their first father, Adam (this is sometimes called “inherited sin” or “original sin”). But the fact that Jesus did not have a human father means that the line of descent from Adam is partially interrupted. Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam. And this helps us to understand why the **legal guilt** and **moral corruption** that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ

TEXT: Matthew 2:1-12

TITLE: WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM -- THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI VS ANTAGONISM FROM KING HEROD

BIG IDEA:

THE COMING OF THE KING OF THE JEWS PROMPTS EITHER ADORATION AND WORSHIP OR FEAR AND OPPOSITION

INTRODUCTION:

Leon Morris: Matthew may well have included this story to bring out the truth that Jesus is Lord of all peoples; since this is so, it was appropriate that at the time of his infancy people came from a distant Gentile country to pay their homage. In this narrative the Jews and their king are ranged against the infant Jesus, but Gentiles do him homage. There will also be the motif that the purposes of God cannot be overthrown. Earthly kings like Herod may try to circumvent the divine purpose, but in the end they are always defeated. And, of course, there is the strong motif of the fulfilment of Scripture; Matthew finds events in the life of Jesus from the earliest days foretold in the holy writings.

E. Michael Green: Such was the climactic event of all history: Jesus, Immanuel, was born in the little town of Bethlehem, the ancient seat of the Davidic line. **His coming always divides people**, as we shall see time and again in this Gospel. Here, at the very start of his life, we see two camps forming: one full of praise and welcome; the other full of hatred and opposition. Herod and the Magi stand out in strong contrast, a contrast that will deepen as the story of Jesus' life unfolds towards the cross. . .

The note of **contrast** is strongly emphasized in this short account. There is the contrast between Herod's kingship and that of Jesus: one inaugurated by Rome, an alien power, and based on aggression and cruelty; the other originating from love, shown in vulnerability and entering into its kingdom through the cross. Herod was thirty-three at his inauguration, and Jesus the same age when he died. What a contrast!

Matthew underlines particularly the contrasting responses to Jesus. We have seen how the Magi pursued what they knew to the utmost of their powers, and made an act of obeisance and dedication that takes our breath away. Those wise men sought him wholeheartedly: wise men and women still do. But over against them stood Herod and the Jewish clergy. Herod's response was hatred and fear: hatred of anything and anyone that threatened his self-centredness, and fear of a possible rival, however improbable. The lust for power blunted the better qualities in Herod's character. Power still has this corrupting tendency today. Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Saddam's Iraq and Milosevic's Serbia show the lengths to which self-seeking can go against what is known to be right.

Then there were the Jewish chief priests and scribes. Their attitude is almost as amazing as that of the Magi. They knew their Scriptures and had no problem in answering Herod when he wanted to know where the child would be born. Back came the answer, pointing Herod to **Micah 5:2**. He would be born in Bethlehem, of course. But did they go to greet him? Did they lift a sandal? Not at all. They knew it all, but they did nothing. That is a characteristic danger for

clergy and scholars in any age. Their **apathy** hardened into outright opposition to Jesus as his ministry developed, and ended with frenzied lust for his blood—an awesome warning that **knowledge is no substitute for obedience**.

D. A. Carson: Of course, Matthew did not just chronicle meaningless events. He wrote to develop his theme of fulfillment of Scripture (Had not God promised that nations would be drawn to Messiah's light [Isa 60:3]?); to establish God's providential and supernatural care of this virgin-born Son; to anticipate the hostilities, resentment, and suffering he would face; and to hint at the fact that Gentiles would be drawn into his reign (cf. **Isa 60:3**; **Nellessen**, *Das Kind*, 120, acutely compares **Mt 8:11–12**; cf. **28:16–20**). The Magi will be like the men of Nineveh who will rise up in judgment and condemn those who, despite their privilege of much greater light, did not receive the promised Messiah and bow to his reign (**12:41–42**).

Grant Osborne: **Worship** permeates this story. These exalted personages represent the rest of the world, come to bow at the feet of the infant Jesus. Their great efforts to find the baby show their resolve. This is a real fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that the Jewish people would be a source of blessing to the world (**Gen 12:3**; **15:5**; **18:18**; etc.).

Richard Gardner: The story of the magi gives special prominence to the theme of **Jesus' kingship**. Jesus is at one and the same time the king of the Jews and the long-awaited world ruler whom all the nations will honor and serve. Only after his resurrection will Jesus really be able to claim that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (**28:18**). The adoration of the magi, however, confirms and celebrates Jesus' royal destiny in advance.

John MacArthur: Now having established that He is a king by lineage, then in **chapter 2**, Matthew reemphasizes that He is a king in terms of the fact that certain people paid him homage as a king. If He's a king, Matthew is saying to us, it ought to be evident by his genealogy. He has to be the child of kings. **If He is a king, it ought to be evident by the way people respond to Him.** And so in **chapter 2**, Matthew tells us the story of certain wise men who came to proclaim that Jesus was indeed a king and to bow at His feet and worship Him as king. Now that again is part of Matthew's emphasis. He is king by virtue of His genealogy. He is king by virtue the **royal majesty** that was displayed, and accepted, and honored, and revealed by the work and the effort of these wise men coming and bringing certain gifts.

I. (:1-2) ADVENT OF CHRIST PROMPTS THE MAGI TO SEEK HIM OUT

A. (:1a) Historical Setting

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,”

Leon Morris: The name Bethlehem means “*House of Bread*,” that is, a granary. Matthew speaks of Bethlehem 5 times, but Luke (twice) and John (once) are the only other New Testament writers to refer to it. It was evidently not considered an important place. It was located about 5 miles (or 8 kilometers) south of Jerusalem. Judea, here as in most places, indicates the southern part of Palestine (in contrast to Samaria, etc.). . .

This Herod is **Herod the Great**, and he is correctly called “*the king*” (the title was sometimes accorded the tetrarch, but he was not a king; this Herod was). He was not a Jew, his father being an Idumean and his mother an Arabian, but the Romans made him King of Judea in 40 B.C. He

is generally thought to have died in 4 B.C. (there is some dispute about this). He was an unscrupulous tyrant, but his achievements were such that he merited the epithet “the Great.” He was a great builder and was responsible for the erection of the temple in Jerusalem, the rebuilding of Samaria (which he called Sebaste in honor of the emperor), and other significant works. And, in the words of **Barclay**, “He was the only ruler of Palestine who ever succeeded in keeping the peace and in bringing order into disorder.”

William Barclay: Bethlehem had a long history. It was there that Jacob had buried Rachel and had set up a pillar of memory beside her grave (Genesis 48:7, 35:20). It was there that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz (**Ruth 1:22**), and from Bethlehem Ruth could see the land of Moab, her native land, across the Jordan valley. But above all, Bethlehem was the home and the city of David (**1 Samuel 16:1, 17:12, 20:6**); and it was for the water of the well of Bethlehem that David longed when he was a hunted fugitive upon the hills (**2 Samuel 23:14–15**). . .

But Herod had one terrible flaw in his character. He was almost **insanely suspicious**. He had always been suspicious, and the older he became the more suspicious he grew, until, in his old age, he was, as someone said, ‘a murderous old man’. If he suspected anyone as a rival to his power, that person was promptly eliminated. He murdered his wife Mariamne and her mother Alexandra. His eldest son, Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, were all assassinated by him. Augustus, the Roman emperor, had said, bitterly, that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son. (The saying is even more epigrammatic in Greek, for in Greek *hus* is the word for a *pig*, and *huios* is the word for a *son*.) . . .

There was the reaction of Herod, the reaction of hatred and hostility. Herod was afraid that this little child was going to interfere with his life, his place, his power and his influence, and therefore his first instinct was to destroy him.

Craig Blomberg: From other historical materials we know that Herod died in **4 B.C.** (The calendrical confusion was caused by the switch from a Roman to a Christian calendar in the sixth century A.D., based on the faulty calculations of Dionysius Exiguus, who did not have accurate information about the time of Herod's death.) Jesus' birth itself almost certainly did not occur on December 25. This date became attached to the celebration of Christmas later because it coincided with a Roman holiday known as Saturnalia, when Christians had time off work to worship. Perhaps Jesus was born in the spring when shepherds would have been watching their flocks by night because lambs might be born (**Luke 2:8**).

Arnold Fruchtenbaum: He was a very clever, ruthless ruler who was constantly on the watch for insurrection and intrigue. His life reads like the worst kind of soap opera of villainy and murder. He became so evil that he killed three or possibly four of his sons, and his favorite wife Miriamne. He had ten wives, and offspring who were constantly conspiring against each other. He was so paranoid that he built incredibly elaborate fortresses in a planned escape route in a line towards Egypt, which included Masada (which he fortified in the 30’s B.C.). He was an Idumean, a race forcibly converted to Judaism earlier in history, and while he practiced Judaism (not eating pork) he was not ethnically Jewish. This is one reason the Jewish people hated him.

B. (:1b) Hallelujah Entourage

“behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,”

Leon Morris: many interpreters hold that these wise men came from Babylon, and they may have done so, but we cannot be sure. Their study of the stars had led them to believe that a great leader had been born in Judea. That being so, they naturally directed their steps to Jerusalem, the capital city. These men would have been Gentiles, but Matthew gives this no emphasis. Tradition says that there were three of them, but Matthew gives no number and it appears to be a deduction from the number of the gifts. Tradition also makes them kings, but this is highly unlikely.

Robert Gundry: The astrologers' arrival "*in Jerusalem*" introduces that city as the center of antagonism toward Jesus already at his birth (compare **23:36**).

John Nolland: Matthew's Magi do not interpret dreams, but they do observe and interpret the stars (or at least one), and they are from the East. If Matthew has one eye on the role of Magi/astrologers in Moses' infancy *haggadah* (as seems likely), then this helps to bring the role of astrologer to the fore. It would be wrong to look here for any polemic against astrology or any claim that now the power of the astrologers/magicians is broken. The Magi are **positive figures** who receive guidance from God (in a manner tailored to their circumstances), not opponents to be vanquished. It is inappropriate to read off this account any evaluation of astrology, either positive or negative; the interest is elsewhere.

Charles Swindoll: The travelers from the east are identified not as kings, but as "*magi*." The Greek word *magos* refers to a "wise man and priest, who was expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams and various other occult arts." But we would be wrong to identify the magi as magicians or sorcerers. Rather, we should probably think of them as philosopher-sages or astrologers who engaged in the interpretation of dreams, sought signs in the heavens, and practiced other such forms of primitive science mixed with folklore. It is possible that they had also become familiar with Old Testament messianic prophecies through exposure to Jewish Scriptures like the books of Isaiah and Daniel, which would have been known among Jewish communities spread through Arabia, Persia, and Babylon (see the eastern regions represented in **Acts 2:9-11**).

These stargazers weren't kings, but they likely belonged to the upper echelons of society, perhaps serving in a royal court. How else could they have afforded such a long journey and brought such expensive gifts? And if they were well-to-do, they would also have been accompanied by at least a modest entourage that would have made their sudden arrival in Judea noticeable.

John MacArthur: The magi were well-versed in astronomy and astrology, agriculture, mathematics, and history. They were involved in various occult practices and were famous for their ability to interpret dreams (cf. **Da. 2:1ff.**). Such was their political power and influence that no Persian ruler came to power without their approval. . . . The **magi from the east** (the word literally means "*from the rising*" of the sun, and refers to the orient) who came to see Jesus were of a completely different sort. Not only were they true **magi**, but they surely had been strongly influenced by Judaism, quite possibly even by some of the prophetic writings, especially that of Daniel. They appear to be among the many **God-fearing Gentiles who lived at the time of Christ**, a number of whom—such as Cornelius and Lydia (**Acts 10:1–2; Acts 16:14**)—are mentioned in the New Testament.

J C Ryle: The cost of the magi to seek Jesus –

The conduct of the wise men described in this chapter is a splendid example of spiritual

diligence. What trouble it must have cost them to travel from their homes to the house where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveller are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things moved them. They had set their hearts on seeing Him “*that was born King of the Jews;*” and they never rested till they saw Him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, “Where there is a will there is a way.” It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men’s example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our souls? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

C. (:2) **Homage Inquiry**

1. Looking for the Messiah

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?”

Grant Osborne: When the Magi called Jesus “*King of the Jews,*” it became a **direct challenge** to Herod, a sign to him that his rule may be nearing its end. A man who would murder wives and children because of a perceived threat would not hesitate to go after Jesus with a viciousness impossible to understand by sane people.

2. Longing to Worship Him

“For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”

Richard Gardner: It was commonly believed in the ancient world that **signs in the heavens** accompanied the births of great figures, including rulers such as Alexander and Augustus. The magi in **Matthew 2** claim to have seen just such a sign. Having observed the rising star of a newborn Jewish king, they make a pilgrimage to Judea to find him and pay him homage.

John Nolland: The identity of the ‘star’ has been extensively debated. The main options which have been canvassed may be divided between those which look for a natural astronomical explanation (the conjunction of planets, a comet, or a supernova) and those which look to a miraculous event (a new star in the heavens, a wandering ‘star’).

The conditions which the star must satisfy are the following. It must be the kind of star

- (a) for which Magi might be considered to be on the lookout;
- (b) which on some basis or other could be identified as the star of the messiah of the Jews;
- (c) which can blaze a trail for the Magi to follow from Jerusalem; and
- (d) which can finally come to rest over a particular dwelling.

While the first two conditions alone would point in the direction of astrological observation of the natural heavens, the third and fourth can point only to a **miraculously provided heavenly light**. We appear to be dealing with a new light in the heavens which on the basis of location and/or time of emergence pointed in astrological lore to some special ascendancy of the Jews, but which goes away from its location in the heavens to lead the Magi from Jerusalem to the location of Jesus in Bethlehem. The story itself provides no basis on which the Magi could have determined the identity of the star at its rising with the star which later went ahead to Bethlehem. The reader is left to depend on the superior knowledge (and the reliability) of the narrator.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Why is it so important to find a human explanation for a miracle, other than to avoid the fact that it was a miracle? Why is it, for example, that some commentators on the Book of Jonah (even some very good ones) find it profitable to produce examples of men who were swallowed by “great fish” and rescued alive? God may very well use natural means to accomplish His purposes, but He does not always do so. Sometimes God uses extraordinary measures, measures that have no counterpart in nature, so that the supernatural hand of God is undeniable. I am therefore inclined to the view that this “*star*” may have been a manifestation of the **Shekinah Glory**, which we sometimes find in the Old Testament.

II. (:3-8) ANTAGONISM AND OPPOSITION FROM KING HEROD AND THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A. (:3) Reaction of Distress by King Herod and Jewish Religious Leaders

“And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

Were the people in Jerusalem worried about:

- 1) Herod’s possible unhinged reaction with ensuing mayhem
- 2) Or false claims of messiahship with corresponding political repercussions ?

Richard Gardner: Given Herod’s fear of rivals, his reaction to those who seek a new king in his kingdom is not surprising. We learn, however, that Herod was not alone in his reaction, but that all Jerusalem was shaken up with him. Here Matthew echoes the Jewish Midrash on Moses which stated that the news of the impending birth of a Hebrew deliverer alarmed the Pharaoh and filled the Egyptians with dread (**Josephus**, Antiquities 2.205-206, 215). Now the roles are reversed, however: It is the Jewish people and their king who are upset by the birth of a Hebrew deliverer, while representatives of a foreign nation seek to honor him! The irony is profound.

Craig Blomberg: If Herod were a true devotee of the Judaism of Scripture, he should have rejoiced greatly, but he does not. Instead, he views the new child as a mortal threat. “*Disturbed*” is too weak a translation of his reaction; “*in turmoil*” or even “*terrified*” (cf. **Weymouth**, “*greatly agitated*”) would be more accurate. “*All Jerusalem*” probably refers primarily to the religious leaders of Israel who dominated the city, many of whom were also personally installed by Herod.

B. (:4-6) Reaction of Indifference (Eventually Leading to Antagonism) by the Jewish Religious Leaders

1. (:4) Sought Out for Their Biblical Knowledge

“And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born.”

D. A. Carson: The vast majority of the scribes were Pharisees; the priests were Sadducees. The two groups barely got along, and therefore **Schweizer** judges this verse “historically almost inconceivable.” But Matthew does not say the two groups came together at the same time; Herod, unloved by either group, may well have called both to guard against being tricked. If the Pharisees and Sadducees barely spoke to one another, there was less likelihood of collusion.

John MacArthur: At the top of the totem pole is the high priest and the captain of the temple, then the chief priests of the aristocracy, then the ordinary priests, and then at the bottom the Levites who helped around the temple were the temple police. . .

The scribes were just folks from the other tribes, none in particular, who were scholars and authorities on the law. These people had spent their life studying the law. These were the Bible scholars, and by that I mean Old Testament obviously. . .

Now note, some of them joined the Pharisees party because they were literalists. They were fundamentalists. They were legalists. They believed in everything that it was said the way it was said. On the other hand, some of them joined the Sadducees because they were the liberals who wanted to throw away a lot of the Scripture. They denied a certain things in the Scripture, such as resurrection, such as angels.

So you had two theological parties, the fundamentalists and the liberals in that day, but both of them had their scribes and their scholars. And whether the scribes of the Pharisees, or the scribes of the Sadducees, they were forever and ever challenging Jesus weren't they? Coming and trying to trap Him in His words. So here you have the political wheels and the brains of Israel to begin with right here in **Matthew 2** set at odds against Christ.

2. (:5a) Satisfied with Intellectual Knowledge

“And they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea,’”

John Nolland: Matthew stresses a leadership role in and responsibility for the people. While the role of the chief priests and scribes is quite **neutral** here, their **inactivity** in comparison to that of the Magi **may imply criticism**, and their **later hostility** to Jesus may be seen as that much more reprehensible in the light of the evident scriptural knowledge of this grouping and their participation in events which pointed to the significance of the birth of Jesus.

3. (:5b-6) Steeped in Prophecy but No Life Connection

“for so it has been written by the prophet, 6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

Grant Osborne: Technically, this is not one of the ten “**fulfillment passages**” in Matthew, for it does not have the same opening formula as **1:22; 2:15;** and others. But it is the same type of OT fulfillment as those.

Leon Morris: The passage is saying that Bethlehem's greatness consists only in that it is the birthplace of the great leader, and this is as plain in Micah as in Matthew.

D. A. Carson: It is tempting to think that Matthew sees a pair of contrasts

- (1) between the false shepherds of Israel who have provided sound answers but no leadership (cf. **23:2–7**) and Jesus, who is the true Shepherd of his people Israel, and
- (2) between a ruler like Herod and the one born to rule.

The words “*my people Israel*” are included, not simply because they are found in **2 Samuel 5:2**, but because Matthew, like Paul, faithfully records both the essential Jewish focus of the OT promises and the OT expectation of broader application to the Gentiles. Jesus is not only the promised Davidic king but also the promised hope of blessing to all the nations, the one who will claim their obeisance (cf. **Ps 68:28–35; Isa 18:1–3, 7; 45:14; 60:6; Zep 3:10**). That same duality makes the desires of the Gentile Magi to worship the Messiah stand out against the apathy of the leaders, who did not, apparently, take the trouble to go to Bethlehem. Of course,

the Jewish leaders may have seen the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem as one more false alarm. As far as we can tell, the Sadducees (and therefore the chief priests) had no interest in the question of when the Messiah would come; the Pharisees (and therefore most teachers of the law) expected him to come only somewhat later.

C. (:7-8) Reaction of Hatred, Hostility and Deceit by King Herod

1. (:7) Dastardly Intelligence Gathering

*“Then Herod secretly called the magi,
and ascertained from them the time the star appeared.”*

2. (:8) Deceitful Investigative Campaign

a. Commissioning the Magi to Locate the Child

*“And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said,
‘Go and make careful search for the Child;’”*

b. Concealing Agenda of Hatred and Hostility

*“and when you have found Him,
report to me, that I too may come and worship Him.”*

III. (:9-12) ADORATION AND WORSHIP OF THE MAGI

A. (:9) Wayfare (Journey) of the Magi

1. Directed Route

“And having heard the king, they went their way;”

2. Divine Guidance

*“and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them,
until it came and stood over where the Child was.”*

Grant Osborne: We must remember that it is not a long way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem—only six miles. So it was a journey of a couple hours. For dramatic “look” (ἰδοῦ), see **1:20, 23**. Still, the “star” led the way, and this language fits none of the celestial phenomena suggested in **2:2b**. It must have been a **supernatural manifestation**, for it not only “went before” them but also stopped and “stood” above the home in which Jesus was staying. The language is reminiscent of the pillar of fire and the cloud in the wilderness that “went ahead of” Israel to guide them along the way (**Exod 13:21; 40:38**). God is still in control.

B. (:10-11) Worship of the Magi

1. (:10) Joy of Worship

“And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”

Craig Blomberg: Thus one born in obscurity is recognized by unlikely devotees as the future King of Israel. The child whose birth is shrouded in suspicions of illegitimacy (**chap. 1**) is in fact God's legitimate appointee. On the other hand, the legal rulers, both political and religious, by their clinging to positions of power and prestige, prove themselves to be illegitimate in God's eyes.

2. (:11a) Expression of Worship

“And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother;

and they fell down and worshiped Him;”

Charles Swindoll: By this time, Jesus would have been a little over a year old —no longer a swaddled baby lying in a manger. Herod deduced that the child would have been under the age of two “*according to the time which he had determined from the magi*” (2:16). By this time, then, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus would have settled in a more permanent home in Bethlehem, possibly a home belonging to relatives —descendants of the line of David. After all, Bethlehem had been the family’s ancient hometown.

3. (:11b) Offerings of Worship

“and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

Leon Morris: Clearly all three were valuable, and together they formed a munificent gift, suitable for offering to a king. Christians have often seen symbolical meanings in them, gold for royalty, frankincense for deity, and myrrh pointing to suffering and death, but Matthew says nothing about this.

Robert Gundry: Elsewhere in Matthew “*gift(s)*” is used exclusively and often for **offerings to God** (5:23–24; 8:4; 15:5; 23:18–19), and the verb “*offered*” has to do with such offerings in 8:4 and throughout the Old Testament. So the astrologers’ offering of these expensive gifts adds further emphasis on Jesus’ **deity** and **kingship**; and the astrologers stand as prototypes of his disciples, who give up earthly treasures for heavenly treasures (6:19–21; 19:21). Like the Gentile kings in **Psalms 72:10–11, 15**, the astrologers bring gifts of gold to a superior king in Israel. Like the Gentile kings in **Isaiah 60:2–3, 6**, they bring gold and frankincense. And as Solomon the immediate son of David is perfumed with myrrh and frankincense in the **Song of Solomon 3:6; 4:6**, Jesus the later son of David is given frankincense and myrrh. These offerings confirm that in 2:2 we should understand “*birthed [as] king of the Jews*” rather than “*birthed [to be] king of the Jews.*”

E. Michael Green: “*Gold*” was valued throughout the ancient world as a medium of exchange as well as a precious metal for making jewelry, ornaments, and dining instruments for royalty. “*Incense*” or frankincense is derived from an amber resin, which produced a sweet odor when burned. It was used as a perfume (**Song 3:6; 4:6, 14**), but in Israel it was used ceremonially for the only incense permitted on the altar (**Ex. 30:9, 34–38**). “*Myrrh*” consists of a mixture of resin, gum, and the oil myrrhol and was used in incense (**Ex. 30:23**), as a perfume for garments or for a lover’s couch, as a stimulant (cf. **Mark 15:23**), and to pack in the wrappings of the clothing of a deceased person to stifle the smell of the body decaying (cf. **John 19:39**).

C. (:12) Wisdom of the Magi

“And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.”

E. Michael Green: The Magi may have gone south around the lower extremity of the Dead Sea to link up with the trade route north through Nabatea and Philadelphia in the Decapolis east of the Jordan River to Damascus and then east. Or they may have traveled south to Hebron and then west to the Mediterranean coast to link up with the trade route traveling north on the coastal plain, then through Sepphoris and Capernaum to Damascus and then east.

Grant Osborne: Matthew uses χρηματίζω for “warn,” a term often chosen for divine revelation. The emphasis is on the supernatural nature of the warning; God continues to control the action. A major thrust of the first gospel is that when people try to thwart the divine will, God intervenes supernaturally to overcome all such hostile actions (cf. **Job 42:2**). The fact that this time no angel appears in the dream (cf. **1:20; 2:19**) stresses even more the hand of God in the warning. So the Magi take another route home, and Herod’s evil plan is thwarted.

John Nolland: Matthew has no further interest in the Magi once they have pointed to the significance of Jesus. The Magi are not the first Gentile followers of Jesus: Jesus has not yet begun his ministry and, specifically, he has not yet directed that discipleship is to be extended to all peoples. Nonetheless, with the hindsight that comes from looking back from the end of Matthew’s story it is probably right to find some **foreshadowing**, especially in the scale of the Magi’s joy and in the use of the verb ‘do obeisance’; also, the Magi coming to Jerusalem may pick up on the OT motif of the coming of the Gentiles.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we actively seeking God and following God’s leading in our life?
- 2) What are the implications of somebody so important coming from such a humble birth city?
- 3) What type of valuable offerings do we bring to the King?
- 4) How should elders combine the functions of authoritative oversight and compassionate shepherding?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. T. France: The first point Matthew needs to establish in his “geographical apologetic” for the origins of the Messiah is that Jesus “of Nazareth” was in fact born where the Messiah must be born, in the Davidic town of Bethlehem. Central to this first infancy story therefore is the combined quotation of **Mic 5:2** and **2 Sam 5:2** which identifies the Messiah’s birthplace specifically as **Bethlehem in Judah**, and the surrounding narrative explains how this was in fact the birthplace of Jesus, even though subsequent events (equally attested to both by scriptural quotation and by divine guidance in dreams) were to dictate his relocation to Nazareth in Galilee.

Charles Swindoll: The real center of attention in this passage —whether **indifference, hostility, or worship** —was the young Messiah. Let’s briefly consider each of the responses to Jesus in this passage. I think we’ll find that they’re similar to the responses people have to Jesus today.

First, we find **indifference**. When Herod called together the high priests and scribes, those religious teachers and Bible scholars knew without hesitation the facts surrounding the coming of the Messiah. They could have won first place in a Bible trivia contest. Perhaps they patted

themselves on the back for being able to answer the king's scriptural question with such ease. But assuming they found out the reason why Herod was asking, these religious leaders didn't seem interested in checking it out for themselves. They had the book knowledge, but they had no passion. The truth of Scripture hadn't moved from their heads to their hearts, and it had certainly not made it to their hands and feet.

Second, we find **hostility**. Herod, though veiling his true motives in false piety and curiosity, sought to destroy the child before He became a threat to his rule. People today similarly find the claims of Christ's lordship threatening. Nobody's threatened by a tiny baby in a manger or a moral teacher or a Cynic sage or a religious philosopher. Such descriptions refer to a mere man who can be either respected or ignored. But the God-man, the King with authority over heaven and earth who deserves full obedience and submission? Unbelievers who have everything to lose in the realm of personal power will fight such a Messiah with venom and vehemence. Just like Herod the Great.

Finally, we find **worship**. Wise women and men today have chosen to follow the guiding light of the Spirit of God and fall down to worship and adore Jesus Christ as God and King. Like the magi of old, they acknowledge Him as worthy of worship, honor, trust, obedience, and total allegiance. And they won't betray their true King for short-term gains found in the favor of a temporal king.

Each of us today must choose how we'll respond to the Messiah —like the wise or the wicked?

William Barclay: From very early times, the gifts the wise men brought have been seen as particularly fitting. Each gift has been seen as representing something which specially matched some characteristic of Jesus and his work.

(1) Gold is the gift of a king. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, tells us that in Parthia it was the custom that no one could ever approach the king without a gift. And gold, the king of metals, is the fit gift for a king.

So, Jesus was 'the Man born to be King'. But he was to reign not by force but by love; and he was to rule over human hearts, not from a throne, but from a cross.

We do well to remember that Jesus Christ is King. We can never meet Jesus on equal terms. We must always meet him on terms of complete submission. Nelson, the great British admiral, always treated his vanquished opponents with the greatest kindness and courtesy. After one of his naval victories, the defeated admiral was brought aboard Nelson's flagship and on to Nelson's quarterdeck. Knowing Nelson's reputation for courtesy, and thinking to trade upon it, he advanced across the quarterdeck with hand outstretched as if he was advancing to shake hands with an equal. Nelson's hand remained by his side. 'Your sword first,' he said, 'and then your hand.' Before we can be friends with Christ, we must submit to Christ.

(2) Frankincense is the gift for a priest. It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for men and women. The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the one who builds a bridge between human beings and God.

That is what Jesus did. He opened the way to God; he made it possible for us to enter into the very presence of God.

(3) Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came into the world to die. Holman Hunt painted a famous picture of Jesus. It shows Jesus at the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. He is still only a boy and has come to the door to stretch his limbs, which have grown cramped over the bench. He stands there in the doorway with arms outstretched, and behind him, on the wall, the setting sun throws his shadow, and it is the shadow of a cross. In the background there stands Mary, and as she sees that shadow there is the fear of coming tragedy in her eyes.

Jesus came into the world to live for men and women, and, in the end, to die for them. He came to give for us his life and his death.

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die – these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true king, the perfect high priest, and in the end the supreme Saviour of the world.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Matthew omits much historical information that we would love to have known. Contrary to popular opinion, we don't know how many Magi came to worship the Lord Jesus. We would certainly like to have been given more information about the Magi. Precisely where did they come from? What did they believe? What was the "star" that appeared, and just how did it guide them? How long was the journey, and what became of them later on? We would like to know how many babies Herod slaughtered, and we would very much enjoy reading a more graphic account of his death. How interesting it would be to read more of the time Jesus and His parents spent in Egypt! Matthew, like the other Gospel writers, was very **selective** in what he chose to include in his Gospel.

David Thompson: (2:1-23) -- The book of Matthew is designed to prove that Jesus Christ is Israel's King, Messiah and Savior. Matthew chapter one shows us that Jesus Christ, as a baby, deserved to be worshipped as King. Matthew chapter two shows us that Jesus Christ, as a child, received worship as King.

The events described in this chapter are not found in any other Gospel. All of these events are predicted in the O.T. and in this one chapter, in capsule form, is the entire Gospel. What we find in Matthew two are Gentiles seeking Christ, Jews ignoring Christ and political power opposing Christ. The main point of these verses is this:

JESUS CHRIST WAS RECOGNIZED TO BE THE PREDICTED KING OF THE JEWS EVEN AS A BABY AND IT WAS GENTILES WHO FIRST ACCEPTED HIM AND WORSHIPED HIM, NOT JEWS.

The Magi had not seen the star in quite some time but as soon as they headed toward Bethlehem, the star reappeared and directed them to the exact house where Jesus lived. When they arrived they found Jesus and Mary (2:11) and they fell down and worshipped Him and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Van Parunak: The "wise men" are μάγοι, sometimes translated "Magi." This term appears in the LXX only in Daniel, where AV has "astrologers," and they are probably connected to the **Zoroastrian religion**, which was fascinated with the stars. Daniel was made their head, 5:11.

From their own religious background, they would have been interested in any astronomical phenomenon. In addition, from their history with Daniel, they would have known

- his prophecy of **ch. 9**, setting the approximate date
- perhaps through him, of Balaam's prophecy

Num 24:17 *I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

So when they see an unusual heavenly event, they make their way to the capital of Israel to inquire.

These wise men are an example to us in two ways.

First, they are a fruit of Daniel's faithful testimony among his colleagues. He was known to his neighbors as a worshiper of the true God. He may never have seen any "converts" during his lifetime, but five centuries later, because of his faithful testimony, these men come to seek Christ.

Second, they are an example of eagerly anticipating the Lord's coming. Throughout the NT, we are exhorted to look forward eagerly to the Lord's appearing, and to prepare ourselves for it:

2Ti 4:8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

1Th 1:10 *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*

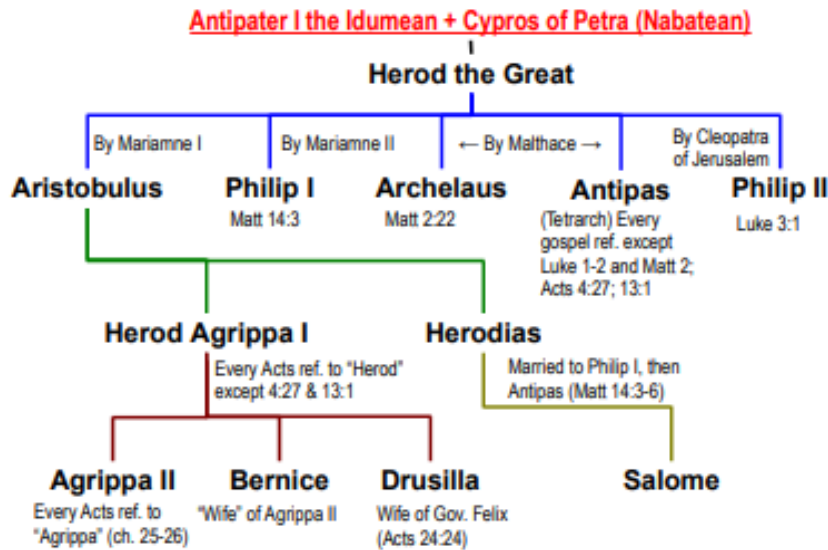
Tit 2:13 *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

Heb 9:28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

Rev 22:20 *He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

Application: Like the wise men, we should be eager for his return

The Herodian Dynasty:



John Piper: There are at least five truths that Matthew wants us to see in this story about Christ and worship:

1. Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and should be honored as such.
2. Jesus is to be worshiped not just by Jews, but by all the nations of the world, as represented by the wise men from the east.
3. God wields the universe to make his Son known and worshiped. This is his great goal in all things—that his Son be known and worshiped.
4. Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him and brings out opposition for those who do.
5. Worshiping Jesus means joyfully ascribing authority and dignity to Christ with sacrificial gifts.

TEXT: Matthew 2:13-23

TITLE: DIVINE PROTECTION OF THE MESSIAH AGAINST THE TREACHERY OF HEROD

BIG IDEA:

DIVINE PROTECTION IN RELOCATING THE MESSIAH FULFILLS OT PROPHECY

INTRODUCTION:

Analogy of a chess strategist. God moves people around on the chessboard of life like pawns accomplishing his long-term strategy and His short-term tactics. Uses His messenger angel to command the movements of Joseph and Mary and the infant child.

D. A. Carson: The point is that God took sovereign action to **preserve** his Messiah, his Son—something well understood by Jesus himself, and a major theme in the gospel of John. Egypt was a natural place to which to flee. It was nearby, a well-ordered Roman province outside Herod's jurisdiction, and, according to Philo (writing ca. AD 40), its population included about a million Jews. Earlier generations of Israelites fleeing their homeland (**1Ki 11:40; Jer 26:21–23; 43:7**) had sought refuge in Egypt. But if Matthew was thinking of any particular OT parallel, probably Jacob and his family (**Ge 46**) fleeing the famine in Canaan was in his mind, since that is the trip that set the stage for the exodus (cf. **v.15**).

Grant Osborne: This episode concludes the infancy narratives on a note of treachery and the attempts of God's enemies to defeat his will. It also contains features from **2:1–12**, such as the evil attempt of Herod to eliminate his rival and the divine intervention of God, who sends two more dream-revelations to Joseph, telling him when to leave and when to return. At the same time, this is all material unique to Matthew.

There are two major, intertwined themes: the divine sovereignty in salvation history and the continual frustration of the forces of evil as they attempt to disrupt God's will. These are both primary themes in Matthew's gospel as a whole.

Donald Hagner: This pericope is unique to Matthew and is probably drawn from his special source. Two structural features of the pericope are striking.

- First, the passage divides readily into three separate frames, each ending with an OT quotation:
 - (1) **vv 13–15**, the dream warning and flight to Egypt (**Hos 11:1**);
 - (2) **vv 16–18**, the slaughter of the innocents (**Jer 31:15**);
 - (3) **vv 19–23**, the return to Israel and settlement in Nazareth (**Isa 11:1?**).

- Second, there is a remarkable **parallelism** in the opening of the first and third frames. Apart from the genitive absolutes that begin both frames, we have nearly verbatim agreement in
 - (1) the account of the revelation;
 - (2) the initial imperatives of the angel; and
 - (3) the obedient response of Joseph (which, in each instance, mirrors the angelic commands of the same frame).

John Nolland: The remainder of the chapter, bringing Matthew's **Infancy Narrative** to its conclusion, offers a sequence of scenes which are united by their concern with the threat represented by Herod's hostility in the face of news of the birth of a messianic claimant to the throne. The threat substantially subsides by the end of the chapter, but there remains some residual sense that Judea represents **a place of danger** for Jesus.

S. Lewis Johnson: so the impression is given by these claims that **Scriptures are fulfilled** in each aspect of the narrative, and by special attention being directed to the angel of the Lord, that what we have here is an account that is constructed with great care and with a definite purpose. **He is the Messiah, and prophecy speaks of him.**

That does seem to be the aim of the evangelist as he unfolds the accounts of the birth and early life of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is also another level of truth here that I want to stress this morning as we look at the section that is before us. And that other level of truth is **the Providence of God in prophecy and in history**. If there is one thing that Matthew seems to be saying to us, it is on this level that God is no omniscient spectator, but he is the supreme mover at all of the events of redemption. And even in the incidental events of the Messiah, one can see that Scripture itself is fulfilled. . .

One of our most prominent, contemporary systematic theologians has said that Providence may be defined as that continuous exercise of the divine energy, whereby the Creator preserves all his creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.

Now that definition indicates that there are three things that are prominent in God's Providence. First of all, there is the element of preservation. He preserves all things and all his creatures. And second, concurrence or cooperation; he works or is operative in everything that comes to pass in the world. He is not surprised by anything, not surprised by any of the events that take place, and not surprised by any of the thoughts of your heart. And finally, government; he directs all things to their appointed end. . .

John Wesley used to like to say, "I read the newspaper to see how God is governing the world." And I think it would do us good to read it in the same spirit, for we are not reading things that are surprising to God. He does not take the Dallas Morning News and, at his breakfast table, after reading the headlines decide that certain activities are appropriate for this particular time. But he is well aware of everything that is taking place, and is actually moving it all to one great common goal when all things are gathered together in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. (:13-15) CALLED OUT OF EGYPT (Hos. 11:1) – SURPRISING BUT PROPHECIED

A. (:13) Urgent Warning

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.'"

D. A. Carson: The focus on God's protection of "*the child*" is unmistakable. Herod was going to try to kill him (v.13), and Joseph took "*the child and his mother*" (v.14—not the normal order) to Egypt.

Grant Osborne: Herod's evil intentions are a controlling factor in this chapter, and he is the archetypal anti-hero. Jesus brings life and freedom, he death and bondage. Jesus gives of himself completely; Herod lives for himself completely. Several have noted here a Moses typology, with the divine protection of the baby as Pharaoh/Herod slaughter the children; the LXX uses the verb "flee" (ἀναχωρέω, as used in **Matt 2:14**) for the first time when Moses flees Pharaoh in Egypt and becomes a refugee in Midian.

Craig Blomberg: Egypt afforded a natural haven for first-century Jews. A large Jewish community had lived there for several centuries, and even from Old Testament times Egypt had often provided a refuge when danger threatened Israel (e.g., **1 Kgs 11:40; 2 Kgs 25:26; Zech 10:10**).

B. (:14) Immediate Evacuation

"And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt;"

Charles Swindoll: As the adage goes, "Where the Lord guides, He provides!" So, gathering their limited belongings and packing the treasures securely, Joseph obeyed the angel's instruction instantly. Matthew indicates in **2:14** that they left "*while it was still night.*" Joseph didn't call a family meeting to weigh the angel's words, didn't begin a week of planning and packing, and didn't go ahead to find suitable lodging in Egypt for his family. He fled immediately because the angel had warned him that Herod would soon be searching for the child to destroy Him (**2:13**). Because of the dangerous prospect of a pursuit, Joseph and his family no doubt left Bethlehem in a manner similar to the magi—quietly and secretly, without a word to anyone. They left without a trace.

R. E. Nixon: There is irony in the fact that Egypt, the place of bondage (**Ex. 20:2**), is now the place of safety.

C. (:15) Enduring Obedience in Fulfilment of OT Prophecy

"and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt did I call My Son.'"

D. A. Carson: The "son" language is part of this **messianic matrix** (cf. **Willis J. Beecher**, *The Prophets and the Promise* [New York: Crowell, 1905], 331–35); insofar as that matrix points to Jesus the Messiah and insofar as Israel's history looks forward to one who sums it up, then so far also does **Hosea 11:1** look forward. To ask whether Hosea thought of Messiah is to ask the wrong question, akin to using a hacksaw when a scalpel is needed. It is better to say that Hosea, building on existing revelation, grasped the **messianic nuances** of the "son" language already applied to Israel and David's promised heir in previous revelation so that had he been able to see Matthew's use of **11:1**, he would not have disapproved, even if messianic nuances were not in his mind when he wrote that verse. He provided one small part of the revelation unfolded during salvation history; but that part he himself understood to be a pictorial representative of divine, redeeming love.

Leon Morris: This is the first time that Matthew speaks of Jesus as "Son" with reference to God. That Jesus is the Son of God is a very important concept for Matthew, and it is interesting that it makes its appearance so early.

Charles Swindoll: In light of the various ways *plēroō* can be used, what does Matthew mean when he says an event or circumstance in the life of Christ “*fulfilled*” an Old Testament Scripture? In a broad sense, the “thing that is lacking” in the Old Testament text that is “fulfilled” by the New Testament event is first and foremost **a more complete revelation in Jesus Christ**. A type of Christ may lack its antitype in the life of Christ; an illustration may lack its referent; a prophecy may lack its accomplishment; a promise may lack its fulfillment; a series of events may lack its ultimate climax. The New Testament authors saw in the person and work of Jesus Christ the ultimate revelation of God (see, e.g., **Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Heb. 1:1-2**). In other words, the body of revelation contained in the Old Testament Scriptures was lacking the further revelation that comes through Christ, similar to the way a question may have an incomplete answer.

This kind of notion of the Old Testament —through its use of pattern, type, illustration, or anticipation —being “*fulfilled*” in the New Testament would have been familiar to Matthew’s Jewish readers. This approach invites readers to mull over passages of Scripture, thinking more carefully about what Matthew is doing in each individual “*fulfillment*” passage.

Craig Blomberg: As before, the **fulfillment quotation** does not contradict the events of history, but neither does it fit them so closely as to substantiate charges that the narrative was created out of the quotation. The historical events described focus on the flight of Jesus and family; the quotation described their return. In its original context the Old Testament text cited (**Hos 11:1**) is not predictive prophecy but a recollection of God’s love for his people Israel at the time of the exodus. Attempts to find a messianic title in Hosea’s use of “*son*” seem contrived and unconvincing. Most simply attribute Matthew’s hermeneutic to some form of Jewish exegesis (e.g., midrash or pesher) which many today would recognize as illegitimate.

Better than either of these approaches is that which recognizes the exegesis as **typological** (and even more specifically that of **analogical correspondence**). Matthew sees **striking parallels** in the patterns of God’s activities in history in ways he cannot attribute to coincidence. Just as God brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt to inaugurate his original covenant with them, so again God is bringing the Messiah, who fulfills the hopes of Israel, out of Egypt as he is about to inaugurate his new covenant. This is the first of several instances in Matthew in which Jesus recapitulates the role of Israel as a whole. The language of Jesus’ son-ship foreshadows Jesus’ role as Son of God (or Immanuel) and recalls Old Testament texts that link Messiah with “*the Son*” (e.g., **Pss 2:7; 89:26-27; 2 Sam 7:14**; cf. **Num 24:7-8, LXX**, in which God himself brings the Messiah out of Egypt).

S. Lewis Johnson: **Augustine** wrote, many years ago, that in the Old Testament the New Testament lies concealed. And that in the New, the Old lies revealed. And so what we have here in this New Testament is a revelation of the fullness of meaning that existed in the Old Testament. And the essential thing that we must remember when we think about the types of the word of God is the word, **correspondence** – the events, the persons, the institutions of the Old Testament, by divine intention, by the exercise of his divine providence – are intended to correspond to the events of the New Testament revelations.

In other words, we find in the Old Testament events that are designed to correspond to the events of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. For example, the Passover account and the Passover service; that particular institution is designed to correspond to certain aspects of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, for he is the true lamb of God. It’s not surprising, then, that the Apostle Paul

should write about Jesus Christ our Passover who has been sacrificed for us. So the Apostle saw in the rite of the Passover, in the Old Testament, a clear adumbration of the Lord Jesus himself. So the term that is important for us is, correspondence – the events, the institutions, the Tabernacle, the services (such as the services of the Levitical cultus), and individuals such as Joseph and Moses and others who look forward to Christ – correspond to things that are found in the New Testament.

Well in what way do we have a correspondence between Israel and the Lord Jesus? Well, Israel is called in the Old Testament, “*God’s son*.” In fact, Israel is called his first born. And furthermore, Israel is called the **servant of the Lord**. Now if there is one person who is God’s unique Son, and who is the servant of the Lord, it is the Lord Jesus. And so what we have, then, is a recapitulating in our Lord Jesus’ experiences of the experience of Israel which pointed forward to him.

So that when they went down to Egypt and were called out of Egypt, their experiences corresponded to that which would happen in the Messianic experiences of the Lord Jesus. He is the seed, he is the representative Israelite through whom God does everything for them.

(:16-18) ASIDE: WAILING OVER HEROD’S MASSACRE OF INFANTS AROUND BETHLEHEM (Jer. 31:15) – SURPRISING BUT PROPHECIED

A. (:16) Slaughter of Male Infants

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.”

Bruce Hurt: *Enraged* (*thumuoo*) is used only here but we get a vivid picture of the meaning from the root word *thumos* which in turn is from *thúo* which means to move impetuously, particularly as the air or wind, a violent motion or passion of the mind; move violently, rush along. And so *thumos* describes passion (as if breathing hard) and speaks of an agitated, "heated" anger that rushes along (impulse toward a thing). It is a tumultuous welling up of the whole spirit produced by a mighty emotion which seizes and moves the whole inner person. *Thumos* especially when accompanied by breathing hard pictures a "panting rage". We can picture Herod exploding with a sudden outburst of passion. When someone is in this anger you can often see their nasal passages widening to take in more air in the heat of their passion!

R. T. France: Estimates of the total population of Bethlehem in the first century are generally under 1,000, which would mean that the number of male children up to two years old at any one time could hardly be more than 20, even allowing for “*all its district*.”

William Barclay: Here is a terrible illustration of what some people will do to get rid of Jesus Christ. If they are set on their own course, if they see in Christ someone who is liable to interfere with their ambitions and rebuke their ways, their one desire is to eliminate Christ; and then they are driven to the most terrible things, for if they do not break others physically, they will break their hearts.

Warren Wiersbe: Matthew introduced here the theme of **hostility**, which he focused on throughout his book. Satan is a liar and a murderer (**John 8:44**), as was King Herod. He lied to the magi and he murdered the babies. But even this horrendous crime of murder was the fulfillment of prophecy found in **Jeremiah 31:15**.

John Butler: **Abortion** makes Herod's act look like a Sunday School picnic. We kill millions and millions of babies every year and the news media yawns and turns the other way. What we need to learn is that there is a relationship between our lack of affection for Christ and our abortion acts. In fact much evil in our land goes back to our bad attitude for Jesus Christ. The politicians do not understand this for they are part of the problem and they pass laws to allow evil which they cannot control. Those who defend abortion are not friends of Christ. They have more in common with Herod than with Christ.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr.: This slaughter of the male children is mentioned only here in the biblical record. Even the Jewish historian **Josephus** (A.D. 37-?100) did not mention this dastardly deed of putting to death innocent babies and young children. But it is not surprising that he and other secular historians overlooked the death of a few Hebrew children in an insignificant village, for Herod's infamous crimes were many.

B. (:17-18) Weeping and Great Mourning

“Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 18 ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, Because they were no more.’”

Craig Blomberg: Ramah originally was located approximately five miles north of Jerusalem and would have been one of the first cities the exiles passed by as they headed north on their way out of Israel. **First Samuel 10:2-3** associates Rachel's tomb with the same general area on the border of Judah and Benjamin.

D. A. Carson: The exile sent Israel into captivity and thereby called forth tears. But here the tears are not for him who goes into “*exile*” but because of the children who stay behind and are slaughtered. Why, then, refer to the exile at all? Help comes from observing the broader context of both Jeremiah and Matthew. **Jeremiah 31:9, 20** refer to Israel = Ephraim as God's dear son and also introduce the new covenant (**31:31-34**) the Lord will make with his people. Therefore the tears associated with exile (**31:15**) will end. Matthew has already made the exile a turning point in his thought (**1:11-12**), for at that time the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the exile are now being “*fulfilled*”—i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, the exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived—and he will introduce the new covenant (**26:28**) promised by Jeremiah.

Leon Morris: Matthew relates Rachel's grief to the situation in Bethlehem after Herod's men were through. Neither the prophet nor Matthew says whose voice was heard: the emphasis is on the mourning, not the mourners, and the language stresses the depths of the grief. It is this sort of bitter grief that Matthew sees in Bethlehem. Her children in a passage like this means “*descendants*,” and Rachel's grief is such that she will not be comforted. The reason? Because they are no more. Nothing can alter the fact of the exile and nothing can alter the fact of the killings at Bethlehem. Thus the grief remains. Yet we should add that Jeremiah's prophecy goes on to the note of hope (**Jer. 31:17**) and to the making of a new covenant (**Jer. 31:31-34**); further,

the Israelites did in time return from their exile. All this points to the fact that the child Jesus would in due course come back from his exile in Egypt.

II. (:19-23) CALLED A NAZARENE – OUT OF GALILEE (Is. 11:1; Ps. 22:6-8; Is. 49:7; 53:3) – SURPRISING BUT PROPHECIED

A. (:19-20) Revelation that the Coast is Clear

“But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 20 ‘Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.’”

Grant Osborne: Again there is a parallel with Moses, as the language echoes **Exod 4:19**, where the Lord tells Moses in Midian, *“Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead.”* At nearly every point of the plot in **chs. 1–2**, this Moses typology is evident. Matthew bathes every aspect in **typology** and the **fulfillment of Scripture**. The point is the sovereign hand of God behind every detail of Jesus’ birth and childhood.

B. (:21) Return to Israel

“And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.”

C. (:22-23) Relocation to Nazareth

1. (:22a) Danger in Judea

“But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.”

Michael Wilkins: After remaking his will at least seven times, Herod finally settled on dividing the kingdom between three of his remaining sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas (**14:1ff.**), and Herod Philip (**16:13**). Archelaus, a nineteen-year-old son by Malthace, was appointed successor to Herod’s throne with power over Judea (including Samaria and Idumaea). Archelaus quickly displayed the same kind of cruelty that marked his father’s reign. He overreacted to an uprising in the temple at Passover after his father’s death, sending in troops and a cavalry who killed about three thousand pilgrims. He was notorious for his cruel treatment of both Jews and Samaritans, continually using oppressive measures to quell uprisings of the people. Augustus feared a revolution from the people, so he deposed Archelaus from office and banished him to Gaul in A.D. 6. The rule over Judea was thereafter passed to Roman prefects.

2. (:22b-23a) Departure for Nazareth in Galilee

“And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and resided in a city called Nazareth,”

Michael Wilkins: Joseph led the family to the region of Galilee, which was not under the jurisdiction of Archelaus. Galilee was governed by another of Herod the Great’s sons, Herod Antipas, who did not yet have the same bloodthirsty reputation as did his older brother.

Craig Blomberg: Many commentators find a contradiction in these verses with Luke because Matthew seems to know nothing of Mary’s and Joseph’s original residence in Nazareth. But Matthew narrates only that which is relevant to his fulfillment quotations. He certainly says nothing that would exclude a previous residence in Galilee. Probably Mary and Joseph had

intended to resettle in Bethlehem in their ancestral homeland and now have to change their plans and go north once again.

R. T. France: The “*new Moses*” can now return to the place in which his work of deliverance will be launched. But that place is **not Bethlehem**. Judea has become an unsafe place for the new Moses, even after the death of the “Pharaoh” whose murderous jealousy initially caused his exile. As the story unfolds we shall be reminded repeatedly that the Jerusalem which shared Herod’s alarm in **v. 3** will remain **hostile territory** for the new king of the Jews, and Bethlehem is too close to Jerusalem for comfort. Political wisdom thus dictates Joseph’s relocation to the now independent state of Galilee to the north, but his move is directed not simply by prudence but also by divine guidance (another dream, **v. 22**), which will ensure that the Davidic Messiah born in Bethlehem will start his public career not as a Judean but as “*Jesus of (Galilean) Nazareth.*”

Grant Osborne: Nazareth was a fairly small village of fifty to sixty acres with about 480 population and thus not significant in and of itself.

William Barclay: Nazareth lay in a hollow in the hills in the south of Galilee. But a young boy had only to climb the hills for half the world to be at his door. He could look west and the waters of the Mediterranean, blue in the distance, would meet his eyes; and he would see the ships going out to the ends of the earth. He had only to look at the plain which skirted the coast, and he would see, slipping round the foot of the very hill on which he stood, the road from Damascus to Egypt, the land bridge to Africa. It was one of the greatest caravan routes in the world.

It was the road by which, centuries before, Joseph had been sold down into Egypt as a slave. It was the road that, 300 years before, Alexander the Great and his legions had followed. It was the road by which, centuries later, Napoleon was to march. It was the road which, in the twentieth century, General Sir Edmund Allenby was to take. Sometimes it was called the Way of the South, and sometimes the Road of the Sea. On it, Jesus would see all kinds of travellers from all kinds of nations on all kinds of errands, coming and going from the ends of the earth.

But there was another road. There was the road which left the sea coast at Acre or Ptolemais and went out to the east. It was the Road of the East. It went out to the eastern bounds and frontiers of the Roman Empire. Once again, the cavalcade of the caravans and their silks and spices would be continually on it; and on it also the Roman legions clanked out to the frontiers.

Nazareth indeed was no backwater. Jesus was brought up in a town where the ends of the earth passed the foot of the hilltop. From his boyhood days, he was confronted with scenes which must have spoken to him of a world for God.

Homer Kent: From Matthew one would suppose that Bethlehem was the original residence. Luke supplements by showing Nazareth to be the former home. Joseph apparently intended to dwell permanently in Bethlehem until his plans were divinely altered.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr.: Nazareth was the town which housed the Roman garrison for the northern regions of Galilee. Therefore most Jews would not have any associations with that city. In fact those who lived in Nazareth were thought of as compromisers who consorted with the enemy, the Romans. Therefore to call one “*a Nazarene*” was to use a term of contempt.

3. (:23b) Despised Reputation of Nazareth

*“that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,
‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”*

D. A. Carson: Nazareth was a despised place (**Jn 7:42, 52**), even to other Galileans (cf. **Jn 1:46**). Here Jesus grew up, not as “*Jesus the Bethlehemite*,” with its Davidic overtones, but as “*Jesus the Nazarene*,” with all the opprobrium of the sneer. When Christians were referred to in Acts as the “*Nazarene sect*” (**24:5**), the expression was meant to hurt. First-century Christian readers of Matthew, who had tasted their share of scorn, would have quickly caught Matthew’s point. He is not saying that a particular OT prophet foretold that the Messiah would live in Nazareth; he is saying that the OT prophets foretold that the Messiah would be **despised** (cf. **Pss 22:6–8, 13; 69:8, 20–21; Isa 11:1; 49:7; 53:2–3, 8; Da 9:26**). The theme is repeatedly picked up by Matthew (e.g., **8:20; 11:16–19; 15:7–8**; see **Turner**). In other words Matthew gives us the substance of several OT passages, not a direct quotation (so also **Ezr 9:10–12**; cf. Str-B, 1:92–93).

It is possible that at the same time there is a discreet allusion to the *nēšer* (“*branch*”) of **Isaiah 11:1**, which received a messianic interpretation in the Targums, rabbinic literature, and Dead Sea Scrolls (cf. **Gundry**, *Use of the Old Testament*, 104), for here, too, it is affirmed that David’s son would emerge from **humble obscurity** and **low state**. Jesus is King Messiah, Son of God, Son of David; but he was a branch from a royal line hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn. Jesus the Messiah, Matthew is telling us, did not introduce his kingdom with outward show or present himself with the pomp of an earthly monarch. In accord with prophecy, he came as **the despised Servant of the Lord**.

Leon Morris: Had he been known as “*Jesus of Bethlehem*” he would have had the aura of one who came from the royal city; there would have been overtones of messianic majesty. But “*Jesus the Nazarene*” carried with it overtones of contempt. We are to understand the prophets as pointing to one who would be despised and rejected, and Jesus as fulfilling this by his connection with obscure Nazareth.

Warren Wiersbe: Who ever heard of a king being born in a humble village and growing up in a despised city? The **humility of the King** is certainly something to admire and imitate (**Phil. 2:1–13**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you testify to God’s providence at work in your own life in providing direction and protection?
- 2) Why do powerful world figures become so enraged when they feel threatened?
- 3) Why is prophecy often more valuable when viewed through the rear view mirror?
- 4) How do you respond to critics that claim that Matthew is just pulling OT quotes out of context and applying them to the Messiah in reckless and unwarranted fashion?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. T. France: The inclusion of Egypt in Jesus' infant itinerary has for Matthew two scriptural resonances which do not fit neatly together. On the one hand, Jesus is the new Moses, and it was in Egypt that Moses escaped the infanticide of Pharaoh, and from Egypt that as an adult he fled to escape Pharaoh's anger (**Exod 2:11–15**), returning eventually to Egypt when "*those who sought your life are dead*" (**Exod 14:19**, echoed by Matthew in **2:20**). But on the other hand Jesus is also the new Israel, God's "*son*," as the quotation from **Hos 11:1** will presuppose; as patriarchal Israel went down to Egypt and came back to the promised land, so now does Jesus, the new Israel. If it is supposed that typology must depend on exact correspondences, Matthew's typology here is decidedly loose, not only in that Jesus is seen both as the **deliverer** and the **delivered**, but also in that whereas Moses escaped from Egypt and returned to it, Jesus (like Israel) does the opposite. But typology depends on meaningful associations rather than exact correspondences, and in each of these quite different ways the mention of Egypt is sufficient to provide food for thought on the relation between the events God directed in Egypt more than a millennium ago and what the same God is now accomplishing through the new deliverer, who is identified by the prophetic text as his Son.

A further effect of including Egypt in the story of Jesus' infancy is to add an important extra dimension to the geographical area which is involved in preparing for the coming of the Messiah. Not only is he the Galilean Messiah born in Judea, but he is honored by magi from "*the East*" (Mesopotamia?), who bring gifts particularly associated with Arabia (and with biblical echoes of Sheba) and part of his childhood is spent in safety in Egypt. Thus all the main elements of Israel's surrounding world as we know them from the OT are involved in welcoming God's Messiah, who, as the story unfolds, will prove to be much more than only the deliverer of Israel.
...

But of course that is the essence of **typology**, which depends not on predictions but on transferable "models" from the OT story. The exodus, leading as it did to the formation of a new people of God, was a potent symbol even within the OT of the even greater work of **deliverance** which God was yet to accomplish (e.g. **Isa 43:16–21; 51:9–11; Jer 16:14–15; 31:31–34; Hos 2:14–15**), and Matthew has taken up that prophetic typology and applied it to the "new exodus" which has now come about through Jesus. Later in this gospel we shall find the language of a new covenant (**26:28**) and we shall hear Jesus speaking to and about his disciples in terms which belong to the new people of God constituted at Sinai; as Jesus sets up "*his ekklesia*" (**16:18**) with its twelve leaders "*judging the twelve tribes of Israel*," (**19:28**) the message will be reinforced that the events which constituted Israel as the special people of God under Moses are now finding their counterpart in the even more fundamental and eschatological role of the "new Moses."

But not only is Jesus in Matthew's view the founder of a new community of the people of God, he also himself embodies it as not only Israel's leader but himself the true Israel. Some of the most potent OT models for Jesus' mission in this gospel are drawn from passages which in their original context spoke, at least in part, about Israel as a corporate entity under the figure of an individual representative: see on **8:17** for the **Servant of Yahweh** and on **10:23** for the **Son of Man**. More directly parallel to the present typology is that which undergirds the story of Jesus'

testing in the wilderness, when the nature of Jesus' status as "*Son of God*" is explored in relation to Israel's filial testing in the wilderness period which followed the first exodus (see on **4:1–11**). Thus, far from Matthew's having seized on a convenient use of the word "*son*" (which in any case is not there in the LXX version of **Hos 11:1**) in relation to Egypt and illegitimately transferred it to a quite different kind of situation involving a different kind of son, this quotation in fact expresses in the most economical form a wide-ranging theology of the new exodus and of Jesus as the true Israel which will play a significant role throughout Matthew's gospel. As usual, Matthew's christological interpretation consists not of exegesis of what the text quoted meant in its original context, but of a far-reaching theological argument which takes the OT text and locates it within an over-arching scheme of fulfillment **which finds in Jesus the end-point of numerous prophetic trajectories.**

E. Michael Green: Looking back over this cycle of stories illustrating Jesus' childhood, a number of strands stand out.

First, Matthew makes it plain that God works through both surprise and continuity to bring about his purposes. The story of Jesus is utterly continuous with Abraham, with David and with the whole history of the chosen people. But it also bristles with surprises. Perhaps this is to encourage us to expect God to be working in our lives steadily and continuously, making sense of our past history; but also to be on the lookout for God's surprises in our lives, ready to grasp them and follow through their implications when they come.

Secondly, Matthew has a clear message for the readers of his day. By then the Gentile mission was in full flood, and the tensions with Judaism had reached snapping-point. The temptation to give up on the Jews would have been very great. But Matthew says, 'Don't give up on the Jewish people. God has not given them up. He has a special purpose for them. It stretches back to the dawn of time. It is from Jewish stock that Jesus was born. Do not forget it.'

Thirdly, Matthew has a word of encouragement about opposition. Opposition is inevitable, but it will never, in the providence of God, be allowed to quench God's mission. There was every possibility of quenching the Messiah: his mother Mary might have been stoned as an adulteress; he might have been killed by Herod; he might have been lost in Egypt. But no. God's hand was upon him. Opposition could not extinguish God's light. What an encouragement that would have been to Matthew's readers! The church, so frail, so exposed, would not be allowed to sink, however threatening the storms and waves that broke over it.

Charles Swindoll: Throughout my life, I've had seasons in which numerous decisions and opportunities have driven me to seek the will of God. Never has the Lord sent an angel or spoken to me in a dream or guided me with a star, as He did in the second chapter of Matthew. However, I have learned a handful of **principles for discerning God's will** through both my study of Scripture and my reflection on how God has led me —and others —through the years.

First, **God leads those who have chosen to follow Him.** You need to be a Christian if you hope to be led by God. **Romans 8:14** says, "*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*" Christians enjoy a personal relationship with Christ through the indwelling Spirit. One of the great benefits believers have that non-Christians don't is the privilege of being led by the Spirit.

Second, God leads through His written Word. Careful, intelligent, and diligent study of the Bible helps us to learn God's mind on moral and practical matters, informs a Christian view of the world, and imparts wisdom and virtue in keeping with the heart of God. **Psalm 119:105** says, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* The Bible may not directly address your specific question, like "Should I accept this job offer or that job offer?" But as God's values and priorities become yours through careful meditation on His Word, you will be able to more critically think through the values and priorities involved in even seemingly neutral decisions like these.

Third, God leads through the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. I don't mean tingling, butterflies, or warm sensations. I mean something **inexpressible** and, yes, even **mysterious**. The Spirit of God truly—not metaphorically—lives in us. He will work to convict you when you're doing wrong and give you a sense of confidence and relief when you do what's right. He'll illuminate the truth of Scripture and open your eyes to see things you didn't see before. When you pray for wisdom and insight, He'll give it (**Jas. 1:5**). In, with, and through the inspired Word of God, the Spirit works in, with, and through you as you genuinely and humbly seek Him.

Fourth, God leads through the counsel of wise, qualified, mature, trustworthy Christians who love and care for you (see **Prov. 11:14**). All these adjectives are important. Don't ask just anybody you know to share their perspective and insight; seek those who exhibit Christlike character, have years of experience walking with God, know you intimately, and have your best interests in mind. You want counselors who are objective, who have no personal or vested interest in the outcome of your decision, and who will ask hard questions and not let you get away with weak answers.

Fifth, God leads by replacing restlessness and fear with confidence and calmness. He gives us **inner peace**. **Colossians 3:15** says, *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."* Of course, the feeling of peace over a decision can't be separated from the other four principles. I've met people in total rebellion against God's clearly revealed will in Scripture who claimed to have had peace over their sinful decisions. But if your process for discerning God's will renders several equally good and viable alternatives, there's nothing wrong with humbly taking steps toward the one that brings peace and relieves restlessness.

William Barclay: Before we move on to the third chapter of Matthew's gospel, there is something at which we would do well to look. The second chapter of the gospel closes with Jesus as a little child; the third chapter of the gospel opens with Jesus as a man of thirty (cf. **Luke 3:23**). That is to say, between the two chapters there are **thirty silent years**. Why should it have been so? What was happening in those silent years? Jesus came into the world to be the Saviour of the world, and for thirty years he never moved beyond the bounds of Palestine, except to the Passover at Jerusalem. He died when he was thirty-three, and of these thirty-three years thirty were spent without record in Nazareth. To put it in another way, ten-elevenths of Jesus' life were spent in Nazareth. What was happening then?

(1) Jesus was growing up to boyhood, and then to manhood, **in a good home**; and there can be no greater start to life than that.

(2) Jesus was fulfilling the **duties of an eldest son**. It seems most likely that Joseph died before the family had grown up. Maybe he was already much older than Mary when they married. In

the story of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee there is no mention of Joseph, although Mary is there, and it is natural to suppose that Joseph had died.

So Jesus became the village craftsman of Nazareth to support his mother and his younger brothers and sisters. A world was calling him, and yet he first fulfilled his duty to his mother and to his own family and to his own home.

(3) Jesus was learning what it was like to be a **working man**. He was learning what it was like to have to earn a living, to save to buy food and clothes, and maybe sometimes a little pleasure; to meet the dissatisfied and the critical customer, and the customer who would not pay his debts. If Jesus was to help men and women, he must first know what their lives were like. He did not come into a protected, cushioned life; he came into the life that all must live. He had to do that, if he was ever to understand the life of ordinary people.

(4) Jesus was faithfully performing the lesser task before the greater task was given to him to do. The great fact is that, if Jesus had failed in the smaller duties, the mighty task of being the Saviour of the world could never have been given to him to do. He was faithful in little so that he might become master of much. It is a thing never to be forgotten that in the everyday duties of life we make or mar a destiny, and we win or lose a crown.

Bruce Hurt: Four Ways Old Testament is Quoted in New Testament

Note that this material is a compilation from **Arnold Fruchtenbaum's** handout entitled "Life of Messiah", notes from "*Messianic Christology*" and comments from **David Cooper's** *Messiah: His Historical Appearance*.

When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, it does so in four different ways. Every Old Testament quotation found within the New Testament will always fit into one of these four categories. There is one example of each of the four ways in Matthew Two, so this will be used as the basis for explaining them. These four ways of quoting the Old Testament are the ways the rabbis in 1st century Israel quoted them in rabbinic writings. Because of so very much unscientific exegesis of the Scriptures, many honest, sincere men and women have reached the conclusion that prophecy cannot be understood, and that it is a waste of time to try to understand it. There is no occasion for such gross and fantastic misinterpretation of prophecy. Essentially, history and prophecy are written upon the same basic principles. History tells what has occurred; predictive prophecy tells what will be. The same fundamental laws of logic and of language govern in both instances. If one gets these facts clearly in mind and approaches prophecy just as he does history, recognizing that the same principles obtain in both cases, he is in a position to understand prophecy more nearly accurately than is usually the case. (Adapted from **David Cooper** - *Messiah-His Historical Appearance*)

CATEGORY (1) Literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment – Matthew 2:6 quotes Micah 5:2.

Matthew 2:6 “AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.”

Micah 5:2 *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”*

Note a specific point for point fulfillment, even predicting that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (not in Bethlehem of Galilee) and this is the easiest kind of prophetic fulfillment to spot. That is the literal meaning, the literal interpretation of **Micah 5:2**; the Messiah, when He is born, will be born in the town of Bethlehem, within the tribal territory of Judah.

CATEGORY (2) Literal prophecy plus typical fulfillment - a typology -

Matthew 2:15 *“He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.’”*

Hosea 11:1 *“When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.”*

In this OT passage from Hosea, the literal meaning of **Hosea 11:1** is describing ISRAEL being called out of Egypt. It is calling Israel God’s son. Look at **Exodus 4:22-23**. It is not a prophecy per se, but a **historical event which foreshadows a future event**. In this passage the calling of Israel out of Egypt is used as a TYPE, or parallel, or similar event, to God bringing Jesus out of Egypt. Many of the citations in the Book of Hebrews of Exodus and Leviticus fall into this category.

CATEGORY (3) Literal prophecy plus application

Matthew 2:17-18 *“Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”*

Jeremiah 31:15 *“Thus says the LORD, ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more.’”*

In this type of usage of Old Testament Scripture, there is one point of similarity, but also many differences. **Matthew 2:17-18** uses **Jeremiah 31:15** which in the original context is Jeremiah witnessing an event in his day as he sees the women of Ramah, where **Rachel** (she was the symbol of Jewish motherhood) was buried, crying as they see their sons being taken to exile in Babylon. They would never see them again. The events of Jeremiah have a **point of similarity** with the events in Bethlehem, since the Jewish mothers are weeping for sons they will never see again. However **Ramah** and **Bethlehem** are different towns, and the **Babylonian exiles** weren’t going to their death as were the **infants of Bethlehem**. Everything is radically different except the mothers weeping.

CATEGORY (4) Summation - a summary

Matthew 2:23 *“and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’”*

There is no exact quotation or prophecy, but when the word prophet switches from singular to plural, it is a summation. *“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets”* is a clue,

when prophet becomes **prophets**, plural instead of singular, you are getting a summary. If you search the Old Testament for a mention of Nazareth, the only remote similarity is **Isaiah 11:1**, which calls Messiah a *Netzer*, which means branch, and sounds similar to Nazareth. However, the point that Matthew is making is that Jesus would be despised and rejected of men, as the **Nazarenes** were despised in their culture. **Isaiah 53:3** and other scriptures foretell this. "*He was despised and forsaken of men.*" Other scriptures are: **Isaiah 49:7**; **Psalm 22:6**. "*As spoken by the prophets*" refers to prophecies such as these.

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-12

TITLE: THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS

BIG IDEA:

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN EMPHASIZING REPENTANCE PREPARED THE NATION FOR THE SUPERIOR BAPTISM OF JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

INTRODUCTION:

Craig Blomberg: Matthew abruptly jumps from the events surrounding Jesus' birth to the time of his adult life. Apart from the one episode of Jesus teaching in the temple at age twelve (**Luke 2:41-52**), none of the canonical Gospels describes anything about his intervening years. Apparently, they provided few clues to his true identity or coming mission. In striking contrast, the apocryphal gospels fill Jesus' "hidden years" with all kinds of miraculous exploits, esoteric teaching, and exotic travels.

E. Michael Green: In all the Gospels the ministry of Jesus is prefaced by that of John. There is a very good reason, in addition to the obvious historical one: the central message of John is **repentance**, and without repentance there is no way in which a person can respond to the good news and become a member of the kingdom of heaven. Repentance is the inescapable beginning.

Walter Wilson: Before the public ministry of the Messiah to Israel can commence, both the Messiah and the people must be prepared. The narratives in **chapter 3** concern John the Baptist, whose role as forerunner Matthew elaborates by likening him to the prophet Elijah. John's ministry paves the way for that of Jesus through its emphasis on certain key themes, including the need for national repentance, warnings of eschatological judgment, and the advent of God's heavenly reign. Both John's message and his location (in the wilderness) are expressed as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning the return of the exiled community to Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem (and indeed all Judea) respond to this message by going out to the wilderness, confessing their sins, and submitting to baptism by John in the river Jordan. Whereas Luke has John respond to questions from tax collectors and soldiers about what sort of conduct accords with repentance, Matthew has him reprove Jesus's future opponents (the Pharisees and Sadducees) for their failure to bear fruit worthy of repentance. While the ensuing speech underscores the reality of divine punishment, it also promises the outpouring of the Spirit, a sign of God's restored presence.

S. Lewis Johnson: The **importance of John the Baptist** in the ministry of the New Testament may be gleaned from one particular statement that the Lord Jesus made concerning him. In the 11th chapter of this same Gospel of Matthew, in reference to John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus said, "*Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*" It's evident from this statement that the importance of John the Baptist is forever settled in holy Scripture.

And not only this, but in the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, the writer of that gospel relates the ministry of John the Baptist to the beginning of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. In other words, the ministry of John the Baptist is extremely important for the gospel itself. And then, as you

well know, there are two passages in the Old Testament in which the ministry of this last of the Old Testament prophets is prophesied, and significant words are said concerning it.

John was a rugged, stern John Knox kind of character, who thundered out the way of the Lord to a stiff-necked generation. I do not think that any true preacher of the word of God would have relished the task that John the Baptist was given. And yet John, although his message was not yet geared for the times – he surely was not a relevant preacher – had a tremendous influence on his contemporaries. **Campbell Morgan**, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, has said that the ministry of John the Baptist was attractive because all of Jerusalem and Judea and the region round about the Jordan went out to him. His ministry was convictive because they were baptized by him and confessed their sins as they were baptized, and it was invective because he did not hesitate to say to that generation of Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism, “*O generation of vipers, who hath warned thee to flee from the wrath to come?*”

David Thompson: JOHN THE BAPTIST’S JOB WAS TO PREPARE THE NATION ISRAEL TO MEET JESUS CHRIST, THE KING WHO COULD USHER IN ISRAEL’S KINGDOM, AND TO INTRODUCE THE NATION TO JESUS CHRIST.

I. (:1-4) ENTERING MINISTRY

A. (:1-2) Pointing People to the Kingdom of Heaven

“Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Craig Blomberg: Matthew introduces John as he came to be known—as one who baptized people. He calls him a preacher or, more literally, one who speaks as a herald. John proclaimed God’s message as a prophetic spokesman in the desert of Judea, the wilderness area to the south of Jerusalem. Reminiscent perhaps of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness prior to their entry into the promised land, John too prepared the way for One who would reconstitute God’s people. Jesus himself would also have his time in the wilderness shortly (**4:1-11**).

D. A. Carson: He began his preaching in the “*Desert of Judea*,” a vaguely defined area including the lower Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea and the country immediately west of the Dead Sea. It is hot and, apart from the Jordan itself, largely arid, though not unpopulated. It was used for pasturage (**Ps 65:12; Joel 2:22; Lk 15:4**) and had Essene communities.

Charles Swindoll: The word translated “*repent*” is the Greek term *metanoēō* [3340], which means to “*change one’s mind*,” resulting in a change of allegiances, lifestyle, or trajectory. It doesn’t mean “change your ways.” True repentance doesn’t start with external actions or mere behavior modifications. We’ve all seen outwardly compliant children do what’s right while harboring rebellion in their hearts. The kind of repentance John preached was a change of mind that was followed by a change of lifestyle.

The **urgency** for John’s call to repentance was the **imminent coming of the kingdom of heaven**. John’s original Jewish audience—as well as Matthew’s Jewish readers—would most likely have understood the coming kingdom of God as the **messianic kingdom** described in such passages as **Daniel 2:44**: “*The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*” Daniel’s dramatic vision itself hearkens back to

other messianic prophecies, such as **Isaiah 9:7**: “*There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*”

So, the “*kingdom of heaven*,” Matthew’s expression for the “*kingdom of God*” (see **Mark 1:15**), is the long-anticipated kingdom that would come with the arrival of the Messiah. With the kingdom would come righteousness, peace, justice, deliverance, and blessing for God’s people. The coming of the kingdom would also bring judgment and wrath upon unbelievers, the wicked, and those who rejected God and His Messiah. This is why repentance was necessary. “John’s message . . . was that a change of mind and heart (*metanoete*, ‘repent’) was necessary before they could qualify for the kingdom. They did not realize how far they had drifted from God’s Law and the requirements laid down by the prophets (e.g., **Mal. 3:7-12**).”

Grant Osborne: Kingdom of Heaven

Five ideas emerge in the prophetic and intertestamental periods:

1. the regathering of Israel (**4 Ezra 13:39–41**),
2. the destruction of the nations (**Dan 2:44; 7:26; 2 Bar. 36–40**),
3. the reign of God’s people (**Dan 7:27; Wis 3:8; T. Jud. 25:1–2; Matt 19:28; 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 20:4**),
4. the harvest of judgment (**Dan 12:2; 4 Ezra 4:30; 2 Bar. 72–74; Matt 3:12; 13:30, 40**),
5. and the transformation of this world into a new earth (**Isa 65:17; 66:22; 1 En. 45:3–5; 2 Bar. 32:1–7; Matt 19:28; Rev 21:1**).

By the time of Christ, virtually all the attention was given to the **destruction of Rome**, and this is why Jesus’ twelve disciples never understood that he came to suffer and die—they had no basis for understanding this, for they thought only of a **conquering Messiah**. . .

the kingdom of God has come and is coming, and the people of God live between the ages, feeling the tension between the already and the not yet. In the Messiah the kingdom has arrived, yet the events have only been inaugurated, and the final stage is in the future.

S. Lewis Johnson: John’s message is that that kingdom of the heaven is at hand, because the King has come. There are two aspects of this kingdom: the aspect of the ministry of the Lord Jesus at his first coming, in which he lays the foundation for the kingdom in the shedding of his precious blood, for it is the blood that he shed that inaugurates the New Covenant which is the foundation of that kingdom; and then there is the ministry of the king at his second advent, at which he destroys the enemies of the program of God and brings that kingdom to pass upon the earth. So then we have a public manifestation of the king. He comes as the **hidden king** in his first coming. He comes as the **magnificent king of glory** in his second coming. . .

You’ll notice John does not know anything about this **interval** between the first coming and the second coming. As a prophet who resided in the Old Testament prophecy primarily, he looks forward to the great events of the New Covenant period, and he sees mountain peaks, but he does not see the valleys that lie between the peaks. And so he sees the first coming mingled with the second coming. And as history unfolds, we have learned that there is now 1900 years plus between the first advent and the second advent, but John puts them together, for his vision is not yet clarified by the unfolding of the revelation of God. The future, in a sense, is fore-shortened for John, but the truths that he proclaims are truths.

John Nolland: Because the mention of the wilderness location is geared to evoking the tradition of **wilderness renewal**, the reader is given no help in imagining how John, at least in the early stages, could have gained any audience for his message in an unpopulated wilderness area. John is being thought of as a prophet, but where the prophets characteristically take their message from God to the people, here the people must trek out into the wilderness to receive the message. This is presumably because the commerce with God which John is calling for is deemed to have its natural setting in the wilderness (as the place to initiate **eschatological renewal**).

B. (:3) Preparing People to Respond to the King

*“For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying,
‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!’”*

Craig Blomberg: Verse 3 presents John the Baptist as the fulfillment of **Isa 40:3**. The quotation reproduces the LXX almost verbatim. In Isaiah the speaker remains unidentified. He could be viewed individually as a specific prophet or corporately as all of the people of Israel (so Qumran; cf. 1QS 8:14). The larger context of **Isa 40-66** discloses that the prophecy depicts part of Israel's end-time restoration. The messianic era, the millennial kingdom, and eventually the new heavens and the new earth often blend together in characteristic prophetic foreshortening. John is thus heralding the beginning of the full restoration and blessing of God's people. Just as roads were often repaired in the ancient world in preparation for royalty traveling on them, so John calls his listeners to rebuild highways of holiness (cf. **Isa 35:8**), i.e., to return to moral living in preparation for God's coming in Jesus.

E. Michael Green: But we are bound to notice how he comes: preaching (:1). ‘Who are you, John?’ we ask. ‘**A voice,**’ he replies (:3). Just that. He was actually a very great prophet, with a radical message of repentance to deliver. He lived a simple lifestyle which powerfully challenged the religious leaders of the day, who lived in considerable luxury. His message shook the state. His courage was phenomenal. And yet with striking humility he sees himself as nothing more or less than the voice through which God was addressing his nation. He takes no credit for his ministry. He is simply his Master's voice. What an example to preachers!

Leon Morris: *Prepare* may be used of making a thing ready or keeping it ready. Here the imagery is of a road that needs to be repaired so that it may be ready for the Lord to travel over it smoothly. *Way* may be used in the literal sense of a road; here the imagery is that of the road over which a king will approach. In antiquity when it was known that the sovereign was coming, every effort would be made to ensure that the road was as smooth as it could be. The great one must be able to travel easily and quickly. “*The Lord*” refers in Isaiah to Yahweh, but the Baptist is applying the passage to Jesus. When Matthew records this use of Scripture he is revealing something of his Christology. To ascribe to Jesus words that in Holy Scripture applied to God shows that for the writer Jesus occupies the highest of places. The use of the same prophecy in the other Synoptists indicates that this was an accepted practice among the Christians, not something peculiar to Matthew. *Make his paths straight* continues the metaphor, but it is not quite clear whether straightening the path means eliminating bends or **removing bumps**. It is perhaps more likely to be **making the path level** (cf. **Moffatt**, “*level the paths*”) than altering it to have fewer bends. All is to be made ready for the coming of God's chosen one. John's announcement of the coming of the kingdom and his call to repentance were ways of **preparing the path for the coming of Jesus**.

John MacArthur: He is presented as the **forerunner** of Jesus. He **prepared the way** for Jesus' arrival. The whole passage emphasizes this. In ancient times, it was common when a king was coming to a city to send ahead of him certain servants, certain heralds, and they had two functions. One of the functions was to announce the king was coming. The other function was to prepare the road so that the travel would be easy. So usually the herald would go ahead with the idea of verbalizing the arrival of the king, and also with a coterie of servants who could fix the road. And since roads in those days were subject to all kinds of pitfalls and hazards and, and broken places, and so forth and so on, this was very important that the king not be delayed, that the king not be injured as he traveled because something was not foreseen. And so a herald went to proclaim and to prepare, to announce the king is coming, and to get the road ready for when the king came by. . .

Now, you can see from what I'm trying to show you, this is a **significant man**. He came to get the people ready for the King. Now you know what happened. He came to get 'em ready for the King. The King came to offer them the kingdom. They didn't want the forerunner. They beheaded him. They didn't want the King. They crucified Him. The whole thing fell apart. Israel was set aside, and it's all gotta be redone in the future, right? And the kingdom was postponed, and there's gotta be another forerunner to get Israel ready again for the coming kingdom.

C. (:4) **Peculiar in His Dress and Diet**

1. Peculiar in His Dress

“Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist;”

2. Peculiar in His Diet

“and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

Craig Blomberg: Matthew describes John's dress as much like that of the prophet Elijah of old (**2 Kgs 1:8**). His diet resembles that of desert dwellers of the day. Both clothing and food point to an **austerity** and **asceticism** appropriate to his stern calls for repentance.

Grant Osborne: Locusts (including grasshoppers) and wild honey (probably taken by John himself from beehives) were the food of the poor, especially those living in the desert.

Leon Morris: The picture we get is of a man who lived simply. His clothing was far from splendid or elaborate, and his food such as could be obtained in the wild.

II. (:5-10) EXPOSING HYPOCRISY

A. (:5-6) **Invitation to the Masses -- Popular Appeal**

1. (:5) **Widespread Response**

“Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan;”

2. (:6) **Wholehearted Submission -- Baptism and Confession of Sins**

“and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.”

Craig Blomberg: John is apparently a charismatic figure who attracts crowds from many nearby places. His welcome reception provides a striking contrast with **2:3**, though hostilities will resume in **v. 7**, confirming that it is primarily the official Jewish leaders who reject God's new revelation. The crowds who come and repent make public their change of heart by acknowledging their failure to meet God's standards and by resolving to change their ways. They visibly demonstrate the seriousness of their pledge with the rite of water baptism. The Greek imperfect tense (literally, *were being baptized*) suggests that John's ministry lasts for a significant period of time. . .

Baptizing in the river suggests that the people were either immersed or had water poured over them. The best historical evidence suggests immersion was more likely. The most common meaning of the verbs *bapt* and *baptiz* points in this direction as well, though there are instances in which the terms also refer to a more superficial dipping (e.g., **Rev 19:13**). In general the New Testament evidence concerning baptism strongly supports **immersion for believers**, even if the history of the church is littered with sad examples of individuals and movements that have proved overly divisive on this issue.

Warren Wiersbe: The Jews baptized Gentile converts, but John was baptizing Jews! His baptism was authorized from heaven (**Matt. 21:23–27**); it was not something John devised or borrowed. It was a baptism of repentance, looking forward to the Messiah's coming (**Acts 19:1–7**). His baptism fulfilled two purposes: It prepared the nation for Christ, and it presented Christ to the nation (**John 1:31**).

Charles Swindoll: When John the Baptizer took up the **rite of immersion**, he “infused into the ritual act of initiation and purification an **ethical quality** that baptism had not had before. His was a moral community of penitent souls seeking personal righteousness, and he associated with the act of baptism the imperative necessity for a thorough change in the condition of the soul.” Or, as one commentator states, “Baptism for John was a symbol of repentance, a symbol of cleansing from sin and turning away from the old life to a new life.” So, like proselyte baptism, John's baptism was an outward symbol of inward devotion to God, submission to His will, and identity with the true people of God. And it was more than just a mark of repentance from sin; it was also a consecration to a life of loving service to God and to holiness. Take note, however, that the audience of John's address was not morally and spiritually “filthy” Gentiles, but Jews! He was saying, in effect, “Because of your sin, you are outside of Abraham's covenant with God—unclean! You must repent like a Gentile and come to God as if for the first time.”

B. (:7-9) Invective against Self Righteous Hypocrites – Powerful Confrontation

1. (:7) Targeting Jewish Religious Leaders

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”

Craig Blomberg: By calling them “*vipers*,” John refers to their shrewdness and to the danger they pose to others. Possibly an indirect allusion to the evil caused by the original serpent (**Gen 3**) appears as well. The last line of **v. 7** therefore oozes with sarcasm. John knows full well that the Jewish leaders are not fleeing from the coming wrath. This wrath forms part of the full arrival of the kingdom, which will lead to judgment of God's enemies as well as blessing for his followers. God's wrath does not reflect “the emotion of anger but that part of his divine holiness that actively repudiates that which is unholy in his creatures.”

R. T. France: As the two main ideological groups in the Sanhedrin both Sadducees (the “politically” dominant group from whom the priestly and temple hierarchy were drawn) and the Pharisees (a self-conscious “party” grouping committed to rigorous observance of the law) represented key elements in the Jerusalem establishment, and the mention of them together probably suggests a sort of “cross-party delegation” who had come out to examine this disturbing new religious phenomenon down by the Jordan. The description of them as “*coming to his baptism*” rather than “being baptized” like the crowds in v. 6 suggests such a **surveillance role**, and the reception they received from John (vv. 7–10) makes it unlikely that any of them actually were baptized.

2. (:8-9) Trumpeting Required Corrective Action

- a. (:8) Proper Response = Genuine Repentance Demonstrated by Fruit
“*Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;*”

Warren Wiersbe: John’s preaching centered on repentance and the kingdom of heaven. The word repent means “to change one’s mind and act on that change.” John was not satisfied with regret or remorse; he wanted “*fruits meet for repentance*” (**Matt. 3:8**). There had to be evidence of a changed mind and a changed life.

- b. (:9) Improper Response = False Security
“*and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves,
'We have Abraham for our father';
for I say to you, that God is able from these stones
to raise up children to Abraham.*”

Craig Blomberg: In v. 9 John again reminds his listeners that they dare not trust in their ancestral credentials or believe that they alone are legitimate candidates for inclusion in the people of God. Matthew’s two-pronged emphasis, introduced in **chaps. 1-2**, thus continues: the messianic age brings new people into God’s kingdom and excludes others who thought themselves secure. The Messiah is the true Son of Abraham (**1:1-2**); apart from him there is no salvation. The reference to “*these stones*” probably reflects an original Aramaic wordplay between children (*b nany*) and stones (*abnany*) and was no doubt inspired by the characteristically rocky ground that covers Israel.

Grant Osborne: The Jewish people are not automatically secure on the basis of their heritage. There may be an echo of **Isa 51:1–2**, “*Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father,*” interestingly in a context of comfort and promise. As **Davies** and **Allison** say, “From Abraham, a lifeless rock (cf. **Gen 17:17; 18:10–14; Rom 4:17**), God had miraculously caused to be born Isaac and descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven.” God could do so again, so the people dare not fail to obey him and develop lives in keeping with their covenant privileges.

E. Michael Green: Religious observance and religious pedigree are not enough. The Pharisees and Sadducees had that and to spare. Orthodoxy is not enough. To be Abraham’s seed is not enough. If there is no heartfelt repentance, there will be no spiritual life for you in the kingdom of the Messiah.

C. (:10) Prophetic Warning of Imminent Judgment

*“And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees;
every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

Craig Blomberg: v. 10 again predicts imminent judgment for those who reject John's call to repentance. The fire, as v. 12 makes clear, stands for **eternal punishment**. One must not think of any lesser judgment as in view. A “fruitless” Christian is no Christian at all (cf. **Jas 2:14-26**). Christians in every age must heed John's warning to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Too often in the history of the church, people have trusted in living in a “Christian” country, being raised in a Christian family, holding membership or even office in a local church, and even in verbal claims to have repented and to have trusted in Christ. Yet without the evidence of a changed life and perseverance in belief, all such grounds of trust prove futile.

Grant Osborne: Certainly final judgment is primarily in view (the present tenses are prophetic, emphasizing the certainty of it), though the destruction of Jerusalem should probably be included as well. The fact that the ax is ready to cut down the “*root*” is important; the goal is not pruning (**John 15:2**) but total destruction. When woodsmen cut down trees, they normally cut at the trunk, from which they want another tree to grow; but when the root is cut, the tree is gone forever.

III. (:11-12) ELEVATING CHRIST

A. (:11) Because of His Superior Baptism

1. Baptism of John

“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance,”

2. Benchmark Comparison

*“but He who is coming after me is mightier than I,
and I am not fit to remove His sandals;”*

3. Baptism of Christ

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Craig Blomberg: The expression baptism “*with/in the Holy Spirit*” appears six other times in the New Testament. Five of these texts refer to this very saying of John (**Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16**). **Acts 1-2** demonstrates that John's prediction was fulfilled at Pentecost. The sixth reference appears in **1 Cor 12:13**, where it is clear that **all Christians** receive Spirit-baptism. The phrase therefore refers to a ritual that depicts a believer's initiation into the body of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who never departs following true conversion and regeneration. Baptism of the Spirit must not be confused with the “*filling of the Spirit*,” which recurs repeatedly to empower believers to proclaim God's word boldly (**Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9**). Here is further reason why one cannot be a Christian without having a changed life; the indwelling Spirit guarantees that the process of sanctification will begin (cf. **Rom 6-8**).

Warren Wiersbe: But John mentioned two other baptisms: a baptism of the Spirit and a baptism of fire (**Matt. 3:11**). The baptism of the Spirit came at Pentecost (**Acts 1:5**, and note that Jesus said nothing about fire). Today, whenever a sinner trusts Christ, he is born again and

immediately baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, the church (**1 Cor. 12:12–13**). In contrast, the baptism of fire refers to the future judgment, as Matthew explains (**Matt. 3:12**).

Grant Osborne: The mention of “*and fire*” has caused some controversy. Some think them antithetical, with the Spirit coming on the faithful and the fire of judgment on the unfaithful. This would certainly fit the context of judgment. More and more, however, the two are being seen as a **hendiadys** (“spirit-fire”—note that one preposition introduces both, indicating they are a unity). Still, there is a question whether the “Spirit-fire” refers to judgment or the refining fire of the Spirit. But this disjunction is unnecessary. It is best to see both nuances: **those who accept the message of the kingdom are purified by the Spirit while those who reject it face judgment**. Both nuances fit the OT background as well as the Judaism of Jesus’ day (e.g., Qumran; cf. 1QS 4:20–21).

Leon Morris: Baptizing with the Holy Spirit goes along with baptizing with fire, which here stands for **purification**. Some interpreters understand fire to refer to judgment (as it often does; **Ridderbos**, e.g., accepts this view here), but the link with the Holy Spirit makes it more likely that the same people are referred to and that they are purified as well as indwelt (fire was linked with the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:3**).

John MacArthur: It's best in my view to see this as a separate judgment of fire. I think it refers to immersing men in fiery divine judgment. When He comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Now, we've already seen - now, note this - that in Scripture, **fire speaks of God's judgment**. It can be used in a refining sense, but it speaks most dominantly of God's judgment and wrath. **These are distinct baptisms**. The former, of the Holy Spirit, belongs to all believers; the latter, to all unbelievers. The former, to those with true repentance; and the latter, to those with no repentance. And this, I think, beloved, **fits the contextual use of fire in the passage**. If fire means judgment - fire in **verse 10**; and fire means judgment - fire in **verse 12**; it would be really stretching the point for fire to mean something else in the verse in between without the Holy Spirit making a comment on it to show us that it meant something else. It fits the context. **You have three parallel sentences in verses 10, 11, and 12. Every one of them ends in fire. And in each case the fire would be the same. There would be no reason to make any difference - fire of judgment.**

B. (:12) Because of His Severe Judgment

1. Function of Ultimate Judgment

*“And His winnowing fork is in His hand,
and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor;”*

Charles Swindoll: This image refers to workers during the grain harvest who would use a tool called a winnowing fork—like a rake or pitchfork—to separate grain kernels from their husks. Workers would toss the grain stalks into the air, and the heavy seeds would fall to the ground while the chaff would blow away in the wind.

2. Fate of Ultimate Judgment

a. Fate of the Wheat = God’s Precious People
“and He will gather His wheat into the barn,”

b. Fate of the Chaff = Worthless Wicked
“but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness?
- 2) Why did the Jewish religious leaders come out to the wilderness scene?
- 3) How can we tell that there is no post-conversion experience of Holy Spirit baptism as some Pentecostal groups claim?
- 4) If eternal judgment is executed via divine fire, why don't we believe in the annihilation of the wicked instead of eternal suffering?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

A. T. Robertson: One cannot properly understand the theological atmosphere of Palestine at this time without an adequate knowledge of both **Pharisees** and **Sadducees.**” In the same way that twenty-first-century Christianity has its conservative and progressive wings, first-century Judaism had its right-wing (Pharisee) and left-wing (Sadducee) branches. The Pharisees were more traditional and orthodox in their doctrine and practice. They were the much larger party, having the respect and favor of the general population, who mostly saw eye to eye with them on theological matters. The Sadducees, on the other hand, tended to be much more secular in their doctrine, yet they generally had control of the priesthood and worked in close association with the prevailing political powers.

Most likely, the term “*Pharisee*” means “separated one.” Many historians trace this strict branch of Judaism back to the remnant of orthodox, observant Jews who lived during the Babylonian exile, represented by figures like Daniel and his three friends (see **Dan. 1:8-20**). While in exile, these Jews had to preserve their culture, religion, language, and identity by separating themselves from the world and maintaining strict attention to detailed traditions. However, after several centuries, the methods used to preserve purity in faith and practice had turned into a **legalistic, judgmental, and hypocritical approach to religion.** This group also came to believe that the traditional teachings and practices that were developed in the course of their study of the Law were as authoritative as the Law of Moses itself, leading many to argue that this “oral law” had actually been passed down to the rabbis from Moses through oral tradition.

The Sadducees, meanwhile, were on a different end of the theological spectrum. They accepted no oral teaching or tradition beyond what could be found in the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch). In this way, they represent a kind of early form of biblical criticism that found a “canon within the canon” and tried to reform Judaism based on this rationalistic approach. Furthermore, while the Pharisees believed in the sovereignty of God and in predestination regarding many matters, the Sadducees rejected the notion of predestination altogether in favor of a strong view of human free will. The Sadducees also denied the reality of angels, spirits, and life after death, emphasizing instead the blessings received in this life for faithfulness to the

covenant —especially with regard to the sacrificial system. They resembled in some ways the progressive deists of the eighteenth century —skeptical to the core of anything supernatural or fatalistic.

Daniel Doriani: Question 76 of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, “What is **repentance unto life?**” The catechism answers:

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and the Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.

The pastors and scholars who penned this knew that true repentance is more than shame over misdeeds or sorrow over pain inflicted to self or others. The penitent man grieves that he has offended God. He hates the sin he has committed. The sinner may feel dreadful or numb. He may have caused much damage or little. But the penitent, unlike Judas, refuse to despair. They turn from heinous sin to a gracious God. They know God is merciful; they also know that true repentance entails a constant endeavor to walk with God in obedience. The repentant turn from sin once for all, yet we also turn to Jesus daily for mercy and for healing.

When the catechism calls repentance a grace and fruit of the Spirit, it follows the Scripture that says, “*God grants repentance unto life*” (**Acts 11:18**). Unless the Spirit enlightens, we will never see that sin is rebellion against God. The Spirit speaks and convicts, but we listen, agree, forsake our sinful ways and return to the Lord, so that repentance is also our act. In fact, **Abraham Kuyper** says, “Sacred Scripture refers to conversion almost one hundred and forty times as being an act of man, and only six times as an act of the Holy Ghost.”

John Nolland: **Christian baptism**, anticipated in **28:18**, is to be seen as a development from John's baptism. It is not entirely clear why baptism plays no role in the Synoptic account of Jesus' ministry (contrast **Jn. 3:22; 4:1-2**), but the best suggestion seems to be, though this is not worked out in any systematic way, that there is a general assumption that those who respond to Jesus' ministry have already been baptized by John. This passage views Jesus' ministry as endorsing and building on that of John, and the Synoptists have no desire to set Christian baptism in competition with that of John. (Christian baptism emerges in **28:18** precisely because of the expansion of vision at that point to include the peoples of the non-Jewish nations.)

John MacArthur: Now, we need to discuss for just a brief moment the **kingdom of heaven**. What is the kingdom of heaven? What does John mean by it? Well, basically, it's an **Old Testament concept**. The precise phrase, “*the kingdom of heaven*,” is not found in the Old Testament; but it is an Old Testament concept. This is why I say that. Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, in **Daniel 4:37**, refers to God as “*the king of heaven*.” **Daniel 2:44** calls Him “*the God of heaven*”; and **Daniel 4:25** says, “*He will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed*.” Now, the God of heaven, the King of heaven, God and heaven are then associated. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God then are associated terms.

Now, Matthew uses the term “*kingdom of heaven*” 32 times; and he is the only gospel writer that ever uses it. Mark doesn't use it. Luke doesn't use it. John doesn't use it. They use “*the*

kingdom of God,” and there may be a special reason for that. As I tried to point out from Daniel, and there are many other illustrations, **heaven** and **God** were thought of as **synonymous**. God was the King of heaven; and the reason Matthew may use it is because Matthew's gospel is a characteristically Jewish gospel; and one thing about Jews that you learn historically as you study Judaism is that a Jew would never say the name of God; and in deference to that, they would substitute frequently the term “heaven.” We even say things like that today. We say, “Heaven smiled down on me.” We mean God. We use it in a synonym fashion; and it may be that Matthew is in some sense accommodating a current substitute by calling the “*kingdom of heaven*” that rather than the “*kingdom of God,*” so that there is not an overt offense. That's one possibility.

Personally, I don't see any great distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. As you study it throughout the gospels, they seem to be **parallels**. In fact, if we had the time, and we don't tonight, I could take you through passages in Matthew and Mark and Luke, all recording the same incident where one time Matthew uses “*kingdom of heaven,*” Mark uses “*kingdom of God,*” and Luke uses “*kingdom of God,*” **interchangeably, identical terms**. And so I don't think there's any reason to build a huge case that they're different. He was simply saying, “The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom Messiah is gonna rule, is coming.”

Now, we go a step further, okay? The kingdom of heaven has two aspects. Two aspects - the outer and the inner, and sometimes, in the gospels, the outer is in view, and sometimes the inner is in view. Let me show you what I mean. In the broadest sense, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, includes - watch this - everybody who professes to acknowledge God. Now, in **Matthew 13** we'll see that, that the kingdom of heaven's got in it wheat and what? Tares, right? That the kingdom of heaven is like a great big bush with birds in it; and you've got the true and the false, the real and the non-real.

So in the outer sense, the kingdom of heaven is, is **everybody that professes**; but in the inner sense, it's only the **really regenerated**, born-again, genuinely saved people; and in some passages, the inner is in view; and in some, the outer; and we'll see that as we go through Matthew. **The big circle of profession includes the true and the false. The little circle only those truly born again in Christ.**

Now, tracing the kingdom will help us a little bit. Let me give you a quick little historical look at the kingdom. We're gonna go flying by, so hang on. There are five distinct phases in the kingdom. Five phases. I, I tried to reduce a very difficult subject to simple terms so I could understand it and pass it on to you simply.

First of all, it's talking about **the rule of God**. The rule of God over the hearts of men and over the world. Both are included. Now, the first phase of this thing is the **prophesied kingdom**, the prophesied kingdom. For example, Daniel said that God is gonna come and set up a kingdom, a kingdom that'll never be destroyed; and Daniel foresaw that Christ would be the King of that kingdom. It was a prophesied kingdom.

The second thing, the second phase of this is what you could call the **present kingdom** or the at-hand kingdom; and that was the kingdom described by John the Baptist. He was saying, “The prophesied rule of God is now imminent. It's now ready.” Jesus said it. The twelve said it. It's

at hand. It's coming. It's imminent. It's near. The rule of God, the reign of Christ, both internally and externally - it's here.

Then the third phase of the kingdom was what I call the **interim phase**. The prophesied, the imminent or at-hand, and the interim; and, there, the kingdom is described in this way. After the King was rejected by Israel, the King returned to heaven, and the kingdom now exists in a **mystery form**. Christ isn't literally in the world, literally reigning, literally sitting in Jerusalem ruling the kingdom; but **He reigns a kingdom in the hearts of all who acknowledge Him as Lord**, right? So it's an interim kingdom, the mystery form. So you have the prophesied, the at-hand, which would've been both earthly and internal, the whole thing; and when they wouldn't accept the King, the kingdom went inside; and now in a mystery form is in the hearts of those who believe. And, as Paul says in **Romans 14:17**, "*The kingdom of God is righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.*" It's internal.

The fourth phase of the kingdom is what I call the **manifest phase**. You start with the prophesied, the at-hand, the interim, and then the manifest; and this is the **literal, thousand-year millennium that is to come**. It will involve an external rule where Christ literally rules, physically in the earth, and an internal where He rules the hearts of the believing people. The book of Revelation talks about this. Jesus, in **Matthew 16**, gave people a glimpse of this in the transfiguration. So what do you have? You have the prophesied kingdom, the at-hand one, the interim one, the manifest one for a thousand years; and finally what I call the everlasting kingdom. **Second Peter 1:11**, Peter calls it, "*The eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" The fifth and final phase.

Now, that's generally **the flow of the kingdom**. The Old Testament prophesied a kingdom — a kingdom that would be external, where they would literally be in the earth; and the earth would be the place of the kingdom; and the earth would be ruled by the King; and it would also be internal, the hearts of the believing people would submit to that reign. And John and Jesus and the twelve said it's at hand. But it was rejected, and so an interim, internal kingdom has taken form now that we call this mystery age. But one day the kingdom will be manifest internally and externally, and then that thousand-year kingdom will exist and, at the end of that, an everlasting kingdom.

TEXT: Matthew 3:13-17

TITLE: THE COMMISSIONING OF THE KING – BAPTISM, ANOINTING AND APPROVAL

BIG IDEA:

THE COMMISSIONING OF JESUS TO PUBLIC MINISTRY INCLUDED BAPTISM TO IDENTIFY WITH SINNERS, ANOINTING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PUBLIC APPROVAL OF GOD THE FATHER

INTRODUCTION:

Walter Wilson: The . . . final segment of **chapter 3** both dramatizes Jesus’s role as God’s faithful Son and suggests that such faithfulness represents the means by which God’s plan of redemption will be accomplished. Among the many people drawn by John’s preaching is the Messiah himself, who travels all the way from Galilee to the river Jordan. When John demurs at Jesus’s request for baptism, the latter explains that he must be consecrated to his messianic vocation by joining the sinful multitudes in this rite of renewal, thereby fulfilling the righteousness that this vocation will embody. During the performance of the rite itself, the investiture of Jesus with the Spirit is presented both visually, in the dove-like descent of the Spirit upon him, and verbally, in divine words of commendation that allude to several biblical texts and concepts. With his identification as **God’s Beloved Son**, the readers have their most definitive answer to the question of Jesus’s identity, a question to which the entire opening section of the gospel has been devoted.

G. Campbell Morgan: These few verse reveal the relation of the King to heaven, as they tell the story of His attestation and anointing.

Grant Osborne: There is **tension** in the fact that Jesus at one and the same time transcends John’s baptism as the Messiah and yet submits to that baptism. “The baptism of Jesus, indeed, serves as a kind of **transition** between the work of preparation and the appearance on center stage of the one who brings fulfillment.” [**Hagner**] Moreover, there is also a **Trinitarian thrust**—both the Father and the Spirit participate in the anointing of the Son. There is an incredible aura of the **power of God** in this scene, and in fact the shaking of the heavens (a major apocalyptic image) occurs as Jesus comes up out of the water (**v. 16**), and God himself tells the onlookers who this Jesus really is, the very **Son of God**.

John MacArthur: This is, as it were, His **coronation**. This is His **commissioning**, the beginning of His ministry. It’s a rich and a blessed section of Scripture. The King comes out of 30 years of seclusion, 30 years of obscurity, 30 years of being hidden, as it were, finally to manifest Himself to the world. John the Baptist, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, has made ready the path. The way is prepared. The path is straight, and from the quiet seclusion of Nazareth, the Lord Jesus **comes to inaugurate His work, to assume His office**, and He is commissioned. He is crowned, as it were, in a very wonderful way right here as we begin in this paragraph.

Now, I want us to see three aspects to the commissioning of Jesus Christ.

- First, the baptism of the Son.
- Second, the anointing of the Spirit.
- Thirdly, the word of the Father, and you will notice that all the **Trinity** is involved. . .

And so, beloved, what do we see in the commission here? He is chosen to be a king, but His, but His throne is gonna be a cross. He's chosen to be a king, but He's gonna die, a sin offering. And so He is commissioned. By baptism, He identifies with sinners and pictures His death. By being anointed with the Spirit, He is empowered to minister a ministry that ultimately will make Him a sacrifice. The dove of sacrifice. And by the Father's word, He is said to be the worthy sacrifice. What an introduction. What a beginning. What a ministry was His.

I. (:13-15) APPROPRIATENESS OF BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN

A. (:13) Intentionality of Jesus – He Came to Be Baptized

“Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.”

Dr. Justin Imel: Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to receive John’s baptism. Mark informs us that Jesus came from Nazareth (**Mk 1:9**)—the distance could have been some 60 to 70 miles. This tells us the value that Jesus placed on being baptized by John. He traveled a considerable distance by foot to receive John’s baptism.

<https://drjustinimel.com/sermon-on-matthew-the-perfect-baptism-matthew-313-17/>

Scott Harris: John’s message was one of **repentance**, and as previously pointed out, this was a very strong message. Some in our day have tried to soften the tone and make the message more palatable to American society. They say that repentance is simply changing your mind about Jesus. They then present the gospel to try to get you to change your mind about Jesus the same way as you might change your mind about what brand of soap you like best. They market Jesus. Such a message is a distortion of the gospel. Repentance is not just a change of mind. It is a **change of mind that radically changes the life!** John’s message was the same as the prophets before them. He called the people to conversion. He implored the people to turn back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for them to trust the Lord alone, and for them to forsake anything and everything in their lives that was ungodly. This was the **Herald’s Message**.

https://www.gracebibleny.org/the_baptism_of_jesus_matthew_3_13_17

B. (:14) Objection of John – You Are Sinless and Don’t Need a Baptism of Repentance

*“But John tried to prevent Him, saying,
‘I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’”*

Scott Harris: John knew from childhood who Jesus was. This was the Messiah, the Christ, the one who would sit on David’s throne, this is the *“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (**John 1:29**). John recognizes that Jesus is without sin, for He will be the one that will remove sin from the world. This being true, John is very reluctant to baptize Jesus with a baptism of repentance. The grammar of the verb, *“prevent”* here is one of continual action. John kept trying to prevent Jesus from being baptized by him. John is as strongly opposing baptizing Jesus as he was opposing baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees, but for opposite reasons. Jesus was sinless and had no need of this baptism. The Pharisees and Sadducees were still in their sins and had not repented. In addition Jesus is the one who is to *“Baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (**vs 11**). John tells Jesus that Jesus should baptize him, not the other way around. This leaves us with a question as well. Understanding the nature of John’s baptism as being one of repentance, one in which the person confessed their sins and were then immersed in the Jordan

as a sign of the washing away of their sin, **why is one who is without sin coming for this baptism?**

Leon Morris: John is surprised at finding Jesus among his baptizands. It does not seem right and therefore he does not want this baptism to proceed. The Fourth Evangelist tells us that the Baptist did not know Jesus until he saw the Spirit descend on him like a dove (**John 1:33**), which may mean that he did not know Jesus or that he did not know him to be the Messiah. But Matthew does not address himself to this question. He simply tells us that John recognized his inferior place without going into the question of how he came to know it or for that matter how he understood it. Since John does not speak of Jesus as Messiah, he may have meant only that he knew that Jesus had greater authority than he or was morally superior to him.

D. A. Carson: John tried to deter Jesus (imperfect of attempted action) from his baptism, insisting (the pronouns are emphatic) that he stood in need of baptism by Jesus. Earlier John had difficulty baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were not worthy of his baptism. Now he has trouble baptizing Jesus because his baptism is not worthy of Jesus. . .

At the very least, John must have recognized that Jesus, to whom he was related, whose birth was more marvelous than his own and whose knowledge of Scripture was prodigious even as a child (**Lk 2:41–52**), outstripped him. John the Baptist was a humble man; conscious of his own sin, he could detect no sin Jesus needed to repent of and confess. So John thought that Jesus should baptize him. Matthew does not tell us when John also perceived that Jesus was the Messiah (though that may be implied by **vv.16–17**); Matthew focuses on Jesus' sinlessness and the Father's testimony, not on John's testimony (unlike the fourth gospel, where the Baptist's witness to Jesus is very important).

John MacArthur: Now, John's statement — this is an incredible statement, and I want you to see how rich it is. His statement is one of the most clear and one of the most powerful and one of the most forceful declarations of the **sinlessness of Jesus Christ** ever given in the Scripture. When anybody wants to argue about the sinlessness of Christ, whether Christ was really without sin, this is a great place to start. Virtually, John is saying, "Look, You can't be baptized with my baptism, because mine is a baptism for sinners." And what is he, in effect, saying? "You're not a sinner." "You're not a sinner." He is declaring, on the other hand, that, "I have need to be baptized by You. I am a sinner. You and I are opposites. I," he says, "am in the class of the people I'm baptizing. You are not." And he is saying, "Not only are You sinless, but You are beyond even the very prophets of God."

C. (:15) Explanation of Jesus – This Act Fulfills All Righteousness

“But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted Him.”

John MacArthur: In the book of Isaiah, in chapter 53, it says, "*He was numbered with the*" - What? - "*transgressors*" - sinners. I believe the supreme element - listen - in the baptism of Jesus was the identification of the sinless Son of God with sinners. And I think the first thing Jesus ever did when He stepped out of obscurity and He stepped into the limelight was declare the very primary reason for which He came, and that was to identify Himself with sinners. He who had no sin took His place among those who had no righteousness. He who was without sin went down into a baptism that was only for sinners, and He was saying as loud and clear as ever

He could say, "I take My place with sinners." And let it be clear from the start that this Jesus is the friend of sinners. Let it be clear that Paul was right. "He who knew no sin became" - What? - "sin for us." His ministry began that way. How fitting. He didn't come to just teach. He didn't come just to set an example. He didn't come to be a moralist. He didn't come to be a revolutionary. He came to identify with sinners, and He was numbered with the transgressors; and there in His baptism He identified with sinners. Even in His birth, He identified with sinners. He was the Child of Mary, who was a sinner.

In His death, He identified with sinners - two, one on each side - and He bore the sins of every sinner who ever lived. Listen, in order to bring sinners to righteousness, He had to go to the depths of the waters of death. He had to bear sin. He had to identify with sinners. There was no other way to fulfill all righteousness.

And in **Isaiah 53:11**, it says, "My righteous servant shall make many righteous" - How? - "*He shall bear the sin of many.*" **Isaiah 53:11**, "*My righteous servant shall bear the sin of many.*" Jesus submitted to John's baptism as a symbolic act of identifying with sinners who were seeking salvation; and I'll go a step further. I believe that His baptism was a **symbol of His death**. I believe it was a symbol of His dying as He went into that water, and a symbol of His rising as He came out.

You say, "Apparently, you believe he was **immersed**." True, and I will defend that in a moment. And I think it was, it was the same picture, really, as Christian baptism. I think Jesus was showing His identification with sinners. I think He was previewing His death and His resurrection.

Walter Wilson: Jesus submits to John's baptism of repentance (**3:2, 8, 11**), an act that expresses his solidarity with the people (**3:5-6**), in contrast to the people's religious leaders (**3:7**). This act can also be understood as a further instance of "fulfillment" (**3:15**) insofar as it reveals a critical aspect of Jesus's person and ministry, namely, his role as servant (**3:17**), a role that complements his role as eschatological judge (**3:11-12**). John's struggle to recognize this fact (cf. **11:2-6**) illustrates the practical difficulty of reconciling these two aspects of Jesus's identity.

G. Campbell Morgan: In **Isaiah liii**. we read, "*He . . . was numbered with the transgressors.*" There, in baptism as in incarnation and birth, and finally and for consummation, in the mystery of His Passion, we see the King identifying Himself with the people over whom He is to reign, in the fact of their deepest need, and direst failure.

Grant Osborne: The best way to understand it is to combine two nuances:

- (1) there is a salvation-historical thrust as Jesus identifies with his people (**Isa 53:12**) in preparing for the saving activity of God (his saving work is the will of God = "*righteousness*").
- (2) Jesus obeys his Father's will (= all righteousness) by assuming the role of suffering Servant (**Isa 53:11**) and so endorses John's ministry.

In this there is also a moral element, for Jesus' action is a moral conduct that obeys God's will, and so Jesus is fulfilling Scripture by doing it God's way. In short, he "fills to the full" the "right" requirements of God in "the OT pattern and prediction about the Messiah." He does not

need to repent, but by submitting to baptism Jesus begins his messianic work by identifying with the human need and providing the means by which it can be accomplished.

D. A. Carson: John's baptism had two foci—repentance and its eschatological significance. Jesus affirms, in effect, that it is God's will ("*all righteousness*") that John baptize him; and both John and Jesus "fulfill" that will, that righteousness, by going through with it ("*it is proper for us*"). The aftermath, as Matthew immediately notes (**vv.16–17**), shows that this baptism really did point to Jesus. Within this framework we may recognize other themes. In particular, Jesus is indeed seen as the Suffering Servant (**Isa 42:1**). But the Servant's first mark is obeying God: he "*fulfills all righteousness*" since he suffers and dies to accomplish redemption in obedience to the will of God. By his baptism, Jesus affirms his determination to do his assigned work. Thus the "*now*" may be significant. Jesus is saying that John's objection (**v.14**) is in principle valid. Yet he must "*now*," **at this point in salvation history**, baptize Jesus, for at this point Jesus must demonstrate his willingness to take on his servant role, entailing his identification with the people.

Bob Deffinbaugh: While believer's baptism looks back to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (**Romans 6:1-11**), our Lord's baptism by John looks forward, anticipating His death, burial, and resurrection on behalf of guilty sinners. Our Lord's baptism cannot include his repentance and confession of sin for He had no sin (as His temptation and subsequent conduct will verify). It may be that He was baptized in order to identify with sinners, but not to identify Himself as a sinner. Based on our Lord's own words to John, it seems not to have focused as much on sin as on the righteousness that would be accomplished by our Lord's ministry, in which John the Baptist was a partner.

II. (:16) ANNOINTED WITH GOD THE SPIRIT FOR MINISTRY

"And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him,"

G. Campbell Morgan: The dove therefore is the bird that signifies patience, gentleness, harmlessness; and is the type of sacrifice possible to the lowliest of the people. . . The dove is the **emblem of weakness**; but the Spirit of God in the form of a dove is an **emblem of power in gentleness** – Deity submissive to sacrifice for the salvation of men. This was an anointing for death, for atonement. It was not simply an anointing for preaching, but for living in order to dying. He had consented to death; and Heaven crowned Him with power for that death.

Grant Osborne: There have been many suggestions for the **imagery of the dove** here, but the best is probably to see a combination of **Gen 1:2** (the Spirit of God hovering over creation), thus signifying a new creation; the Spirit as a symbol of Israel (**Hos 7:11**), with Jesus as the ideal, true Israelite; the dove returning to Noah's ark (**Gen 8:8–12**) with the imagery of a new world being inaugurated; and the dove as a messenger signifying to Jesus the divinely commissioned role set for him. Putting them together, the descent of the Spirit signifies **a new age being inaugurated in the coming of the Messiah, God's very Son.**

D. A. Carson: The Spirit's descent in **v.16** needs to be understood in the light of **v.17**. The Spirit is poured out on the servant in **Isaiah 42:1**, to which **v.17** alludes. This outpouring does not change Jesus' status (he was the Son before this) or assign him new rights. Rather it identifies

him as the promised Servant and Son and marks the beginning of his public ministry and direct confrontation with Satan (4:1), the dawning of the messianic age (12:28).

R. T. France: The significance of the baptism hinted at in vv. 14–15 is distinguished from the revelatory event which follows it, which takes place after Jesus has come out of the river. Three elements are combined in vv. 16b-17, the opening of heaven, the descent of the Spirit, and the divine proclamation. The opening of heaven is familiar elsewhere in the NT as an expression for a visionary experience (John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 19:11). There is a significant OT parallel in Ezek 1:1 where Ezekiel, standing beside a river, also sees heaven opened and receives a theophanic vision and hears God’s voice commissioning him for his prophetic role and giving him the Spirit (Ezek 2:2). Isa 63:19 (EVV 64:1) asks God to *tear* (LXX *anoigō*, as here) the heavens and come down to redeem his people. The opening of heaven is the prelude to the divine communication which follows and especially to the visible descent of the Spirit.

Dr. Justin Imel: The Spirit came upon Jesus. It was vital that the Spirit come upon Jesus in order for Jesus to begin his ministry. Jesus’ ministry was carried out with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Immediately after Jesus was baptized, the Lord “*was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*” (Matt 4:1). Therefore, the Spirit played a vital role in Jesus’ being a merciful high priest by suffering temptation. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to carry out the great miracles he performed: “*If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Matt 12:28).

Not only did the Spirit enable Jesus to carry out his ministry, but the Spirit demonstrated that Jesus was indeed the Christ. The Greek *christos* literally means “*anointed one*.” In the Old Testament, prophets, priests and kings were anointed with oil as a demonstration that they were chosen by God. E.g., about David’s coming king, we read: “*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward*” (1 Sam 16:13).

The Spirit came upon Jesus in this context to anoint him as the Christ, to demonstrate that he was God’s chosen One. Lest you think that I’m making too much of the literal meaning of “Christ,” the Old Testament refers to the Messiah’s anointing with the Holy Spirit. “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*” (Is 61:1). Therefore, the Spirit comes upon Jesus and anoints him, demonstrating that he is, in fact, the One whom God has chosen.

III. (:17) APPROVED BY GOD THE FATHER AS WORTHY SACRIFICE FOR SIN

*“and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying,
‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’”*

David Platt: The Son obeys, the Spirit anoints, and in verse 17 the Father speaks.

S. Lewis Johnson: Incidentally, this statement, “*this is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased,*” does not really mean, primarily, “*this is my beloved Son in whom I am delighted.*” But the meaning of the Greek word is, rather, this is my Son in whom and upon whom my pleasure rests, or whom my plan for the salvation of both Israel and the Gentiles is centered. So what it means then is not, I’m very pleased with him, I’m happy over him. It means he is the one in

whom I am going to accomplish my purposes. It is a word that has to do with **the plan and purpose of God**.

Leon Morris: Matthew's *This is my Son* makes the words relevant to the bystanders; they are an open testimony to the Father's approval of his Son (cf. **17:5**), and we should view "Son" as a messianic title. The heavenly voice points to a relationship shared by no other. *Beloved* tells us of the strong affection the Father has for the Son; it is probably (as **Allen** thinks) "an independent title = 'the Beloved' = the Messiah" (see further the note on the same expression in **17:5**). It is reinforced with *in whom I am well pleased*. The verb has the meaning "to think it good, give consent" and thence "to be well pleased, take pleasure in"; the latter is, of course, the meaning here. The divine voice gives approval to Jesus as he begins his public ministry. The words are reminiscent of **Psalm 2:7** and **Isaiah 42:1**; they show us that right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus was identified with both the **Messiah** and the **Suffering Servant**, "and this strange combination exactly describes the nature of the Lord's ministry soon to begin" (**Melinsky**). We should perhaps notice the mention of the three Persons of the Trinity in this passage; Matthew has a certain trinitarian interest (cf. **28:19**).

Warren Wiersbe: On three special occasions, the Father spoke from heaven: at Christ's baptism, at the Transfiguration (**Matt. 17:3**), and as Christ approached the cross (**John 12:27-30**). In the past, God spoke to His Son; today He is speaking through His Son (**Heb. 1:1-2**).

R. T. France: From this point on Matthew's readers have no excuse for failing to understand the significance of Jesus' ministry, however long it may take the actors in the story to reach the same christological conclusion (**14:33; 16:16; 26:63-64**). It will be this crucial revelation of who Jesus is which will immediately form the basis of the **initial testing** which Jesus is called to undergo in **4:1-11**: "*If you are the Son of God ...*" (**4:3, 6**). And there, as in the account of the baptism, Jesus' sonship will be revealed in his obedience to his Father's will.

Dr. Justin Imel: This passage is an **enthronement text** for Jesus. It is here that the Father declares to the world that Jesus Christ is indeed his Son. The voice from heaven serves as undeniable proof that Jesus is the Son of God and the great King of all. As the great King, Jesus deserves the praise of all: "*To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen*" (**1 Tim 1:17**). Are you giving the "*king of ages*" glory and honor in your life?

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are the Scriptures so silent about the first 30 years of the life of Jesus?
- 2) Why did Jesus feel compelled to be baptized?
- 3) How does this passage contribute to our understanding of the Trinity?
- 4) What is significant about the testimony of God the Father regarding Jesus?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Recognition of Our Unworthiness before Jesus --

John the Baptist's **humility** reflects the necessary realization of the great heroes of the faith throughout biblical history. Moses (**Exod 3:11 – 4:16**), Gideon (**Judg 3:15**), Isaiah (**Isa 6:5**), Jeremiah (**Jer 1:6–7**), Ezekiel (**Ezek 1:1–2:3**), and Peter (**Luke 5:8**) all felt their inadequacy and unworthiness to serve the Lord. The fact is that we are unworthy of Christ and inadequate to do his work, but Paul answers that. He freely admitted that "*in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing*" (**2 Cor 10:10**), but he adds, "*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness*" (**11:30**), and "*I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me*" (**12:9**).

We all must come face to face with our **sinfulness** so that we will rest entirely on Christ. Then our inadequacies will be a means by which Christ's power will be all the more evident, for in him we will accomplish more than we ever could in our own strength and abilities. Our insufficiencies should force us to turn to Christ and his Spirit for the power to accomplish things for God. We all have seeds of greatness in us but must depend on the Spirit to unleash that power and maximize our potential for the glory of God.

David Platt: There are many different opinions about what Jesus means here, but it seems that Jesus' baptism is the convergence of a variety of factors. We'll consider three of these factors.

First, Jesus' baptism is an **identification with sinners**. Jesus came, according to **Isaiah 53:12**, to be "*counted among the rebels*," and ultimately this has to do with their sin, though Jesus Himself had no sin (**Heb 4:15**). We identify with Jesus when we are baptized, being united to Him in His life, death, and resurrection, so it makes sense that baptism is in a very real sense His identification with us. He who had no sin took His place among those who had no righteousness. This is the essence of what Jesus came to do (see **2 Cor 5:21**).

In addition to identifying with us, Jesus also **sets an example for us**. His baptism is an example for saints. Jesus models obedience for His followers by being baptized, which is an obedience that He will eventually command His followers to submit to (**Matt 28:20**). Jesus is validating here the central importance of baptism. He begins His ministry by showing what would be central in our mission. Baptism is not something that man has made up; it's something that God has commanded, something He has called every follower of Christ to do, and something He has told us to do in all nations (**28:19**). Jesus sets the stage for this at the beginning of His public ministry.

Finally, baptism is not only an identification with sinners and an example for saints, but it is also a **picture of salvation**. Baptism pictures death and resurrection to new life, such that here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we get a picture of the climax of this ministry. That is, His immersion portrays His future death and resurrection. And now, every person who trusts in Christ for salvation is baptized, immersed in water, as a picture of our dying to sin and to ourselves and rising to new life in Christ.

S. Lewis Johnson: What does this baptism mean? Well first of all, it means that the Lord Jesus is **identified with the Nation Israel**. It is his positive submission to the kingdom program which he himself is inaugurating and bringing to its conclusion. It is his confession that he, as the king

in heart, is prepared for the coming of the kingdom. There are no negative acts of sin or thoughts of sin for him to confess, but he makes a positive declaration of his submission to the will of God as any Israelite should have done through the ministry of the forerunner, John the Baptist.

Second, it is his **inauguration into his Messianic office**. The Spirit coming upon him is the sign and the seal of the Messianic era. In Isaiah chapter 1 and in Isaiah chapter 61 verse 1 it is stated, concerning the Messianic ministry of the Messiah, that it would be characterized by the possession of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah chapter 42, God says, in the first of the prophecies, “*I have given my Spirit upon him.*” It is his endowment with power for the carrying out of his Messianic task. All of his preaching, all of his carrying out of miracles, and finally his act of redemption upon the cross are carried out under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God.

Incidentally, of course, all of our acts and all of our lives are to be carried out under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God.

And finally, it is the **illustration of the goal of his ministry**. The fact that the Lord Jesus went down into the water and came out of the water is a vivid representation, a kind of mirror of the event of the cross where he went into the waters of baptism. And the fact that later on he calls the suffering of the cross his baptism is striking confirmation of the fact that right here, at the beginning of his ministry, in the light of the voice from heaven, he’s the suffering servant of Jehovah. He goes down into the water and comes out of the water as if to say the great ministry of the Messiah is his suffering and his death.

John Piper: Now what does all this tell us about **baptism**? Three things:

1. It tells us that John's baptism is **not simple continuation of circumcision**. This is important because those who defend infant baptism often appeal to circumcision as the old sign of the covenant and say that baptism is the new sign. The one was given to infants and so should the other be. Circumcision was the sign of belonging to the Old Covenant people of God. Every Jewish male received it. If you were born Jewish, you received the sign of the covenant as a baby boy. So at least some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to see circumcision as the sign of God's favor and of their security as the covenant people. But John's baptism was a radical attack on this false security. He infuriated the Pharisees by calling the people to renounce reliance on the sign of the covenant that they got when they were infants, and to receive another sign to show that they were not relying on Jewish birth, but on the mercy of God received by repentance and faith. A new people within Israel was being formed, and a new sign of a new covenant was being instituted. It was not a simple continuation of circumcision. It was an indictment of a misuse of circumcision as a guarantee of salvation. **Circumcision was a sign of ethnic continuity; baptism was a sign of spiritual reality.**

2. John's baptism was a **sign of personal, individual repentance**, not a sign of birth into a covenant family. It is hard to overstate how radical this was in John's day. The Jews already had a sign of the covenant, circumcision. John came calling for repentance and offering a new sign, baptism. This was incredibly offensive, far more offensive even than when a Baptist today says that baptism is not a sign to be received by infants born into a Christian home, but a sign of repentance and faith that a person chooses for himself, even if he already has been christened as an infant, the way the Jews were circumcised as infants. John's baptism is the beginning of the radical, individual Christian ordinance of baptizing those who believe.

3. John's baptism fits what we are going to see in all the rest of the New Testament, and indeed in all the first two centuries of the Christian era until A.D. 200 when Tertullian mentions infant baptism for the first time in any historical document, namely, that **all baptism was the baptism of believers, not infants**. And the reason was that baptism was the sign of belonging to the new people of God who are constituted not by birth or ethnic identity, but by **repentance and faith in Jesus Christ**.

Scott Harris: Jesus was born under the law of Moses (**Gal. 4:4**) and he kept the law, not the Pharisaical interpretation of it, but God's original intent. Jesus said in **Matt 5:17** that He came to **fulfill the law**. Jesus voluntarily submitted to divinely approved ordinances whether religious or secular. For example, He was circumcised, presented in the Temple and celebrated the feasts even though His own relationship with God was independent of God's covenant with Israel. But Jesus' submission to the rituals of the covenant brought Him into full identification with all of Israel. Jesus even paid taxes to Caesar though He was exempt as the Son of God (**Matthew 17:25-27**). Jesus came into the world to identify with man so much so that **Isaiah 53:12** says he would be "*numbered among the transgressors.*" The self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees would call Jesus a glutton and drunkard, a friend of sinners (**Matthew 11:19**) because of His identification with man.

In the Levitical law a clean person that touched an unclean person, or in some cases even something that an unclean person had touched, would also then be considered unclean and would have to wash (**Leviticus 11**, etc.). Jesus was sinless and clean, and because His righteousness was internally generated and not externally granted (as is our righteousness) nothing could actually make Him unclean (such as the woman in **Matthew 9:20f** that touched His garment). However, in Jesus' baptism He fulfills all righteousness by fulfilling the Levitical code of ceremonial cleanliness. Jesus came to minister to sinners (the unclean), and in His Baptism He identifies Himself with sinful man even though He Himself was without sin. Jesus' baptism also gives approval to John's message and sets the example for those who would follow Him.

Jesus baptism was also **symbolic of His death and resurrection**. He only spoke of personal baptism in two other passages and in both He related Baptism to His death. In **Luke 12:50** he speaks of His soon coming crucifixion as a "*baptism.*" In **Mark 10:38** He asks James and John if they would be able to "*drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized*" which was a reference to his coming death. It would be in His death that all righteousness would be completed as Jesus would bear the full price of the sin of men in Himself in order that He could impute His own righteousness to sinful men. Jesus baptism by John was part of His identification with sinful men pointing to the time when He would bear the sin of men.

Jesus' baptism also signified something else. It was the beginning of His public ministry as He was **anointed by the Holy Spirit**.

TEXT: Matthew 4:1-11

TITLE: THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

JESUS AS THE SECOND ADAM DEFEATED THE TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN BY RELYING ON THE WORD OF GOD IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:

D. A. Carson: We must conclude that Satan's aim was to entice Jesus to use powers that were rightly his but which he had voluntarily abandoned to carry out the Father's mission. Reclaiming them for himself would deny the self-abasement implicit in his mission and in the Father's will.

Charles Swindoll: Think about what hung in the balance. Were Christ to yield to the temptations, not only would He disqualify Himself from being the perfect, innocent sacrifice for the sins of the world, but He would also allow the devil to declare himself victor, thereby claiming once and for all total dominion over humanity and the world. However, by withstanding the tests, Jesus would retain His rightful position as the victorious Ruler of all creation . . . and also leave us an example to follow when we, too, are tempted.

Craig Blomberg: One might expect the main, central period of Jesus' public ministry to unfold at once, but one more crucial preparatory event must occur. Jesus could well have perverted the nature of his messianic sonship and bypassed the way of the cross in favor of some more glamorous political or military role as liberator of Israel. But refusing to die for the sins of the world would have given the devil rather than God the victory. So Jesus' resolve to fulfill God's plans for him must be tested and proved right at the outset of his ministry.

Grant Osborne: The final event that launches Jesus' messianic ministry is the testing of Jesus. In the ancient world all sons of the king had to be tested and prove their right to the throne, and the heroes of the OT were put to the test before their ministries as well (e.g., Abraham with Isaac). Jesus passes the test and proves himself to be truly Son of God, thus entering his ministry on a note of triumph. He is announced in **3:1–12**, anointed and empowered in **3:13–17**, and **proven by combat** here. There is wilderness typology and a deliberate contrast with Israel here: they failed the test in the wilderness, but Jesus is victorious. In fact, the order of the temptations and Jesus' responses reverse the order of Israel's failures in **Deut 6–8**, as we will see. . .

Satan tests his "commitment to the will of his Father (the real criterion of true sonship)" and the reality of Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus triumphs and shows himself to be "the true Israel, the 'Son of God' through whom God's redemptive purpose for his people is now at last to reach its fulfillment." . . .

In effect the three tests concern the Shema (**Deut 6:5**), which calls on Israel to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart ... soul ... and strength.*" The first temptation concerns **the heart** and how Israel's hunger was intended to test their heart for God (**Deut 8:2**). The second temptation tests Jesus' safety and his desire to save his **soul/life** and whether he will follow God even if it means his soul/life. The third tests his resolve to draw his **strength** from God alone rather than seek to rule the world by himself.

Warren Wiersbe: Just as the first Adam met Satan, so the Last Adam met the enemy (**1 Cor. 15:45**). Adam met Satan in a beautiful garden, but Jesus met him in a terrible wilderness. Adam had everything he needed, but Jesus was hungry after forty days of fasting. Adam lost the battle and plunged humanity into sin and death. But Jesus won the battle and went on to defeat Satan in more battles, culminating in His final victory on the cross (**John 12:31; Col. 2:15**).

E. Michael Green: But what did the temptation mean to Jesus? It would be a great mistake to suppose that the story of the temptations is included in the Gospel primarily to provide an example to Christian disciples, though they do provide that example. These temptations were **messianic**. They were uniquely appropriate to God’s Son, who had just received a clear vision of his mission. How was he to carry it out? How was he to lead people back to God? **Was he to adopt the path of the conquering king or of the suffering Servant?**

(:1) PROLOGUE – SETTING FOR SPIRITUAL COMBAT

A. Connection to His Baptism

1. Sequential Connection

“Then”

2. Spirit Connection

“Jesus was led up by the Spirit”

D. A. Carson: Jesus’ three temptations tie into his baptism, not only by the references to sonship and the Spirit, but by the opening *“Then”* (*tote*). Jesus’ attestation as the Son (**3:17**) furnishes “the natural occasion for such special temptations as are here depicted” (**Broadus**). The same Spirit who engendered Jesus (**1:20**) and attested the Father’s acknowledgment of his sonship (**3:16–17**) now leads him into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

B. Consigned to a Realm of Barrenness and Isolation

“into the wilderness”

D. A. Carson: The *“desert”* is not only the place associated with demonic activity (**Isa 13:21; 34:14; Mt 12:43; Rev 18:2**; cf. **Trench**, *Studies in the Gospels*, 7–8) but, in a context abounding with references to **Deuteronomy 6–8**, the place where Israel experienced her greatest early testings.

C. Conflict with the Devil

“to be tempted by the devil.”

Craig Blomberg: Matthew warns against two common errors—blaming God for temptation and crediting the devil with power to act independently of God. In the New Testament, God is always so dissociated from evil that he is never directly responsible for tempting humans (**Jas 1:13**). Yet the devil is never portrayed as an enemy equal with but opposite to God; he always remains bound by what God permits.

Leon Morris: Matthew is telling us that immediately after the experience in which Jesus, so to speak, was commissioned for his work as Messiah Satan tried to deflect him from doing the will of God. On this occasion the evil one is called the devil, the one who opposes God and tries to

lead the people of God, and here the Son of God, away from the right path. Jesus has been called into the service of God. The devil will then try to seduce him into the service of evil.

**I. (:2-4) TEMPTATION #1 -- FAILURE TO TRUST GOD'S PROVISION --
Can God care for me? Goodness and Love of God attacked
SUFFICIENCY -- Lust of the Flesh – Self-gratification**

A. (:2) Seductive Approach of Offering Something Attractive

“And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.”

D. A. Carson: The parallels with historic Israel continue. Jesus' fast (doubtless total abstention from food but not from drink; cf. **Lk 4:2**) of forty days and nights reflected Israel's forty-year wandering (**Dt 8:2**). Both Israel's and Jesus' hunger taught a lesson (**Dt 8:3**); both spent time in the desert preparatory to their respective tasks. The main point is that both “sons” were tested by God's design (**Dt 8:3, 5**; cf. **Ex 4:22**; **Gerhardsson**, *Testing of God's Son*, 19–35), the one after being redeemed from Egypt and the other after his baptism, to prove their obedience and loyalty in preparation for their appointed work. The one “son” failed but pointed to the “Son” who would never fail. In this sense, the temptations legitimized Jesus as God's true Son (see **Berger**, “*Die königlichen Messiastraditionen*,” 15–18).

Charles Swindoll: Though wicked to the core, the devil's no dummy. He knows that the best chance he has at successfully hooking victims with temptation and dragging them into sin is when they are weakened in mind, emotion, and will. When Satan catches us alone in a weakened state, he can more easily get us to justify our evil desires. And he can craft his temptations in such a way that the path toward destruction appears like the road to glory. His temptations can seem not only reasonable but even downright good and right.

B. (:3) Specific Area of Temptation

*“And the tempter came and said to Him,
‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’”*

Charles Swindoll: Satan's subtle suggestion was designed to make the Son doubt the Father's love for Him and concern for His physical welfare. Didn't the Son have every right to use His divine power and authority to meet the basic needs of His life?

Michael Wilkins: Satan does not doubt Jesus' identity as the Son of God, nor is he trying to get Jesus to doubt it; rather, he is trying to get Jesus to misuse his prerogatives as the Son of God.

C. (:4) Scripture Quotation of Rebuttal

“But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Craig Blomberg: In this instance the text he cites originally underscored God's provision of manna as an alternative to the Israelites' reliance on their own abilities to feed themselves. The principle applies equally well to Jesus' situation and to any other context in which people are tempted to give physical needs priority over spiritual needs.

II. (:5-7) TEMPTATION #2 -- FAILURE TO TRUST GOD'S PROVIDENCE -- How does God want to deliver and exalt me? Sovereignty of God attacked SUSTAINABILITY -- Lust of the Eyes -- Self-protection

A. (:5) Seductive Approach of Offering Something Attractive

*“Then the devil took Him into the holy city;
and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,”*

Charles Swindoll: Here Satan used a completely different strategy. This time it wasn't about satisfying Jesus' physical needs; instead, it was about attracting a crowd, instantly promoting His fame, and gaining the attention and adoration He rightly deserved as the Son of God.

B. (:6) Specific Area of Temptation

*“and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written,
'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and
'On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'”*

Charles Swindoll: The devil conveniently left out an important part in the middle: *“to guard you in all your ways.”* The text thus indicates that the promise of protection was related to accidents that would occur in the course of a person's normal comings and goings —not to intentional, attention-grabbing stunts that put oneself in danger.

David Platt: We are tempted to question God's presence and manipulate God's promises.

Leon Morris: What Satan is suggesting is that Jesus should needlessly thrust himself into danger; he would be creating a hazard where none previously existed. And for what? To compel God to save him miraculously. It is a temptation to manipulate God, to create a situation not of God's choosing in which God would be required to act as Jesus dictated. Jesus rejects the suggestion with decision. He prefers the way of quiet trust in the heavenly Father, a trust that needs no test, and a ready acceptance of his will. He refuses to demand a miracle even if from the perspective of someone on earth that might seem desirable, even compelling.

C. (:7) Scripture Quotation of Rebuttal

*“Jesus said to him, 'On the other hand, it is written,
'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'”*

D. A. Carson: For both Israel and Jesus, demanding miraculous protection as proof of God's care was wrong; the appropriate attitude is trust and obedience (**Dt 6:17**). We see, then, something of Jesus' handling of Scripture. His *“also”* shows he would not allow any interpretation that generates what he knew would contradict another passage.

Craig Blomberg: This time the devil asks Jesus to demonstrate miraculously God's ability to preserve his life. The devil again knows that Jesus has the power to do this, and he cites **Ps 91:11-12** to justify it. There God promises all who *“dwell in the shelter of the Most High”* (**Ps 91:1**) safeguarding and protection. The devil's mistake is to confuse the psalmist's stumbling so as to fall with Jesus' deliberately jumping off. We must not test God's faithfulness to his word by manufacturing situations in which we try to force him to act in certain ways. We dare not deliberately put our lives in danger as some kind of fleece. Jesus thus replies by quoting **Deut 6:16** on not testing God. The original context alluded to Israel's rebellion against the Lord at Massah (again harking back to **Exod 17:1-7**).

III. (:8-10) TEMPTATION #3 -- FAILURE TO TRUST GOD'S KINGDOM PROGRAM –

How does God want to accomplish His agenda? Wisdom of God attacked SUPREMACY – Pride of Life -- Self-exaltation

A. (:8) Seductive Approach of Offering Something Attractive

“Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory;”

Bob Deffinbaugh: Consider the appeal of the offer from the devil’s viewpoint.

<u>Jesus’ Condition</u>	<u>The Devil’s Offer</u>
Deprived – tired, hungry	Splendor, not suffering
Alone with the wild animals 116	Significance, not obscurity
Waiting indefinitely	Instant results, not delayed
Nothing accomplished	Power to do what He wanted

To each condition of Jesus the devil offered a solution. The last one is the key to this temptation. In answering the first two temptations, Jesus had already resisted the first three aspects of the devil’s third temptation. He would not turn stones into bread to stop His suffering from hunger. He would not jump off the highest point of the temple to get instant notoriety. In neither temptation would He succumb to the lure of a shortcut to get instant results. The devil then added another element to make up a new and enticing package: “You can have splendor, significance and instant results, AND you can serve God while you do it. That’s what you want to do, isn’t it? Serve God? What have you done with your life so far, Jesus? Been a carpenter’s son, huh? Look, I’ll give you the kingdoms, and you may do with them as you wish. You’re a king, aren’t you? Inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth, if that’s what you want to do. Free Israel from Roman rule. Establish justice in the world. Take care of the poor. Bring about world peace. Wouldn’t that please God? Do it without suffering! Do it successfully! Do it now! YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL!”

B. (:9) Specific Area of Temptation

*“and he said to Him,
‘All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me.’”*

Craig Blomberg: After having tempted Jesus to satisfy a legitimate bodily appetite in an illegitimate way and then to use his supernatural power to rebel against God even while seeming to demonstrate great faith, Satan now makes the most brazen offer of all. He will give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in return for worship. Ironically, Jesus would receive this glory anyway after his death and resurrection; but here the devil tries to seduce him with instant power, authority, and wealth apart from the way of the cross. Satan regularly tempts Christians in the same way— with the success syndrome, empire building, or alleged guarantees of health and

wealth. But **the devil's price is damning**. He requires nothing short of selling one's soul in worshipping him, which leads inexorably to eternal judgment. Whatever joy and power he can offer vanishes with death. Jesus rightly rejects the devil's offer and quotes Deuteronomy for a third time (**Deut 6:13**). Only one is worthy of worship, the One who redeemed Israel from Egypt, the Lord God Yahweh himself. Jesus' insistence on worshipping God alone makes the characteristic Matthean theme of worshipping Jesus (e.g., **2:2; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:17**) all the more significant as **evidence for his divinity**.

Bob Deffinbaugh: The devil would have liked for Jesus to believe that after bowing down before him, He would be finished with him. Worship signifies several things, however:

- allegiance to the one who is worshiped (there is a duty of loyalty);
- the superiority of the one who is worshiped (worship flows from inferior to superior);
- dependence of the worshiper on the one who is worshiped (the worshiper acknowledges that he is not sufficient without the one who is worshiped).

Jesus realized that the symbolic act of bowing down and worshipping the devil would also carry with it a continuing obligation.

C. (:10) Scripture Quotation of Rebuttal

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Begone, Satan!

For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

Warren Wiersbe: Notice that Luke’s account **reverses the order** of the second and third temptations as recorded in Matthew. The word *then* in **Matthew 4:5** seems to indicate **sequence**. Luke only uses the simple conjunction “*and*” and does not say he is following a sequence. Our Lord’s command at the end of the third temptation (“*Get thee hence, Satan*”) is proof that **Matthew followed the historical order**. There is no contradiction since Luke did not claim to follow the actual sequence.

Grant Osborne: Now the impetus shifts to Jesus, for Satan has to obey his command to leave (**4:11**). The use of the imperative and the brevity of the command are frequent in exorcisms (**8:32**; cf. **Mark 1:25**); Jesus takes charge, and the battle is over. The victory belongs to Jesus, and Satan can only skulk away.

(:11) EPILOGUE

A. Departure of the Devious Devil

“Then the devil left Him;”

B. Arrival of Ministering Angels

“and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.”

D. A. Carson: Though the conflict has barely begun, the pattern of obedience and trust has been established. He has learned to resist the devil (cf. **Jas 4:7**). The angelic help is not some passing blessing but a sustained one (the **imperfect tense** is probably significant). Jesus had refused to relieve his hunger by miraculously turning stones to bread; now he is fed supernaturally (*diēkonoun*, “*attended*,” GK 1354, is often used in connection with food; e.g., **Mt 8:15; 25:44; 27:55; Ac 6:2**; cf. Elijah in **1Ki 19:6–7**). He had refused to throw himself off the temple heights in the hope of angelic help; now angels feed him. He had refused to take a shortcut to inherit the

kingdom of the world; now he fulfills Scripture by beginning his ministry and announcing the kingdom in Galilee of the Gentiles (vv.12–17).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can the same event be both a test from God and a temptation from Satan?
- 2) How can we check our priorities to make sure that we are not placing our confidence in material things?
- 3) Do we ever try to manipulate God to perform acts in our own self-interest that do not advance His kingdom agenda?
- 4) In what ways do angels minister to God’s people today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: The episode of Jesus’ temptation by Satan in **Matthew 4** leads to a hypothetical question often used by seminary professors who are trying to get their students to think through their doctrinal convictions: “Could Jesus have sinned in the wilderness?” The two responses are often posed this way: “Yes, Jesus could have sinned, being fully human —the temptation wouldn’t have been real if He was guaranteed victory.” Or, “No, Jesus couldn’t have sinned, being fully divine —it is impossible for God to sin.”

The answer to this question reveals everything about the soundness of one’s Christology —that is, the doctrine concerning Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus is not just a man but is also God the Son. On the other hand, He is not just God but is also fully human. He is the God-man, fully God and fully human in one person (**John 1:1, 14; Phil. 2:5-11**). The Christian church has therefore definitively taught that Jesus has “two undiminished natures —human and divine —in one person, and that the unity of the two natures is ‘without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.’”

So the question as to whether Jesus could have sinned is solved by an understanding of the nature of His incarnation as the God-man. Because Jesus was fully human, **He could be tempted** by Satan and feel the full force of this temptation. However, because Jesus was simultaneously fully God, **He could not sin** but would be victorious over the temptation. **This doesn’t make the temptation less real.** A person can pummel a 12-inch-thick steel wall with a sledgehammer over and over again with every ounce of might he or she has, but the nature of the steel wall is such that it will not succumb to the pounding. In the same way, Satan unleashed a **genuine attack** on the God-man, but His nature is such that He was able to be tempted but unable to sin. . .

When we ponder Satan’s strategies and goals in leading us into temptations that test our faith and obedience, we need to keep some important principles in mind: something about Satan, something about Scripture, something about the Savior, and something about sin. These

reminders and warnings aren't complicated. They're simple enough to memorize; in fact, I'd suggest that you do.

First, regarding Satan, remember that he's a defeated enemy —so don't fear and don't be intimidated in the face of his temptations.

Second, regarding Scripture, remember that it's alive and powerful —so don't hesitate to stand on it.

Third, regarding the Savior, remember that He's our Shield and Sustainer —so don't lean on your own strength.

Fourth, regarding sin, remember that you don't have to yield to temptation —so resist its call.

David Platt: As we consider the temptation of Jesus in **Matthew 4:1-11**, we'll begin by acknowledging six realities. These are really basic reminders that will help us wrap our minds around what is happening in this passage.

1. There is a spiritual world.
2. We are involved in a spiritual war.
3. Our enemy in this spiritual war is formidable.
4. The stakes in this spiritual war are eternal.
5. The scope of this spiritual war is universal.
6. Our involvement in this spiritual war is personal.

Michael Wilkins: Three important implications surface in reflecting on Jesus' temptations:

- (1) **Satan's power.** Satan does have significant influence over the people and powers of this world, but his influence is limited.
- (2) **The Scripture's power.** Temptations involve the twisting of reality, so the antidote comes from the truth of Scripture.
- (3) **The Spirit's power.** Jesus was guided and empowered by the Spirit in his temptations. He was never alone in his struggle, even at the most difficult moments. Jesus relied on the power of the Spirit to enable him to resist the devil's temptations.

Throughout his life Jesus gives the ultimate example of how Christians today can also overcome the temptations that will come our way: Resist the devil in the power of the Spirit through the guidance of the Word to accomplish the will of God.

G. Campbell Morgan: Here, then, is revealed the Man Whom God ordained to be King – God's archetypal Man, the perfect man – and as we look at Him we see that the supreme end of life is vocation; that the essence of life is spiritual; that the present expression of the spiritual fact and vocation is physical. Temptation commences in the external, which is physical; passes to the

internal, which is spiritual; attacks finally the vocational, which is the supreme thing in the life of every man. This is the picture of human life, according to the purpose of God.

Daniel Doriani: Temptation invites a man or woman to take something that is good, when for some reason the person tempted does not have the right to that good thing or cannot, at that moment, use it properly. Thus **temptation begins with something that is good and perverts it**. So Satan tempted Jesus with good things, such as food and knowledge, by inviting him to take them for himself at that moment, even though he had no absolute right to them. Since food, knowledge, and honor are good and Jesus was a man, he was susceptible to the temptation to take them for himself, at the wrong place and time. In saying this, we do not question Jesus' sinlessness, we assert his humanity.

After forty days of fasting, Jesus might well want food. But would he take food in a self-interested way? To change rocks to food—to use his miraculous powers to satisfy his hunger—is to promote **self-interest** above God's cause. Similarly, to jump off the temple would be to force God to perform a miracle in the interest of personal security. To bow to Satan is to gain power without suffering.

Satan offered something good in all three temptations; that is why they tested Jesus.

Grant Osborne: Jesus exemplifies absolute surrender to the Father's will, and where Israel/we failed (in the areas of food, protection, and gaining kingdoms) Jesus succeeded by obeying God. **Hagner** says it well: "In this pericope we encounter a theme that is vital in the theology of the Gospels. The goal of obedience to the Father is accomplished, not by triumphant self-assertion, not by the exercise of power and authority, but paradoxically by the way of humility, service, and suffering. Therein lies true greatness (cf. **20:26–28**)."

1 John 2:16	Eve (Gen 3:6)	Christ
Cravings of sinful people	Good for food	First temptation
Lust of their eyes	Pleasing to the eye	Third temptation
Boasting	Desirable for gaining wisdom	Second temptation

R. T. French: The most significant key to the understanding of this story is to be found in Jesus' three scriptural quotations. All come from **Deut 6–8**, the part of Moses' address to the Israelites before their entry into Canaan in which he reminds them of their forty years of wilderness experiences. It has been a time of preparation and of proving the faithfulness of their God. He has deliberately put them through a time of privation as an educative process. They have been learning, or should have been learning, what it means to live in trusting obedience to God: "*As a father disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.*" (**Deut 8:5**; for Israel as God's son cf. **Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1–4**) Among the lessons they should now have learned are not to depend on bread alone but rather on God's word (**8:3**), not to put God to the test (**6:16**), and to make God the exclusive object of their worship and obedience (**6:13**). Now another "*Son of God*" is in the wilderness, this time for forty days rather than forty years, as a preparation for

entering into his divine calling. There in the wilderness he too faces those same tests, and he has learned the lessons which Israel had so imperfectly grasped. His Father is testing him in the school of privation, and his triumphant rebuttal of the devil's suggestions will ensure that the filial bond can survive in spite of the conflict that lies ahead. Israel's occupation of the promised land was at best a flawed fulfillment of the hopes with which they came to the Jordan, but this new "*Son of God*" will not fail and the new Exodus (to which we have seen a number of allusions in **ch. 2**) will succeed. "Where Israel of old stumbled and fell, Christ the new Israel stood firm." It is probably also significant that the passage of Deuteronomy from which Jesus' responses are drawn begins with the Šema', the text from **Deut 6:4-5** recited daily in Jewish worship which requires Israel to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength;*" it is precisely that **total commitment to God** that this wilderness experience is designed to test.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Beware of offers that promise things that God has not promised.

1. Super results. "Follow these methods," a youth leader is told, "and the size of your youth group will triple." "Raise your family this way," parents are told, "and your children will be obedient and follow Christ." "Use our fundraising plan," church leaders are told, "and you will raise so much money that your building fund goal will be exceeded."

2. Instant results. "Your ministry doesn't have to take years to develop," a seminary graduate is told. "Get a successful ministry now! Not later!"

3. Recognition and importance. "Be significant for God," we are told. "Be a leader in your church. Have impact for Christ. That's what successful Christians do."

4. No suffering. "God wants you to be blessed," Christians everywhere are being told. "Expect happiness and prosperity." Perhaps the most popular form this message takes in our circles today is fulfillment. "Enter this ministry," we are told, "and find fulfillment like you've never had before." Anytime you are offered a fulfilling ministry in this church or anywhere else, watch out! Somebody is trying to sell you something.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now let me sum up in just a sentence, what is meant by the temptation from the standpoint of the argument of the Gospel of Matthew? It's evident by virtue of our Lord's victory in the temptation, that he is seen to be **qualified morally** to be the Davidic sovereign. If there was any question about his moral qualifications, they vanish in the victory of the struggle with Satan.

And second, he is perfectly qualified morally to be our Savior, impeccable in his holiness and righteousness, as well as loving in the plan and will of God. It's interesting that Milton concluded his *Paradise Lost* with this.

And finally the Lord Jesus is seen to be perfectly qualified morally to be a sympathetic high priest. I know that you often think that your hope in the Christian life, when you run into difficulty, is to run into some other Christian and speak to them about your spiritual needs and troubles. I do not want to discourage you from doing this as occasion may suggest it. But I do want to suggest to you that the important counseling is done by the Lord Jesus himself. And the great psychologist and psychiatrist, the great source of truth and guidance for the Christian, is our great High Priest in heaven.

TEXT: Matthew 4:12-25

TITLE: SUMMARY OF POWERFUL IMPACT OF EARLY GALILEAN MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:

**MANIFESTING THE LIGHT OF JESUS TO A WORLD LOST IN DARKNESS
REQUIRES COMMITTED DISCIPLESHIP, EFFECTIVE SOUL WINNING AND
IMPACTFUL KINGDOM WORDS AND WORKS**

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The preliminary events are over, and it is time for Jesus to engage in his messianic mission. Like **Mark 1:14**, Matthew begins after John the Baptist is imprisoned; **John 1–5** shows that Jesus' ministry actually began earlier, interspersing ministry in Judea and Galilee before moving to Capernaum. So the Synoptic Gospels actually begin later in Jesus' ministry.

Irving Jensen: Matthew's reporting skips most of the first year of Jesus' ministry. Only John reports the early Judean ministry of that year (**John 1:19 – 4:42**). The passage in this unit opens **Jesus' Galilean ministry**, beginning the second year of His mission.

E. Michael Green: Fresh from his baptism and temptation, Jesus **launches his public ministry**. Matthew stresses the fact that it continues that of John. John is arrested by Herod, and imprisoned in the terrible dungeons of Machaerus; Jesus immediately and boldly replaces him. John preached repentance, and that is precisely the subject of Jesus' preaching. Not for the first time, nor for the last, does Matthew stress the **continuity** of Jesus' work with all that had gone before. Very soon he will expand on the content of Jesus' teaching, but first of all he gives us some indication of his **initial impact** and the characteristics of the budding ministry.

J. C. Ryle: We have in these verses the beginning of our Lord's ministry among men. He enters on His labors among a dark and ignorant people. He chooses men to be His companions and disciples. He confirms His ministry by miracles which rouse the attention of all Syria and draw multitudes to hear Him.

John MacArthur: Jesus is the day star. Jesus is the bright and morning star. Jesus is the One of whom Malachi said, "*The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.*" And "*the sun*" there is spelled s-u-n, and that is the great reality of this tremendous text in Matthew. Look again at **verse 16**, "*The people who sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.*" You see, Matthew sees the darkness of man, and he calls **the light of Jesus Christ** to bear upon the darkness of man, and here he's really quoting the great prophet Isaiah, as we shall see in a few moments. This is how Matthew introduces the ministry of Jesus. It is the **light dawning on the darkness**. . .

Jesus had a clear, explicit plan. The plan was this: by **words** and **works** He would establish His deity. By the things that He did and the things that He said, He would **make manifest** who He really was.

Walter Wilson: With John off the stage, Jesus returns to Galilee, his relocation from Nazareth to Capernaum according with biblical prophecy, thereby likening the advent of his public ministry

to the dawning of a new age in salvation history, an age that brings light to all people, even the gentiles. Like John, Jesus proclaims a message of repentance. Unlike John, he also calls disciples who will “*follow*” him in his journeys through Galilee and share in his ministry, summoning them with irresistible authority. Before they can “*fish*” for other disciples, however, these fishermen must abandon both their livelihood and their familial connections, thereby becoming “brothers” of both Jesus and other members of the messianic movement. As they accompany Jesus, they learn how the ministry of the kingdom includes acts of both word and deed, the latter coming to expression especially in miracles of healing, which attract large crowds from throughout the region. An appropriate audience is assembled, then, for the delivery of the Messiah’s first major address.

I. (:12-17) THE LIGHT DAWNS IN THE DARKNESS OF GALILEE -- BEGINNING THE CAPERNAUM MINISTRY

Donald Hagner: This passage serves as an important **transition**, bringing Jesus to Galilee where his ministry is to have its formal beginning. Jesus has been prepared by the baptism and the temptation in the wilderness, the stage is fully set, and now comes the word that John has been arrested: the work of the forerunner is complete. Jesus comes to Nazareth and to Capernaum beside the sea, and in these regions, so significant in their correspondence to the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus begins to proclaim the presence of the kingdom by word and deed: a great light appears to those who sit in darkness. Thus, as **G. Dalman** (Sacred Sites and Ways [London: SPCK, ET 1935] 183) puts it, “the loveliest lake of Palestine remains the place where God’s redeeming power appeared to men for the first time on earth in a new guise, like a light, and thus was the prophetic word (**Isa 8:23; 9:1**) concerning the great light in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali abundantly fulfilled.” The gospel in its essence is the proclamation of **the good news of the dawning of God’s rule**. With that rule begins a new frame of salvation-history, one closely related to the eschaton itself.

A. (:12-16) Relocation to Capernaum in Galilee to Bring Light to a People in Need

1. (:12) Withdrawing from Judea

*“Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody,
He withdrew into Galilee;”*

R. T. France: The continuity between John and Jesus is recognized by the link made here, and yet there is a clear sense of discontinuity, of a new and different ministry beginning in a new location. This “*withdrawal*” was in part a matter of **political wisdom**: in view of John’s conflict with Antipas his “successor” could not expect to be safe in the same area, especially if, as **Josephus** tells us (Ant. 18:118), Antipas saw the baptizing movement as a potential source of sedition. Galilee was, of course, also under Antipas, but an itinerant preacher touring the Galilean villages was a less obvious target for political concern than John’s centripetal campaign by the Jordan. News of John’s fate will again cause Jesus to “withdraw” in 14:13.

John Phillips: In Jesus’ day nine cities bordered the lake and a busy life went on all around it. Township ran into township about the feet of the green western hills, and along the shore there were docks and harbors. Farmers elbowed fishermen; dockworkers jostled coopers and shipwrights. Fishing and fish curing were big business, employing thousands of families and making Galilee famous in the Roman world long before the Gospels were written. An intricate system of aqueducts carried water to the farms and orchards. There were dyeworks at Magdala

and pottery kilns and shipyards at Capernaum. Presiding over the whole scene was the regal city of Tiberias with its magnificent Herodian palace, where Greek sculptures shone in the sun and reminded the Jews that their land was in the hands of the Gentiles. Walking the roads of Galilee, a Jew would meet long caravans heading south to the fords of Jordan. He would meet Rome's marching cohorts encased in iron, and their officers richly arrayed in armor adorned with purple and gold. He would meet Phoenician merchants bringing the treasures of lands across the sea to the bazaars and markets of a hundred towns. He would see chariots of the wealthy, troops of gladiators, and bands of roving entertainers coming to play before the cosmopolitans of Caesarea, Tiberias, and Decapolis. This was "*Galilee of the Gentiles*" (**Matthew 4:15**), as the proud Judeans contemptuously termed it. This was where Jesus chose to live.

John MacArthur: Well, so Jesus chose Galilee. The whole idea must have been just **offensive to Jerusalem Jews**. That the Messiah would settle in Capernaum of Galilee. You've gotta be kidding. There are no theologians there. That's a place where people are farmers and fishermen. The outstanding Jewish minds were in Jerusalem. The revelation of God was to be in Jerusalem. That was the sacred city and the only fitting place for the Messiah. It must have been as offensive to them as was the announcement of John, here in the fourth chapter, when he announces to the whole world when he wrote his gospel that the first person Jesus ever revealed His messiahship to was a Samaritan.

Galilee? A Galilean messiah was ludicrous. In John chapter 7, verse 40, "*Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, 'Of a truth this is the Prophet.'*" *Many of them said that. 'Others said, 'This is the Christ.' But some said, 'Shall Christ come out of Galilee?'' Galilee?! 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?''* And later on that same crowd, in **John 7:52**, "*Answered and said to him, 'Are you also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee arises no prophet.'*" What are you talkin' about?

2. (:13) Settling in Capernaum

"and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali."

R. T. France: Jesus' relocation (the combination of *kataleipō* and *katoikeō* indicates a decisive move away to a new home) took him from the rather remote hill-village in which he had been brought up (see on **2:23** for Nazareth) to a busy lake-side town set among other thriving villages which depended largely on the productive fishing industry of the Lake of Galilee. He thus gained a more public platform for his proclamation, as well as escaping the suspicion attaching to a local boy who becomes a celebrity (see on **13:54–58**). Matthew records only one return to Nazareth, whereas Capernaum and the neighboring lakeshore communities will be the setting for most of the Galilean ministry. It is sobering to note, however, that even Capernaum, favored with so much of Jesus' presence, will be denounced as **unresponsive** in **11:23–24**.

Capernaum was an important settlement on the north-western shore of the lake, and the presence there of a centurion (**8:5**) and a customs post (**9:9**) indicates that it was a local administrative center. The population in the first century was perhaps as high as 10,000, substantially bigger than Nazareth. While Capernaum had its resident Roman officials, it was a traditionally Jewish town, very different from the newly-established Hellenistic city of Tiberias a little further down the Western shore. While Luke and Josephus more correctly speak of the "*Lake*" of Galilee, Matthew, Mark and John consistently refer to this inland fresh-water lake as a "*sea*" (reflecting the OT name *yām-kinneret*, **Num 34:11** etc.), but in my translation (except in **v. 15**, see

comments below) and in the commentary, I have thought it less misleading to modern readers to use “lake.”

In the traditional tribal allocation after the conquest the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali shared the area between the Lake of Galilee and the territory of Asher along the Mediterranean coast. The lakeshore area originally belonged to Naphtali, while Nazareth was in Zebulun, but tribal areas had little actual relevance by NT times. Matthew combines the two tribes in order to echo Isaiah’s prophecy.

Grant Osborne: The importance of the tribal names is seen in the **chiasm** in vv. **13b–15**:

A Galilee
B by the sea
C Zebulun and Naphtali
C' Zebulun and Naphtali
B' toward the sea
A' Galilee

3. (:14-16) Fulfilling OT Prophecy of the Dawning of a Great Light

“This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 15 ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- 16 The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, And to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a light dawned.’”

Van Parunak: Isaiah promised that the **northern districts**, which were the first to feel the oppression of Mesopotamian invaders, would also be the first to enjoy the blessing of the coming kingdom. When our Lord moves from Nazareth (in Zebulun) to Capernaum (in Naphtali), both of the tribes mentioned by Isaiah are associated with his ministry.

R. T. France: Matthew sets the geographical scene more carefully than Mark, both by noting Jesus’ removal from Nazareth to Capernaum and by giving it theological significance by means of another formula-quotation. The effect of his reference to **Isa 9:1–2** is to designate Galilee as **the place of light**, as opposed to the darkness which we shall eventually find to be settled over Judea. The dawning light is heralded in Jesus’ proclamation, and the succeeding section of the gospel set in and around Galilee will be essentially one of light and hope, as light shines on the people at large and they respond gladly to it, despite the hostility of some whose special interest keeps them from welcoming it. Galilee is the place where the mission will be enthusiastically launched and developed (and from which eventually, after the conflict and rejection in Judea, the mission will be relaunched to reach all nations, **28:16–20**). Even as early as this there is a further hint (cf **1:3–6; 2:1–12**, and the Abrahamic theme of **1:1; 3:9**) that Jesus’ messianic mission extends beyond Israel alone, in Isaiah’s loaded phrase “*Galilee of the nations.*”

John Walvoord: These prophecies [commenting on **Is. 9**], as interpreted in their normal literal sense, predicted fulfillment of the expectation of a kingdom on earth after the second coming of Christ in keeping with the premillennial interpretation of Scripture. There was nothing in this passage that corresponded to the present reign of Christ on earth or the present position of Christ in heaven, the interpretation of amillenarians. In this passage, as in many passages in the Old Testament, the first and second coming of Christ were not distinguished and the Child who was born (**Isa 9:6**) in Bethlehem in His first coming will be the same Person described as the

Everlasting King who will reign forever (**Isa 9:7**). The theme of the future kingdom of Christ on earth was a familiar subject of the prophecies of Isaiah (**Isaiah 11:4; Isa 16:5; Isa 28:5-6, 17; Isa 32:16; Isa 33:5; Isa 42:1, 3-4; Isa 51:5**).

Warren Wiersbe: The “*light*” that Isaiah promised was the Light of the Word of God, as well as the Light of His perfect life and compassionate ministry.

G. Campbell Morgan: Now He made Capernaum His base of operations, that neglected city living under the shadow of death. When He came, men saw Life at its highest, and its best, according to a Divine Ideal; the Light of Love flashed over their sorrows and their sins; the Light of Truth illuminated the dark corners, and revealed evil things. There, in the midst of the darkness and in the midst of the need, He struck the key-note of His ministry.

William Barclay: Of all parts of Palestine, Galilee was **most open to new ideas**. Josephus says of the Galilaeans: ‘They were ever fond of innovations, and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions.’ They were always ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection. They were notoriously quick in temper and given to quarrelling. Yet for all that, they were the most brave and honourable people. ‘The Galilaeans’, said **Josephus**, ‘have never been destitute of courage.’ ‘Cowardice was never a characteristic of the Galilaeans.’ ‘They were ever more anxious for honour than for gain.’ The inborn characteristics of the Galilaeans were such as to make them most fertile ground for a new gospel to be preached to them.

This openness to new ideas was due to certain facts.

(1) The name Galilee comes from the Hebrew word *galil* which means a **circle**. The full name of the area was *Galilee of the Gentiles*. In his commentary on Matthew, **A. Plummer** wishes to take that to mean ‘heathenish Galilee’. But the phrase came from the fact that Galilee was literally **surrounded by Gentiles**. On the west, the Phoenicians were its neighbours. To the north and the east, there were the Syrians. And even to the south, there lay the territory of the Samaritans. Galilee was in fact the one part of Palestine that was inevitably in touch with non-Jewish influences and ideas. Galilee was bound to be **open to new ideas** in a way that no other part of Palestine was.

(2) The **great roads of the world** passed through Galilee, as we saw when we were thinking of the town of Nazareth. The Way of the Sea led from Damascus through Galilee right down to Egypt and to Africa. The Road to the East led through Galilee away out to the frontiers. The traffic of the world passed through Galilee. Down in the south, Judaea is tucked into a corner, isolated and secluded. As it has been well said, ‘**Judaea is on the way to nowhere: Galilee is on the way to everywhere.**’ Judaea could erect a fence and keep all foreign influence and all new ideas out; Galilee could never do that. Into Galilee, the new ideas were bound to come.

(3) Galilee’s geographical position had affected its history. Again and again it had been **invaded and conquered**, and the tides of the other nations had often flowed over it and had sometimes engulfed it.

B. (:17) Repentance Preached to Prepare Sinners for the Kingdom

*“From that time Jesus began to preach and say,
‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

Grant Osborne: “*From that time*” (ἀπὸ τότε) is a **significant transition** found three times in this gospel (4:17; 16:21; 26:16) and indicates a **new start**. Several believe that “*from that time Jesus began to*” (4:17; 16:21) indicates the major sections of Matthew’s gospel and divide the book accordingly (1:1 – 4:16; 4:17 – 16:20; 16:21 – 28:20). While this is viable, it probably reads too much into the phrase. More likely, it indicates a new phase to Jesus’ ministry. The time of preparation is over, and Jesus begins to proclaim his kingdom message.

R. T. France: If the announcement of “*God’s kingship*” in v. 17 might lead the reader to expect some dramatic development in world history, the character of these first recruits offers a different perspective: four local fishermen do not sound like a world-changing task-force. The **parable of the mustard seed** (13:31–32) will spell out the paradoxical character and insignificant beginnings of the kingdom of God.

Warren Wiersbe: In the New Testament, the word kingdom means “**rule, reign, authority**” rather than a place or a specific realm. The phrase “*kingdom of heaven*” refers to the **rule of God**. The Jewish leaders wanted a political leader who would deliver them from Rome, but Jesus came to bring spiritual rule to the hearts of people. This does not deny the reality of a future kingdom as we have already noted.

Leon Morris: Jesus began with the same emphasis as John the Baptist had. The two go together: if the kingdom of God is near, then clearly people cannot be complacent. They must prepare for that kingdom, and that means repenting of their sins. Jesus calls on them to realize that they are unfit for the kingdom of heaven and to repent accordingly. Such preaching is a clarion call to action, not a recipe for slothful complacency. We should not overlook the importance of this call to repentance at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry; everything else follows from that. Matthew has often been seen as one who stresses the importance of good works, and of course he does. But this must not be held in such a form that his emphasis on grace is missed. From the beginning Jesus took it for granted that people are sinners, and accordingly his first message was that they must repent. Only so would they know the forgiveness he came to bring. . .

There is a sense in which God has acted decisively in sending his Son: the kingdom is here in his words and deeds. But there is another sense in which the culmination of the kingdom in all its fulness is a future reality: the best is yet to be. Both truths are important.

William Barclay: Finally, Matthew gives us a brief one-sentence summary of the message which Jesus brought. The Authorized Version and Revised Standard Version both say that Jesus began **to preach**. The word preach has come down in the world; it is all too unfortunately connected in the minds of many people with boredom. The word in Greek is *kērussein*, which is the word for a **herald’s proclamation from a king**. *Kērux* is the Greek word for herald, and the herald was the man who brought a message direct from the king.

This word tells us of certain characteristics of the preaching of Jesus, and these are characteristics which should be in all preaching.

(1) The herald had in his voice a **note of certainty**. There was no doubt about his message; he did not come with perhapses and maybes and probablys; he came with a definite message. The German poet **Goethe** had it: ‘Tell me of your certainties: I have doubts enough of my own.’ **Preaching is the proclamation of certainties**, and we cannot make others sure of that about which we ourselves are in doubt.

(2) The herald had in his voice the **note of authority**. He was speaking for the king; he was laying down and announcing the king's law, the king's command and the king's decision. As was said of a great preacher, 'He did not cloudily guess; he knew.' Preaching, as it has been put, is the **application of prophetic authority to the present situation**.

(3) The herald's message **came from a source beyond himself**; it came **from the king**. Preaching speaks from a source beyond the preacher. It is not the expression of one individual's personal opinions; it is the voice of God transmitted through that person to the people. It was with the voice of God that Jesus spoke to men and women.

John MacArthur: Can I add one little note here? I like to mention that Jesus preached, because I believe in preaching, and I'm always running into people who aren't sure we oughtta preach. They're not sure there's a place for preaching. Maybe we oughtta just have small group studies and things like that. Jesus preached. The word is *kruss*. It means "to proclaim." The fine Bible commentary writer named **Lenski** says this: "The point to be noted is that to preach is not to argue or reason or dispute or convince by intellectual proof against all of which a keen intellect may bring counter argument. We simply state in public, or testify to all men the truth, which God bids us state. No argument can assail the truth presented in this announcement or testimony. Men either believe the truth, as all sane men should, or refuse to believe it, as only fools venture to do," end quote. **It's a great thing to preach.**

II. (:18-22) THE RADICAL CALL TO TOTAL DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT AND THE MISSION OF SOUL WINNING

A. (:18-20) Calling of Peter and Andrew

R. T. France: Hitherto Jesus, while briefly involved with John and others by the Jordan, has been presented as operating alone. But it is significant that his first recorded action is to gather a group of followers, who will commit themselves to a total change of lifestyle which involves them in joining Jesus as his essential support group for the whole period of his public ministry. From this point on we shall not read stories about Jesus alone, but stories about Jesus and his disciples. Wherever he goes they will go; their presence with Jesus, even if not explicitly mentioned, is assumed. While the Twelve will not be formally listed until **10:1-4**, the stories from here on will assume a wider group of disciples than just these first four. They will be the primary audience for his teaching (**5:1-2**) and witnesses of his works of power, but they are also called to be his active helpers in the task of "fishing for people," as we shall discover in **ch. 10**. The first time Jesus will be left alone after this point will be when eventually the disciples desert him in the garden of Gethsemane (26:56). Until then, Matthew's story is not only that of the Messiah, but also of the messianic community which is being formed around him. The placing of this incident right at the beginning makes it clear that that was Jesus' intention.

Grant Osborne: Jesus calls his first followers and immediately gives them a new kind of ministry, fishing for people. There are three major points here:

- (1) The creative force in discipleship is Jesus, and the task of every follower is to surrender to his active presence.
- (2) The purpose of discipleship is evangelistic, to learn a whole new type of "fishing."
- (3) The demand is for radical surrender, to leave everything in order to follow Christ.

The emphasis is also on their **radical response** to the call. Simon and Andrew “*immediately*” (v. 20) leave both vocation and home. This introduces the theme of radical discipleship in Matthew; Jesus has **absolute priority** over occupation and family. This is also shown when we compare **1 Kgs 19:19–21** (the call of Elisha), where Elisha was plowing his field when Elijah called him. There he was allowed to kiss his parents good-bye, while here and in **8:21–22** there is no time to bid family farewell. The radical nature of Jesus’ demand leaves no room for farewells.

David Platt: Now let me be very careful here: I am not saying, and I would not say based on the whole of the New Testament, that all followers of Jesus must lose their careers, sell or give away all their possessions, leave their families behind, and physically die for the gospel. But the New Testament is absolutely clear that for all who follow Jesus, comfort and certainty in this world are no longer your concerns. Your career revolves around whatever Jesus calls you to do and however He wants to use you to spread the good news of the kingdom. Your possessions are not your own, and you forsake material pleasure in this world in order to live for eternal treasure in the world to come. And this could mean that you sell or give away everything you have. After all, position is no longer your priority.

Donald Hagner: But for Matthew, the placement of the passage is also important in that it fits in with his emphasis on the importance and nature of **discipleship**, something he will stress in the major discourse that follows the brief description of the ministry of Jesus in vv 23–25. Thus the evangelist uses the tradition for historical purposes, showing the way in which Jesus gathered disciples, but also for pastoral purposes directly relevant to his readers. That is, the calling of these disciples serves as a **model of the nature of true discipleship generally**. The call of God through Jesus is sovereign and absolute in its authority; the response of those who are called is to be both immediate and absolute, involving a complete break with old loyalties. The actual shape of this break with the past will undoubtedly vary from individual to individual, but that there must be a fundamental, radical reorientation of a person’s priorities is taken for granted. As the first disciples were called and responded, so are Matthew’s readers called to respond. Such response is of primary importance if they are to participate in the new reality of the kingdom. And with discipleship comes the task of bringing others into the kingdom—a task for which Jesus equips those whom he calls (cf. **28:18–20**).

1. (:18-19) Initiating Call by Jesus of Peter and Andrew

*“And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.
19 And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”*

Robert Gundry: The word for “*net*” means a net with weights attached to its perimeter. When cast into the sea it would enclose fish as it sank to the bottom. Then the fishermen drew the weighted perimeter together to prevent the fish from escaping and raised the net containing the fish.

S. Lewis Johnson: So, if the king is to have a kingdom, it would be natural to expect that he should have disciples. So as he begins his ministry, he begins to call his disciples. And incidentally, you notice that he calls them.

John MacArthur: In one of his books, **S. D. Gordon** pictures Gabriel as engaged in a dialogue with Christ shortly after the ascension. The angel is asking Christ about the plans for evangelism, and Jesus said, “Well I asked Peter and James and John and Andrew and a few

others to make it the business of their lives to tell people. Then, those others would tell others, and finally the whole world would hear the story and feel the power of it.” In the legend, Gabriel said, “But suppose, they don’t tell others. What then?” Jesus answered quietly, “Oh, I have no other plans. I’m counting on them. **I have no other plans.**”

Have you ever analyzed how Jesus trained soul winners? Let me just give you some brief insights. Our time is nearly gone. First, listen to this. As you look at the New Testament, this is what you find. How did Jesus win people? They watched Him. He didn’t give them 45 lectures. **He just did it, and they watched and they learned.** . .

For three years, Jesus trained His men how to be available, how to have no favorites, how to be sensitive, how to secure a public confession, how to use love and tenderness and how to take time and to apply everything they ever knew as fishermen; patience, perseverance, courage, an eye for the right moment, and hide themselves in the midst of all of it. I think whoever said it is right when he said, “Evangelism is not taught as much as it’s caught,” like everything else in the Christian life.

2. (:20) Immediate Response of Total Commitment

“And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.”

E. Michael Green: There may have been something about fishermen, too, that made them particularly suitable for the ‘fishing for people’ that they would be doing in future. A good fisherman in those waters needs courage, for dangerous squalls erupt on that treacherous lake. He needs perseverance, patience and flexibility in the use of different methods (three types of fishing-net were used). He must keep himself unobtrusive so as not to frighten the fish away, and he must have a sense of timing. All these qualities were essential in the new kind of fishing to which this landsman introduced them.

Warren Wiersbe: Why would Jesus call so many fishermen to His side? For one thing, fishermen were busy people; usually professional fishermen did not sit around doing nothing. They either sorted their catch, prepared for a catch, or mended their equipment. The Lord needs busy people who are not afraid to work.

Fishermen have to be courageous and patient people. It certainly takes patience and courage to win others to Christ. Fishermen must have skill; they must learn from others where to find the fish and how to catch them. Soul winning demands skill too. These men had to work together, and the work of the Lord demands cooperation. But most of all, fishing demands faith: Fishermen cannot see the fish and are not sure their nets will enclose them. Soul winning requires faith and alertness too, or we will fail.

B. (:21-22) Calling of James and John

1. (:21) Initiating Call by Jesus of James and John

“And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them.”

2. (:22) Immediate Response

“And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

III. (:23-25) SUMMARY OF POWERFUL IMPACT OF HIS INITIAL MINISTRY

Walter Wilson: Like Matthew's other summary statements, the overview provided in 4:23–25 emphasizes the **scale** and **effectiveness** of Jesus's ministry, special attention being drawn to his acts of healing. The general impression is not only of a man on the move but also of a man whose renown spawns a far-flung movement, with people streaming to Jesus from many places. While the preceding story had illustrated the impact of Jesus's words, here the focus is on both **his words** and **his deeds**, the complementarity of the two passages establishing a pattern that will be replicated more fully in the ensuing chapters, where a presentation of "*the Messiah of the word*" (5:1 – 7:29) is joined to a presentation of "*the Messiah of the deed*" (8:1 – 9:35). The fact that the wording of 4:23 corresponds closely to that of 9:35 supports this feature, **the two verses creating a frame around the intervening material that encourages the reader to interpret its contents as a unity**. Accordingly, our passage can be understood as a heading for what follows, with the contents of **chapters 5–9** providing specific illustrations of what 4:23–25 portrays in general terms. In the depiction of the Messiah's "*deeds*," we encounter a new element, the practice of healing distinguishing Jesus from John but (eventually) binding him to the disciples he has just called (cf. 10:1, 8). No doubt the expectation that the messianic era would usher in a time of human health and wholeness would have helped generate a sense of anticipation in this regard.

A. (:23) Three Aspects of Ministry – Impactful Kingdom Words and Works

1. Teaching Ministry

“And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,

Michael Wilkins: Approximately forty-five miles from north to south and twenty-five miles from east to west, Galilee must have been intensively cultivated and extensively populated in Jesus' day. Conservative estimates place the population at around 300,000 people in the two hundred or more villages and towns in Galilee, which make for a large citizenry to whom Jesus presents the message of the kingdom.

R. T. France: The mention of "*proclaiming the good news*" alongside "*teaching*" in the synagogues is perhaps not simply repetition but rather distinguishes informal preaching to gathered crowds from the more formal opportunity to speak by invitation in a regular weekly assembly; the content is however unlikely to have differed significantly.

E. Michael Green: First, he **preached** (17, 23). The word *kēryssein* was used to describe the work of the herald in a Greek city. It involved bold, clear, challenging proclamation. When the herald had something to proclaim, people had better listen. It was important. It came with the authority of the civic authorities. Effective preaching today has an **arresting quality** and a sense of **authority** that far transcend the personality of the preacher.

Secondly, Jesus gave himself to **teaching** (23), explaining the difficulties people found in his preaching, clearing up misunderstandings and changing attitudes. Teaching is directed primarily towards informing the **mind**; preaching towards reaching the **will**.

2. Preaching Ministry

“and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,”

3. Healing Ministry

“and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.”

Grant Osborne: Christ has now fully prepared for his ministry proper. He has “*fulfilled all righteousness*” by being baptized (3:15), proven himself to be Son of God by passing the test against Satan, moved to Galilee in fulfillment of Scripture, and chosen a nucleus of his followers. **Now he is ready to begin**, and Matthew wants to tell of his actions as well as his teaching, i.e., his **works** and his **words**. So we begin with a summary of his early ministry in Galilee. Matthew centers on Jesus’ message before an extended narration of his powerful ministry of healing, nature miracles, and exorcisms (chs. 8–9). In this sense 4:23–25 is **transitional**, concluding the preliminary stages of Jesus’ ministry in chs. 3–4 and introducing the Sermon on the Mount in chs. 5–7.

Leon Morris: the impression Matthew leaves is that of the **breadth of Jesus’ ministry** at this time, not of its narrowness. It is better to understand it as a reference to the general populace. Matthew stresses that Jesus **healed them all**, a fact that differentiates him from the healers of antiquity (or, for that matter, in modern times). Those healers had their successes and their failures, but Jesus had complete mastery over illness; he healed all who came to him.

Charles Swindoll: Since the practices of teaching and preaching were able to convey Jesus’ central message, **why did He engage in healing sickness and disease?**

- First, the miracles Jesus did proved that He had **divine authority** in His teaching and preaching. People couldn’t reject His message without rejecting God Himself.
- Second, the miracles demonstrated that **God is compassionate**; He cares about not only spiritual needs but also physical needs.
- Third, the miracles verified that **Jesus was the prophesied Messiah**, whose mission included the ushering in of a kingdom in which sickness, disease, suffering, and death would be vanquished.
- Finally, His miracles proved that the **offer of the kingdom to Israel was legitimate** — the One who had authority over sickness, disease, and demonic forces could be taken seriously when He offered the kingdom of God to those who repented and accepted Him as Messiah.

B. (:24) Growing Reputation of His Healing Ministry

1. Spreading News

And the news about Him went out into all Syria;”

2. Severe Disabilities

“and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics;”

Craig Blomberg: Matthew enumerates several categories of maladies that Jesus cures. Examples of all of these will subsequently be illustrated. The most striking on the list is **demon possession**, which Matthew carefully distinguishes from ordinary diseases, including epilepsy (“*those having seizures*”). Contrary to what many today believe, the ancient world regularly and carefully distinguished between afflictions ascribed to demons and other forms of illness. Demon possession was viewed as a unique situation in which an evil spirit actually took control of an individual, acting and speaking through that person in at least partial independence of his

or her own volition and consciousness. Almost everyone in ancient societies believed in the reality of demon possession, and striking examples of it remain common enough today so as to be deniable only through severe naturalistic prejudice. Jesus' miracle working understandably attracts crowds, but those in the crowds will need to be instructed on what **true discipleship** involves if they are to become genuine followers.

John Nolland: The listing is not particularly intended to specify disease types; it is rather to underline the **massive range and scale** of Jesus' healing activity. In his survey of disease, Matthew's thought ranges over the pain and suffering involved, the imprisoning control of evil spirits, the episodic attacks of maladies such as epilepsy (the word used points to folk belief that the influence of the moon was involved, and it may well have a wider reference than to epilepsy), and the awful limitations imposed by paralysis.

A thread runs from the uses of 'whole' and 'every' in v. 23 ('the whole of Galilee', 'every disease and every sickness') through the uses of 'whole' and 'all' in v. 24 ('all those sick', 'the whole of Syria') and on in v. 25 to the list of all the parts of Jewish Palestine. Matthew is concerned to create an image of **comprehensiveness**, clearly in the interests of asserting the **scale of the significance of Jesus**.

3. Supernatural Healings

"and He healed them."

Grant Osborne: The primary thrust is the incredible extent of Jesus' ministry. He impacted everyone he met and healed as many as came to him. His reputation exploded to the point that people were coming to him from everywhere. Yet it is not just the power of his ministry but also the compassion of his ministry that is so meaningful. We will see this "hermeneutic of love" again, as he was willing to break religious taboos and traditional demands (e.g., healing on a Sabbath) whenever there was a need. He healed everyone he could, each person who was brought to him. He cared deeply about them all.

C. (:25) Comprehensive Geographic Breadth of Ministry

"And great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan."

R. T. France: In view of the various sources of opposition to Jesus which we shall encounter in **chs. 11–16** (even including the Galilean communities of Nazareth, **13:53–58**, and of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, **11:20–24**), it is important for Matthew's readers to keep in mind this overall impression of **general enthusiasm** for Jesus' Galilean ministry which he has provided at the outset.

Grant Osborne: Every **great revival** in history has been accompanied by great excitement and innumerable converts, from the Josianic revival in **2 Chr 34:29 – 35:19**, or the Wesley revival in England, or the two great awakenings in America. Jesus saw similar results, with people coming from everywhere to see him (even more, see **Mark 1:21–45**). This kind of "frenzy" is needed today. It is happening in China, and we desperately need to develop teachers there who can harness the energy and direct it to worldwide evangelism. Yet we also need that energy for the Lord in the Western world as well.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Isaiah prophecy that light would dawn in those northern regions?
- 2) How should you respond to people today who tend to denigrate the value of preaching and seek to promote more non-authoritative types of interactions over God's truth?
- 3) Why shouldn't we expect a lot of kingdom type miracles in today's church context?
- 4) What do you think about the following statement: "The New Testament pattern for discipleship is more about 'go and tell' than 'come and see.'"

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Platt: What does it mean to follow Jesus as a genuine disciple?

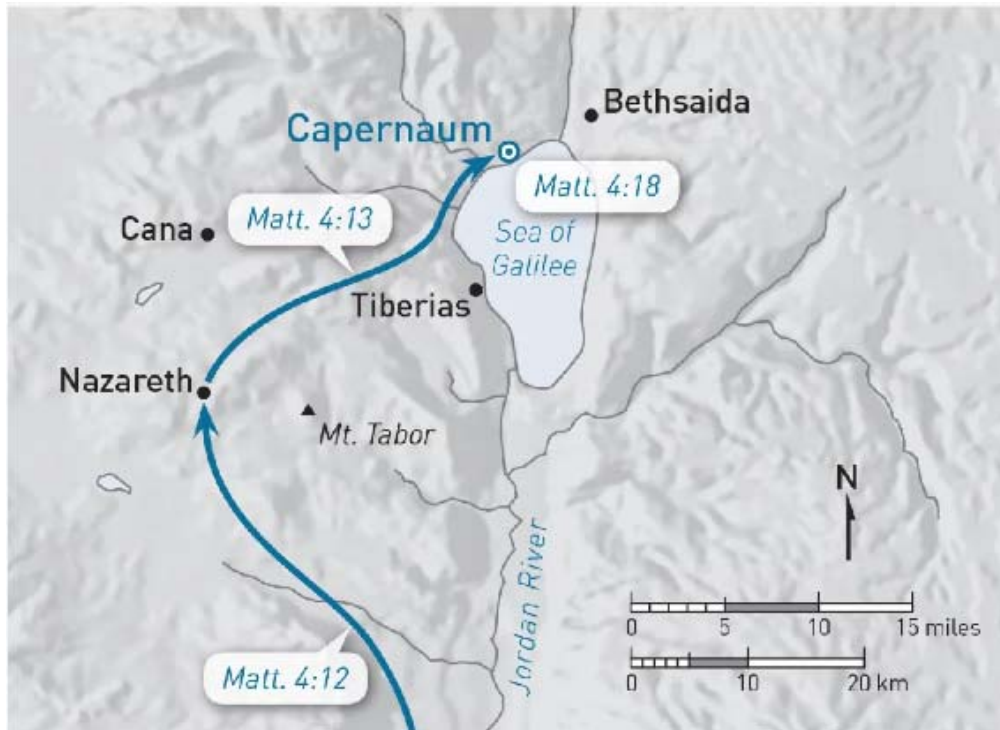
Follow

- A. Live with radical abandonment for His glory.
 1. We leave behind all things.
 2. We live for one thing: to honor the King.
- B. Live with joyful dependence on His grace.
 1. He takes the initiative to choose us.
 2. He provides the power to use us.
 3. He gets the glory through us.
- C. Live with faithful adherence to His person.
 1. We are not casual listeners.
 2. We are not convinced listeners.
 3. We are committed learners and followers.
- D. Live with total trust in His authority.
 1. He is the Master of every domain in our lives.
 2. He is the Lord of every detail in our lives.
- E. Live with urgent obedience to His mission.
 1. Every follower of Jesus is a fisher of men.
 2. Every disciple is a disciple-maker.
 3. This is an unconventional plan that demands a universal response.

Will You Follow Jesus?

- A. Consider the cost of discipleship.
- B. Consider the cost of non-discipleship.

Charles Swindoll: After departing the Jordan River Valley in the vicinity of Jericho, Jesus returned briefly to Nazareth, then ministered around the Sea of Galilee, establishing His base in the city of Capernaum. He would call His first disciples along the seacoast.



Ray Pritchard: Somewhere in my past I heard the story about a man who was a phenomenal fisherman. He was so good that his fame spread far and wide. When everyone else was catching two or three fish a day he would come back with two or three hundred. Eventually the local game warden decided to investigate because it just sounded too good to be true. On a certain day, the game warden showed up at the man's door, identified himself, and asked to go fishing with him. The man was agreeable to that and off they went to the lake. When they got into the boat, immediately the warden noticed that something didn't seem right. The man didn't have any fishing poles or bait. He didn't even have a tackle box. All he had was a small duffel bag.

So off they went, chatting about this and that until the man maneuvered the boat to the middle of the lake. Without a word, he turned off the motor, reached into the duffel bag and pulled out what looked like a stick of dynamite. Before the warden could say anything, he lit it and threw it into the water. It exploded with a mighty roar and stunned fish by the dozens floated to the surface. The man calmly started his boat and began gathering the fish in his net.

The warden said, "Now see here. This is highly illegal." But the man just laughed and steered the boat to another part of the lake. He did the same thing with a second stick of dynamite and sure enough more fish floated to the surface.

By this time the warden had seen enough. He said, "Mister, you've broken so many laws I can't even begin to count them." The man just laughed and pulled out another stick of dynamite. The warden kept on talking. "This is illegal possession of dynamite and illegal detonation of dangerous material and disturbing the peace and about a half-dozen other misdemeanors and felonies." While the warden was talking, the man calmly lit the stick of dynamite and handed it to the game warden. As he did he asked him the question fishermen always ask, "**Are you going to talk or are you going to fish?**"

That really is our problem when it comes to evangelism—too much talking and not enough fishing. We're good at talking; we're not so good at fishing. Most of the time we act as if Jesus said, "Follow me and we'll talk about fishing for men." So we read books and go to seminars and watch videotapes and take training sessions and listen to sermons (just like this one!).

We end up experts at talking about fishing for men. We know how to bait the hook and what kind of lure to use. We learn all about how to fish for the loud-mouth speckle-bellied atheist and which bait works with the salt-water Pharisee. And most of us have a tackle box full of memorized Scripture, clever questions and some very old tracts. Yes, we're good at talking about fishing.

Bob Deffinbaugh: I believe that Matthew has gone to considerable effort to **underscore the relationship Jesus had to Galilee.**

- Jesus' parents were from Galilee, and He would have been born there other than the providential guidance of God (in order to fulfill the prophecy that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea).
- Jesus was raised in Galilee. God directed Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, and then to Nazareth of Galilee. Jesus was a Galilean in that this was His home.
- Jesus began His earthly ministry in Galilee. He went from Galilee to Jerusalem.
- Many Galileans followed Jesus to Jerusalem, particularly His disciples and the women who accompanied Him.
- Most of Jesus' earthly ministry was in Galilee.
- Jesus met His disciples in Galilee, after His resurrection.

Matthew makes a point of letting His readers know that Jesus was from Galilee. He informs us that after His baptism and some preliminary ministry in Judea, Jesus withdrew to Galilee and from there He commenced His public teaching ministry, which would take Him to Jerusalem. He lets his readers know that Jesus not only went to Galilee, but that He was from Galilee – that is, He was a Galilean, as were His disciples. So what is the point or the purpose of this emphasis on Galilee?

First of all, I believe that His association with Galilee was part of His **humiliation as the Messiah**. Jesus humbled Himself to come to this earth in human flesh (**Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10**).

Second, I believe our Lord's association with Galilee is **consistent with our Lord's saving purpose**. As **Isaiah 9** described it, Galilee not only had a higher concentration of Gentiles than did Jerusalem or Judea, it was also a **place of great spiritual need**. The people were living in darkness. It was a place where people sat in the shadow of death. Upon such a needy place and people, the Light dawned. This is not to say that the people of Judea were more spiritual, or that they were less in need. It is to say that they did not perceive it to be this way. The people of Jerusalem and Judea saw themselves as those who were spiritually enlightened, those who were not in need. They were certainly wrong. . .

I call this "**the principle of inversion**." Jesus is drawn to those who are most aware of their need and those who are most despised by those who think themselves spiritual. By seeking out sinners, Jesus manifests divine grace, and thereby brings great glory to Himself.

J. Ligon Duncan: Notice **Jesus' miracles**. Those miracles, those **attesting signs** confirmed both His person, and His message. You remember Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the lamb of God, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. His miracles were proof of His person. Proof of His claims. They were also proof of His message of divine stamp of approval on the truth of the Gospel message which He preached.

By the way, have you ever reflected on the **different kind of miracles that Moses did** in comparison to Jesus' miracles? Moses' miracles, were primarily miracles of warning, judgment and destruction. Think of the ten plagues. Jesus' miracles were a **display of God's mercy**. Moses' miracles were a display of God's power in wrath and judgment. Jesus' miracles were a display of God's power in mercy and loving kindness on those who were needy. What better way to display the power of the New Covenant, than the healing mercies and miracles of Christ. Those miracles confirmed that He was the Messiah of prophecy. The Old Testament in passages, like **Isaiah 35** had told us that the Messiah would come, doing miracles. And so Jesus' miracles proved His claims to be the Messiah.

They also **proved that the kingdom had now arrived**, because the Old Testament prophets told us that when the Messiah came, and when He established His new kingdom, it would be shown forth with power and miracles. And so Jesus' healing miracles proved who He is and the truth of His message.

Notice also the **universal character** of these healings. Jesus heals in Galilee, a place where Jews and Gentiles were mixed and people come to Him to be healed from Syria, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea and from across the Jordan. People from all over come to Christ to be healed. Jesus healed all regardless of race or nationality and so showed Himself to be the Savior of the world.

Notice also the **types of healings** that the Lord Jesus did. In **verse 25**, we are told that Jesus in His ministry healed every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. A general word is used. Various diseases and torments to indicate that Jesus healed all sorts of things. But three specific words are used in that passage that I would like to point your attention to: demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics. Jesus did not simply, like some latter day television faith healers, heal vague aches and pains, headaches, armaches, backaches. Jesus healed the most deadly diseases known to His time, and He did it instantaneously and irrevocably by the power of God and He did it in the presence of His enemies who more than anyone else would have like to have proved Him a farce. And even those of the Pharisees, such as Nicodemus would come to Him at night in **John chapter 3**, and say, *Rabi, we know that you are from God, because nobody could do the things that you are doing. . .*

In those three particular healings, we are being told by Matthew, that Jesus was doing a redemptive work of **destroying the kingdom of Satan**. No longer would Satan have sway over people, over their hearts, in the dominion of sin. But Christ would destroy that dominion, and He Himself would set up the rule of the kingdom of God. Matthew is telling you this is the Son of God who has come to release you from captivity. **The Gospel's power in our lives is displayed in Jesus' healing power.**

John MacArthur: **Alexander McLaren**, that great preacher, said, quote, "It may be doubted whether we have an adequate notion of the immense number of Christ's miracles. Those recorded are but a small portion of those done. Those early ones were illustrations of the nature

of His kingdom. They were His first gifts to His kingdom's subjects," end quote. What a great thought. What a great thought. Those miracles were a taste of His kingdom, just like His words were. You wanna know what the kingdom is going to be like? Just check out all the miracles and multiply that a millionfold, and that's what the kingdom is going to be like. A miraculous, supernatural kingdom!

Those were **tastes of the kingdom**, and that's why in **Hebrews 6** the writer says, "*You have tasted the powers of the age to come.*" You've been in on the miracles. You've seen the signs and wonders and diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit that confirmed unto you the preaching of the gospel. Hebrews 2, 3, and 4. You've tasted of the age to come. That's why He condemned in **Matthew 13** those unbelieving Pharisees because they had seen the power of the kingdom, and they should have known this was the King. Listen, these were **kingly credentials**. These were **pre-kingdom manifestations of kingdom power** to prove to those people that He was the King and He would bring the kingdom. And the miracles and the teaching are so interwoven that you can't extract one from the other. . .

Now listen, beloved, I'm convinced that the only time these kind of miracles will again happen is in the next time, just before the kingdom comes. Not now. This is the parenthesis, but in that time, when God begins the re-gathering of Israel, the time of the Tribulation, and begins to set up His kingdom, then we're going to see these marvelous signs of the kingdom again. And when the kingdom comes in full bloom, the supernatural will take over. Miracle upon miracle will happen.

TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12

TITLE: *THE BEATITUDES TIED TO KINGDOM DISTINCTIVES*

BIG IDEA:

LIVING OUT KINGDOM DISTINCTIVES MEANS THAT ONE WILL ENJOY BIG-TIME BLESSINGS EVEN WHEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Rather than refer to this discipleship discourse as it is commonly known as “**The Sermon on the Mount**” I have chosen to label it **Kingdom Distinctives**. The focus should not be on the location of this oratorical masterpiece but on the unique content as it defines the citizens of the kingdom.

William Barclay: One great scholar called the Sermon on the Mount ‘the Ordination Address to the Twelve’. Just as young ministers have their task set out before them, when they are called to take charge of their first churches, so the Twelve received from Jesus their ordination address before they went out to their task. It is for that reason that other scholars have given other titles to the Sermon on the Mount. It has been called ‘the Compendium of Christ’s Doctrine’, ‘the Magna Carta [the charter of liberties] of the Kingdom’ and ‘the Manifesto of the King’. All are agreed that in the Sermon on the Mount we have the essence of the teaching of Jesus **to the inner circle of his chosen disciples**. . .

True, it will find its fullness and its consummation in the presence of God; but, for all that, it is a present reality to be enjoyed here and now. The beatitudes in effect say: ‘O the bliss of being a Christian! O the joy of following Christ! O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Master, Saviour and Lord!’ The very form of the beatitudes is the statement of the joyous thrill and the radiant gladness of the Christian life. In the light of the beatitudes, a gloom-encompassed Christianity is unthinkable.

Leon Morris: Matthew’s method is to give some important teaching of Jesus in the form of comparatively lengthy discourses (he has five major discourses), interspersed with other aspects of his ministry, such as healing and the instruction of disciples. Now that he has introduced Jesus’ ministry with the call of disciples and with the explanation that Jesus taught, preached, and healed, Matthew comes to the first great section of teaching, usually called “The Sermon on the Mount.”

Grant Osborne: The current tendency is to see the Sermon through the lens of inaugurated eschatology, that keeping the commands should be the goal of all believers but that they will be fully observed only after Christ has returned. . . There is a distinct wisdom flavor in the sermon, but primarily it is the new laws for the kingdom age, intended as an **ethical model** to be followed by the new citizens of the kingdom community.

In Matthew’s gospel the Sermon immediately follows the summary of Jesus’ kingdom preaching (**4:17, 23**) and must be seen in that light. Therefore it establishes the ethical standards of righteousness for Jesus’ followers. **Overman** says, “This section of the gospel has as its primary

focus the ordering of relationships and behavior within the community.” **France** calls this “The Discourse on Discipleship,” centering on the radically new lifestyle demanded of Jesus’ followers who will become a “Christian counter-culture.” In that sense it is the law of the new covenant, the demands of discipleship in the eschatological community brought by Christ. It is not a new messianic Torah but rather a transformation of the Torah of the OT into **the Torah of the Messiah**.

Craig Blomberg: **Inaugurated eschatology** thus seems most in keeping with Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom more generally. Inaugurated eschatology recognizes an “*already/not yet*” tension in which the sermon’s ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ’s return.

J. C. Ryle: Let us learn how entirely contrary are the principles of Christ to the principles of the world. It is vain to deny it. They are almost diametrically opposed. The very characters which the Lord Jesus praises, the world despises. The very pride, thoughtlessness, high tempers, worldliness, selfishness, formality, and unlovingness which abound everywhere, the Lord Jesus condemns.

Charles Swindoll: The very first word in the Greek translation of the book of Psalms is *makarios*: “*Blessed [makarios] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly*” (**Ps. 1:1**, KJV). The theme of blessing is carried on throughout the collection of songs, with the term appearing twenty-five times in the Psalms. It expresses the **positive benefits of a life of faithfulness**. The Greek term originally conveyed “the happy estate of the gods above earthly sufferings and labors. Later it came to mean any positive condition a person experienced.” From the Latin word *beatus*, a translation of *makarios*, we get the term “**Beatitudes**,” used to describe the repeated use of the adjective in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (**Matt. 5:1-12**). Here the term describes **transcendent happiness**, the kind that neither depends upon earthly fortunes nor falters before temporal hardships. A “blessed” person possesses what we would call **true joy**. . .

Through these words, Jesus —with penetrating insight —exposed the brittle veneer of all self-righteousness prevalent in His day . . . and in ours. He explained the essence of true righteousness, which leads to a deep-seated joy. Weaving threads from the Old Testament throughout this garment of truth, the heir of the throne of David set forth principles that must never be ignored by subjects of His kingdom. Yet how few truly embrace Jesus’ words!

Bob Deffinbaugh: I’m with **Hughes** in his commentary when he says that probably the primary sense of the word “*blessed*” here is the **sense of approval**. It is saying that God has expressed His approval on these people. **To be blessed is to be approved by God**, and I think that probably fits my view as well.

E. Michael Green: To follow Jesus demands a totally different way of life, and is vital for the people of God. Right at the outset of his ministry Jesus lays it on the line. The new age has dawned. And the Sermon shows what human life is like after repentance and commitment to the King. In a word, life is very different. The injunction “*Do not be like them*” (**6:8**) encapsulates the tone of the whole Sermon. A sharp contrast is constantly being drawn between the standards of Jesus and those of all others. Here we meet a distinctive lifestyle, with radically different values and ambitions. Everything is at variance with life outside the kingdom.

Warren Wiersbe: The King's Principles: True Righteousness –

I have always felt that **Matthew 5:20** was the key to this important sermon: “*For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*” The main theme is **true righteousness**. The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of character. **Conduct flows out of character.**

Donald Hagner: The righteousness described here is to be the goal of the Christian in this life, although it will only be attained fully in the eschaton proper. It is primarily an ethics concerning the individual, but it is not without implications for social ethics. The radical nature of the sermon must not be lost in a privatization of its ethics. . .

What must be stressed here, however, is that the kingdom is presupposed as something given by God. The kingdom is declared as a reality apart from any human achievement. Thus the beatitudes are, above all, predicated upon the experience of the **grace of God**.

David Platt: The last thing we need to come away with is an imposing and crushing laundry list of things that we must do in order to be accepted by God. When you read the Sermon on the Mount, you should not walk away thinking, "I must turn the other cheek in order to be accepted by God. I must love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me in order to be accepted by God. I must follow the Golden Rule perfectly in order to be accepted by God." **We are not accepted by God because of anything that we do.** We are accepted by God completely and totally because of a perfect Savior who has died a bloody death in our place and who has risen again in victory. Yes, we pray for our enemies, we love those who persecute us, and we follow the Golden Rule. But we do these things not in order to earn acceptance before our God, but because we have acceptance by God and we want to glorify Him in everything that we do.

R. Kent Hughes: The Sermon on the Mount is the compacted, congealed theology of Christ and as such is perhaps the most profound section of the entire New Testament and the whole Bible. Every phrase can bare exhaustive exposition and yet never be completely plumbed... . It shows us exactly where we stand in relation to the kingdom and eternal life. As we expose ourselves to the X-rays of Christ's words, we see whether we truly are believers; and if believers, the degree of the authenticity of our lives. No other section of Scripture makes us face ourselves like the Sermon on the Mount.

(:1-2) PROLOGUE TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A. (:1a) Typology of Mountaintop Revelation

“And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain;”

Charles Swindoll: Jesus' miracles had drawn crowds from all over the regions of Galilee, Syria, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and even beyond the Jordan (**4:23-25**). A group this large would have had not only **diverse backgrounds** and beliefs but also different life experiences, different struggles, and different levels of commitment to spiritual things. In addition to regional differences, Jesus' audience contained people old and young, male and female, well-off and poor, religious and rebellious. With such a diverse group of people, what would Jesus preach? What lessons could He possibly teach that would minister to all of them together and each of

them individually? **The fundamentals of life.** These **essential principles** would transcend language, culture, gender, age, and class.

Donald Hagner: These introductory verses indicate that Jesus addresses **primarily the disciples** in the sermon. The crowds prompt him to go to the mountain where he can teach his disciples in relative privacy. Yet from the way in which Matthew ends the great sermon, “*the crowds*” too had gathered and heard the teaching and were amazed at the authority of his teaching (**7:28–29**).

E. Michael Green: The main point about the mountain here is the parallel to **Mount Sinai**. Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the law from God to give to the people of Israel. And now Moses’ great successor ascends a mountain to receive from his Father and transmit to his disciples the **law of the kingdom**. We have a new law for a new people given on a new mountain by a new Moses. That is the context of the Sermon.

B. (:1b) Target Audience

“and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.”

Grant Osborne: The disciples were those committed to following Jesus (**4:18–22**) and were closely involved in his ministry. They are the ones expected to live by the principles elucidated in the message that follows.

Charles Swindoll: The “*disciples*” (**5:1**) who had come to Him to hear the message included many more than just Jesus’ inner circle of Peter, James, John, Andrew, and select others. This is evidenced at the end of the sermon, where Matthew reports, “*When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching*” (**7:28**).

Donald Hagner: It was customary in Judaism for the rabbi to teach from a seated position. Thus Jesus *sat down* (καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ) before he *began to teach* (cf. **13:2; 24:3**). Jesus, somewhat like a new Moses, goes up to the mount to mediate the true interpretation of the Torah. . . . Jesus can teach as he does because of his unique identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. His teaching alone, and not that contained in the Pharisaic oral tradition, penetrates to the full meaning of God’s commandments. Thus Jesus majestically assumes his authority as teacher and begins in a definitive manner to expound the way of righteousness to his disciples.

William Barclay: Jesus began to teach when he had sat down. When a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially, he sat to teach. We still speak of a professor’s chair; the pope still speaks *ex cathedra*, from his seat. Often a Rabbi gave instruction when he was standing or strolling about; but his really official teaching was done when he had taken his seat. So, the very intimation that Jesus sat down to teach his disciples is the indication that this teaching is central and official.

John Nolland: As radical as its demands are, this is no manual for an exclusive spiritual elite. Its concern to elucidate the will of God is based on theological and ethical considerations and is not linked to a distinctive call for an exclusive few. The **double audience** of disciples and crowds fits in with this: the disciples learn from within the context of a relationship of committed discipleship, but that which they learn has pertinence as well to all the others who hear.

C. (:2) Teaching Gravity

“And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying,”

William Barclay: This phrase *he opened his mouth* is not simply a decoratively roundabout way of saying he said. In Greek, the phrase has a double significance.

(a) In Greek, it is used of a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. It is used, for instance, of the saying of an oracle. It is the natural preface for a most weighty saying.

(b) It is used when people really open their hearts and fully pour out their minds. It is used of intimate teaching with no barriers between.

Again, the very use of this phrase indicates that the material in the Sermon on the Mount is no chance piece of teaching. It is the grave and solemn utterance of the central things; it is the opening of Jesus' heart and mind to those men who were to be his right-hand men in his task. . .

The Sermon on the Mount is greater even than we think. Matthew in his introduction wishes us to see that it is the official teaching of Jesus; that it is the opening of Jesus' whole mind to his disciples; that it is the summary of the teaching which Jesus habitually gave to his inner circle. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart-to-heart communion between the disciples and their Master.

R. T. France: The focus of these chapters is not then the wider proclamation of the “*good news of the kingdom,*” (4:23) but the instruction of those who have already responded to that proclamation, and now need to learn what life in the “*kingdom of heaven*” is really about. The teaching will frequently describe them as a special group who stand over against, and indeed are persecuted by, people in general. They are those who have entered into a new relationship with “*your Father in heaven,*” and who in consequence are called to a radically new life-style, in conscious distinction from the norms of the rest of society. They are to be an alternative society, a “Christian counter-culture.”

It is because of this distinctive focus of **chs. 5–7** that I have preferred to call this the “**Discourse on Discipleship**” rather than use the familiar but non-descriptive title “**Sermon on the Mount,**” a term which too often conveys to modern hearers the concept of a general code of ethics rather than the specific demands of the kingdom of heaven. . .

The discourse is indeed intended as a guide to life, but only for those who are committed to the kingdom of heaven, and even they will always find that its reach exceeds their grasp.

I. (:3-9) THE 7 BEATITUDES STRESSING BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER EXPRESSED IN RIGHTEOUS LIVING

A. (:3) Poor in Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

J. C. Ryle: He means the humble, the lowly-minded, and the self-abased. He means those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God's sight. These are they who are not wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. They are not rich and wealthy. They do not imagine that they need nothing. They regard themselves as wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Blessed are all such! Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity. We must begin low if we would build high.

Leon Morris: It is the opposite of the Pharisaic pride in one's own virtue with which Jesus was so often confronted (and which has all too often made its appearance in later times). . .

Of these lowly people Jesus says, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. We should understand this in the sense of **consequence** rather than **reward**. In no sense do they merit the kingdom, but being what they are they possess it.

Charles Swindoll: those who realize their own utter helplessness and absence of spiritual merit. The only response to such realization is total dependence on the Lord God for spiritual riches. Pride, arrogance, and haughtiness are banished in the life of true happiness, contentment, and joy. This is the attitude expressed in the great hymn of **Augustus Toplady**, “Rock of Ages”:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

By giving up the foolish agenda of building our own kingdoms of dirt here on earth, we truly participate in Christ’s kingdom agenda. We serve under His sovereign rule, allowing Him to direct our steps while He gets the glory He deserves.

Donald Hagner: In Israel, especially in the post-exilic period, poverty and piety often went together, the poor (**Luz** refers to the “*déclassé*”) having no other recourse than their hope in God. The poor were driven to complete reliance upon God, and the righteous poor were thought especially to be the objects of God’s special concern (cf. **Pss 9:18; 33[34]:18; 40:18; Isa 57:15; Jas 2:5**). The poor were particularly in view in expressions of eschatological hope. In a passage alluded to in **Matt 11:5, Isaiah (61:1)** writes:

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good tidings to the afflicted [poor];
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*

This passage is almost certainly the basis for the present beatitude. The good news that has now come to the poor is that the kingdom is “*theirs*” (αὐτῶν is in an emphatic position). Thus this opening beatitude points to eschatological fulfillment (cf. the citation of **Isa 61:1–2** and the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry in **Luke 4:18–19**).

D. A. Carson: The natural conclusion is that, though the full blessedness of those described in these beatitudes awaits the consummated kingdom, they already share in the kingdom’s blessedness so far as it has been inaugurated.

B. (:4) Those Who Mourn

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

J. C. Ryle: He means those who sorrow over sin and grieve daily over their own shortcomings. These are they who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remembrance of it is grievous to them. The burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! *The*

sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart. One day they shall weep no more. They shall be comforted.

Charles Swindoll: This doesn't mean that God *calls us to permanent depression or to hum a constant dirge*. As *Ecclesiastes* wisely affirms, "*There is an appointed time for everything. . . . A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance*" (**Ecc. 3:1, 4**). What Jesus is saying is that when we mourn for the woes and wrongs of this world, we can take comfort in the here and now that one day the wrongs will be righted, death will be dealt a death blow itself, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (**Rev. 21:4**).

Donald Hagner: Those who mourn do so because of the seeming slowness of God's justice. But they are now to rejoice, even in their troubled circumstances, because their salvation has found its beginning. The time draws near when they shall be comforted (cf. Rev. 7:17; 21:4), but they are already to be happy in the knowledge that the kingdom has arrived. Their salvation is at hand.

R. T. France: This verse illustrates the danger of treating the first half of a beatitude in isolation from the second half. To say simply that those who mourn are "*happy*" would clearly be nonsense. Their "*happiness*" consists in the fact that they will be **comforted**.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Mourning is the appropriate response to sin, and the appropriate manifestation of mourning is repentance. But there is the other side of the coin. Just as mourning is the appropriate response to sin, so worship is the appropriate response to the perfections of God. It would be wrong to experience and confront sin and not mourn, but it is just as wrong to come face to face with the perfections of God and not worship. I think it is interesting because we are considering mourning in our text but yet there is a very prominent theme today about joy and rejoicing, and you say, "Well, isn't that sort of schizophrenic?" You know the answer? It probably is. "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep*". Those both go on at the same time, and the reality is, as I understand it, we would not rejoice and praise God as we ought apart from the mourning that comes in response to sin. As I understand it, our mourning because of the occasion of sin is what makes our joy and our rejoicing greater because our salvation takes us from its consequences.

C. (:5) The Gentle

"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."

Charles Swindoll: The world has some less-than-flattering descriptions for the gentle or **meek** person: wimp, doormat, milquetoast, spineless, weak, yellow, pushover. But the biblical term used here, *praus* [4239], means "not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate." The word is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe Moses (**Num. 12:3**)—hardly somebody we would picture in a constant state of kowtowing to those around him. Meekness doesn't mean weakness, but **strength under control**. Those who keep their anger in check, who don't flaunt their power or constantly claim their rights, who put others' interests before their own—these are the kind who will "*inherit the earth*" (**Matt. 5:5**). In the future, they will be fellow heirs with Christ, ruling with Him in the kingdom (**Rom. 8:16-17; 2 Tim. 2:12**). But even in the present, God may place them in positions of influence, knowing they can be trusted to handle authority with integrity and humility.

Donald Hagner: In view are not persons who are submissive, mild, and unassertive, but those who are humble in the sense of being oppressed (hence, “*have been humbled*”), **bent over by the injustice of the ungodly**, but who are soon to realize their reward. Those in such a condition have no recourse but to depend upon God.

William Barclay: The full translation of this third beatitude must read:

O the bliss of those who are always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who have every instinct, impulse and passion under control because they themselves are God-controlled, who have the humility to realize their own ignorance and their own weakness, for such people can indeed rule the world!

D. (:6) Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Charles Swindoll: In Matthew, the term “*righteousness*” is used to emphasize the visible manifestation of a right disposition or moral uprightness reflected in one’s attitudes and actions (**5:6, 10; 6:1**). Throughout this Gospel, the superficial and humanly impossible righteousness of the Pharisees is contrasted with God’s righteousness (**6:33**), for which we are to “*hunger and thirst*” (**5:6**).

Martin Lloyd-Jones: This Beatitude again follows logically from the previous ones; it is a statement to which all the others lead. It is the logical conclusion to which they come, and it is something for which we should all be profoundly thankful and grateful to God. I do not know of a better test that anyone can apply to himself or herself in this whole matter of the Christian profession than a verse like this. If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture, you can be quite certain you are a Christian. If it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Why is hungering and thirsting such a good illustration? Because as water and food is to the body, so righteousness is to the spiritual life. We as humans hunger and thirst not only for food but for satisfaction in life. We search in all kinds of different areas to be filled, to be satisfied, but we always end up falling short.

John Piper states: “God has put eternity in our hearts and we have an inconsolable longing.”

Blaise Pascal said that we all have a “God-shaped void” in our lives.

All men are hungry and thirsty; the problem is that we try to fill that emptiness, that hunger, with things other than the righteousness of God. Some of you reading this message are empty; you have not been satisfied. You are trying to fill that “God-shaped void” in your life with all kinds of things, but you are left empty, unsatisfied. There is an incredible message of hope for you if you are searching for the answer.

C.S. Lewis states: We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased.

E. (:7) The Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Donald Hagner: The fifth beatitude marks a new emphasis in the beatitudes. Whereas the first four find their focus primarily in a state of mind or an attitude (and imply conduct only secondarily), this beatitude refers to the **happiness of those who act**, namely, those who are merciful toward others.

J. C. Ryle: He means those who are full of compassion towards others. They pity all who are suffering either from sin or sorrow, and are tenderly desirous to make their sufferings less. They are full of good works and endeavors to do good. Blessed are all such! Both in this life and that to come they shall reap a rich reward.

Charles Swindoll: The “*merciful*” are those whose hearts are moved for those in need, having a desire to step in and assist in relieving their pain. This kind of mercy goes beyond merely feeling sorry for people or having pity or sympathy. It may start with such emotions, but it doesn’t end there. The merciful person empathizes with those who suffer and then actually does something to help. **James 2:15-16** says, “*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?*” Similarly, **1 John 3:17** admonishes, “*Whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*”

F. (:8) The Pure in Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

William Barclay: So, the basic meaning of *katharos* is unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed. That is why this beatitude is so demanding a beatitude. It could be translated:

Blessed are those whose motives are always entirely unmixed, for they shall see God.

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives.

J. C. Ryle: He means those who do not aim merely at outward correctness but at inward holiness. They are not satisfied with a mere external show of religion. They strive to keep a heart and conscience void of offense and to serve God with the spirit and the inner man. Blessed are all such! The heart is the man. “*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (**1 Samuel 16:7**). He who is most spiritually-minded will have most communion with God.

Donald Hagner: “*Pure in heart*” refers to the condition of the inner core of a person, that is, to thoughts and motivation, and hence anticipates the internalizing of the commandments by Jesus in the material that follows in the sermon. It takes for granted right actions but asks for integrity in the doing of those actions, i.e., a consistency between the inner springs of one’s conduct and the conduct itself. Another way of putting this is in terms of “*single-mindedness*” (cf. **Jas 4:8**, where it is the “*double-minded*” who are exhorted to “*purify [their] hearts*”). Purity of heart and purity of conscience are closely related in the pastoral Epistles (cf. **1 Tim 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; 2:22**; cf. **1 Pet 1:22**).

Craig Blomberg: The “*pure in heart*” exhibit a single-minded devotion to God that stems from the internal cleansing created by following Jesus. Holiness is a prerequisite for entering God's

presence. The pure in heart pass this test, so they will see God and experience intimate fellowship with him. This Beatitude closely parallels **Ps 24:3-4**.

Bob Deffinbaugh: So, first, having a pure heart means living by the rule of God, living a life that is pleasing to God. Secondly, having a pure heart means living for the sole purpose of God, to have a heart that is fully devoted to God. It means single-minded devotion and commitment to God, doing anything and everything in our life for the sole purpose of glorifying God (**1 Corinthians 10:31**). “*Pure*” in this sense means **unadulterated**.

G. (:9) The Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Charles Swindoll: Those who make peace relieve tensions and don’t feed fuel to fires of controversy. A peacemaker seeks resolutions to arguments and debates. A peacemaker works hard to keep offenses from festering into fractured relationships. A peacemaker’s words generate light but not heat. **Proverbs 15:1** says, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*” It is important to note, however, that being a peacemaker does not amount to being a passive person who lies down like a doormat and lets people walk all over them. The kind of peacemaking referred to here is active, not passive. Peacemakers are engaged in a **ministry of reconciliation** and restoration, entering troubled waters to help bring calm. In this way, they model in this life the ministry of Jesus, the Son of God, who came preaching peace and reconciliation to those willing to hear.

Donald Hagner: In the context of the beatitudes, the point would seem to be directed against the **Zealots**, the Jewish revolutionaries who hoped through violence to bring the kingdom of God. Such means would have been a continual temptation for the downtrodden and oppressed who longed for the kingdom. The Zealots by their militarism hoped furthermore to demonstrate that they were the loyal “*sons of God.*” But Jesus announces the kingdom entirely apart from human effort and indicates that the status of υιοὶ θεοῦ, “*children of God*” (cf. **Rom 9:26**), belongs on the contrary to those who live peaceably. It is the peacemakers who will be called the “*children of God.*” Later in the present chapter, Jesus will teach the remarkable ethic of the love of even one’s enemies (**vv 43–48**). This stress on peace becomes a common motif in the NT (cf. **Rom 14:19; Heb 12:14; Jas 3:18; 1 Pet 3:11**).

Leon Morris: those who make peace are fulfilling what membership in the family really means, and this is something to which all the members of the family must aspire.

II. (:10-12) THE FINAL BEATITUDE STRESSING BLESSING ASSOCIATED WITH ENDURING PERSECUTION

If the citizen of the kingdom of heaven lives a life in harmony with kingdom distinctives he will inevitably suffer persecution. It is that eventuality that Jesus now addresses.

Charles Swindoll: I understand **5:11-12** as **expanding** on the beatitude of **5:10** regarding **persecution**. These statements provide a surprising conclusion to the previous seven beatitudes, and the association between persecution and joy seems counterintuitive. This is why in this case Jesus expends a few words of explanation beyond the pithy principle.

A. (:10) Persecuted for the Sake of Righteousness

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Charles Swindoll: In **5:10** Jesus refers to those who are persecuted and harassed for living lives in keeping with God’s ethical standards and for promoting these moral truths in their teaching and preaching.

Donald Hagner: **V 10** could well be the **closing beatitude** of the collection used by Matthew, since it rounds out the collection by an **inclusio**, i.e., concluding with the same ending as in the first beatitude: *“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (cf. **v 3**). The poor and the persecuted, precisely the most unlikely candidates, are proclaimed the happy or blessed ones who receive the kingdom.

The ninth beatitude, **vv 11–12**, is in effect an **elaboration of the preceding beatitude**. Its original independence from the preceding collection of eight is indicated not only by its different form but also by the use of the second person pronoun rather than the third. Matthew probably received it in the form in which it stands and added it to the collection he had received from another source.

B. (:11-12) Further Expansion of Theme of Persecution

“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. 12 Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Leon Morris: Persecuted believers are in good company. The plural brings all the prophets together as one godly company. The persecutions they received no doubt varied greatly, but the point is that persecution is the lot of the people of God while they walk this earth. In three consecutive verses Matthew has used the verb *“persecute,”* which puts emphasis on the concept. Here even the prophets, whom everyone now accepts as the servants of God par excellence, were treated badly in their own day. It is a privilege for the servants of God in later days to share in some measure in the lot of these great men of God.

R. T. France: The so-called *“ninth beatitude”*, **vv. 11–12**, is in fact a repetition and expansion of **v. 10**, and stands from a literary point of view outside the tightly-structured unit of eight beatitudes. It lacks the epigrammatic conciseness of **vv. 3–10**, nor does it repeat their regular formula *“for it is they / to them...”* Moreover, its change to a second-person form links it directly with the verses that follow rather than with **vv. 3–10**. Like **vv. 13–16**, **vv. 11–12** speak of the sharp contrast between the disciples (whose *“good life”* has been spelled out in the third person in **vv. 3–10**) and other people around them. I therefore think it more appropriate, despite the repetition of the opening *makarioi*, to treat the *“ninth beatitude”* not as a part of the beatitudes as such but as the **linking introduction** to this **following section** which comments on the effect of living the good life on the rest of society. [treats **vv. 11-16** as a unit]

D. A. Carson: These verses neither encourage seeking persecution nor permit retreating from it, sulking, or retaliation. From the perspective of both redemptive history (*“the prophets”*) and eternity (*“reward in heaven”*), these verses constitute the reasonable response of faith, one which the early Christians readily understood (cf. **Ac 5:41; 2Co 4:17; 1Pe 1:6–9**; cf. **Da 3:24–25**). *“Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that*

Christians should be called on to suffer. In fact it is a joy and a token of his grace” (Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 80–81). But in reassuring his disciples that their sufferings are “neither new, nor accidental, nor absurd” (Bonnard), Jesus spoke of principles that will appear again (esp. **Mt 10, 24**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do the Beatitudes of Matthew compare to the Sermon on the Plain from the book of Luke?
- 2) In what sense has the Kingdom arrived and in what sense are we still anticipating its arrival?
- 3) Do you think it is a good translation for the modern day to say “*Happy are . . .*” instead of “*Blessed are . . .*”?
- 4) When in life have you functioned as a peacemaker?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Leon Morris: This discourse displays many resemblances to Luke’s “*Sermon on the Plain*” (**Luke 6:17-49**), and many interpreters hold that they are variant accounts of the same discourse. Luke’s use of “*plain*” does not rule this out, for it means no more than “*a level place*” and may well indicate a rather flat area in the mountains (though against this is the fact that a great multitude came to be healed, **Luke 6:18**, and it is unlikely that the sick would have climbed a mountain). Both sermons begin with beatitudes, go on to significant ethical teaching, and conclude with the little parable of the men building houses. But the differences between the two are such that it is not easy to regard them as variant accounts of the same sermon. It is better to think that **Jesus used similar material on more than one occasion.**

Grant Osborne: The best structure is to see **5:3–16** as the introduction and **7:13–27** as the conclusion, with the central section comprised of three parts:

- the relationship of the law to the new covenant in Jesus (**5:17–48**),
- true versus false piety (**6:1–18**), and
- social ethics (**6:19 – 7:12**).

Donald Hagner: As one possible outline, the following may be suggested:

I. Introduction (5:3–16)

- A. The Foundation of Righteous Living: The Beatitudes (**5:3–12**)
- B. The Essence of Discipleship: Salt and Light (**5:13–16**)

II. The Main Body of the Sermon (5:17—7:12)

- A. The Relation between the Old and the New Righteousness (**5:17–48**)

1. Continuity with the Old (5:17–20)
2. The Surpassing of the Old: The Six Antitheses (5:21–48)
- B. Outward vs. Inward Righteousness (6:1–18)
 1. Almsgiving (6:1–4)
 2. Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer (6:5–15)
 3. Fasting (6:16–18)
- C. Dependence upon God (6:19–34)
 1. Serving God Rather Than Wealth (6:19–24)
 2. The Disciple and Anxiety (6:25–34)
- D. Various Teachings and the Golden Rule (7:1–12)

III. Conclusion (7:13–27)

- A. The Two Ways (7:13–14)
- B. The False and the Genuine (7:15–23)
 1. Warning concerning False Prophets (7:15–20)
 2. The Insufficiency of the Charismata (7:21–23)
- C. The Parable of the Two Builders (7:24–27)

Bob Deffinbaugh: There is a certain pattern in the Beatitudes. For instance, if you look at **verse 3** of chapter 5, Jesus says, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them,*”—**present tense**. Then, when you come down to **verse 10**, He says, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.*” So you have this **present tense**—the kingdom is theirs—and in between, in **verses 4 through 9**, they’re all **future tenses**. . .

I think, as most commentators would say, that we have to conclude there is a present dimension and a future dimension to what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. There are things yet to come, but there are foretastes (firstfruits) with us that we presently possess as well, and those are dealt with in the Sermon on the Mount.

John MacArthur: *Makarios* is an adjective that simply, basically means “*happy*” or “*blissful*.” That’s really what it means. But I want to expand that a little bit so you’ll understand the significance of this new message. The word basically comes from a root *makar*, that root means “*to be happy*,” real happiness. Not in the world’s sense of happiness based upon positive circumstance. . .

The word, then, has the idea of an **inward bliss**, an inward happiness which is neither the result of circumstance nor subject to change on the basis of circumstance. This is the basic New Testament meaning of “*blessed*.” It means an inner peace, an inner bliss, an inner happiness, an inward joy that is not produced by circumstance nor is it affected by circumstance. It is a state of happiness, a state of wellbeing in which God desires his children to live. . .

Makarios then, is fundamentally an element of the **character of God**. And man will only know that element insofar as he is a partaker of the divine nature. . .

The Sermon on the Mount is the great statement of the king as he opens his mouth and gives blessing instead of cursing to those who desire it. That’s the general biblical context in which this sermon is delivered - a new age, a new king, a new message. . .

There's no politics in the Sermon on the Mount. None. There is not one reference to the social, political aspect of the kingdom made here, not one. The Jews were so concerned about the politics and the social life. Jesus makes no reference to that at all. The stress - I want you to get this - the stress is on **being**. That's the word you're going to have to see. The stress is on being. It's not on ruling or possessing it is on being.

In other words, he's not after what men do, he's after what men are. What men are. Because what they are will determine what they do. All of the ideals that are given in the Sermon on the Mount are contrary to human ideas about government, human ideas about kingdoms. In fact, the most exalted people, the most exalted people in Christ's kingdom would be the lowest of the low in the world's evaluation. . .

Jesus was confronting a whole society full of religionists. They all had their own little thing going. And the point that Jesus was making is, "Hey, you know, you're all wrong, every one of you." For the Pharisees he was saying, "Religion is not a matter of external observance." And for the Sadducee he was saying, "Religion is not a matter of human philosophy invented to accommodate the new day." And to the Essenes he was saying, "Believe Me, religion is not a matter of geographical location." And to the Zealots he was saying, "And neither is religion a matter of social activism."

What he was saying is this, "**My kingdom is inside.**" Do you see? It's inside. That's the whole point. That's the whole message of Jesus to the world. That's the whole basis of the Sermon on the Mount. It's inside, not outside. Not outside rituals, not outside philosophy, not outside location or monasteries or any of that stuff, not outside activism, it's inside.

William Hendriksen: The sayings of **Matt. 5:1-12** must have resounded from the mountain with tremendous emotional force. What the Speaker is doing is nothing less than this: he is stating that though everybody may consider his followers to be most wretched and unfortunate and though they themselves are by no means always filled with optimism regarding their own condition, in the sight of heaven and by the standards of its kingdom they are happy indeed; yes, "*happy*" in the most exalted sense of the term; hence, **superlatively blessed**. Not only is this true because of the blessing in store for them in the future – that, too, is implied; see especially **5:12**: "*your reward in heaven is great*" – but even because of their present state. Already heaven's favor is resting upon them. Right at this moment the light of their future bliss is beginning to engulf them. Even now, no matter how despised they may be, this is true, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon them (**1 Peter 4:14**).

Martin Lloyd-Jones: Matthew puts the true teaching concerning the kingdom in the very forefront of his Gospel, for the great purpose of this Sermon is to give an exposition of the kingdom as something which is essentially spiritual. The kingdom is primarily something "within you". It is that which governs and controls the heart and mind and outlook. Far from being something which leads to great military power, it is to be "*poor in spirit*". In other words, we are not told in the Sermon on the Mount, "Live like this and you will become Christian"; rather we are told, "Because you are Christian live like this." This is how Christians ought to live; this is how Christians are meant to live. . .

What is of supreme importance is that we must always remember that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of character and not a code of ethics or of morals. It is not to be regarded as law – a kind of new "Ten Commandments" or set of rules and regulations which are to be carried out

by us – but rather as a description of what we Christians are meant to be, illustrated in certain particular respects. It is as if our Lord says, “Because you are what you are, this is how you will face the law and how you will live it.” . . .

None of these descriptions refers to what we may call a natural tendency. Each one of them is wholly a disposition which is produced by grace alone and the operation of the Holy Spirit upon us. I cannot emphasize this too strongly. No man naturally conforms to the descriptions here given in the Beatitudes. . .

These descriptions, I suggest, indicate clearly (perhaps more clearly than anything else in the entire realm of Scripture) the essential, utter difference between the Christian and the non-Christian . . . as I see things at the present time, the first need in the Church is a clear understanding of this essential difference. It has become blurred; the world has come into the Church and the Church has become worldly. The line is not as distinct as it was. . . Our ambition should be to be like Christ, the more like Him the better, and the more like Him we become, the more we shall be unlike everybody who is not a Christian.

Van Parunak: This sermon is a carefully structured chiasm that echoes the main issues of Deuteronomy:

- the ten commandments (**Deut 5, 12-26**), and
- the consequences associated with our response to them (**Deut 6- 11, 27-28**).

Each of these themes has two parts.

- The ten commandments, according to our Lord’s summary in **22:37-40**, it can be summarized as uncompromised devotion to God and equitable treatment of our neighbor.
- Moses himself distinguishes the consequences as blessings (**Deut 11:27; 28:1-14**) and curses (**11:28; 28:15-68**).

The structure of the Sermon reflects both of these distinctions. The corresponding members are (chart):

Setting	4:25-5:2	7:28-8:1
Blessings and Warnings	5:3-12, Blessings	7:13-27, Warnings
Law and Prophets	5:17-19	7:12b
Manward Responsibilities	5:20-48 (contrasts with “them of old time”)	7:1-12a (absolute)
Godward Responsibilities	6:1-18 (contrasts with “the hypocrites”)	6:19-34 (absolute)

TEXT: Matthew 5:13-16

TITLE: *SALT AND LIGHT -- IMPACTING THE WORLD AROUND US ... OR GOOD FOR NOTHING?*

BIG IDEA:

KINGDOM CITIZENS SHOULD HAVE A POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD

- TO COUNTERACT DECAY BY STANDING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS ... AND

**- TO SHINE THE TORCH OF TRUTH AND LIFE TO THE DARKNESS AROUND US
OUT OF A MOTIVATION TO BRING GLORY TO GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Show and Tell today -- hand out O-rings ... examine them ... not very expensive ... very common ... doesn't seem very significant ... we use these a lot in repairing the big Caterpillar machines at my work ... put it on your finger and listen while I tell you a story about a very famous O-ring

On January 28, 1986 America was shocked by the destruction of the space shuttle Challenger, and the death of its seven crew members. One of those who died that day was a female schoolteacher -- privileged to be selected as the first civilian in NASA history to "ride the rocket" into the last frontier. It was to be the Challenger's 10th mission -- we had come to take for granted the safety of these missions.

The temperature that day at ground level at Pad 39B was 36 degrees F, that was 15 degrees cooler than any other previous launch by NASA. The boosters started rumbling according to play. But 0.68 seconds after ignition black smoke started coming from the bottom right booster. Apparently the burning of one of the O-rings in the booster caused the smoke. That's why I gave you each an O-ring so you could get an ideal of what we're talking about. O-rings are rubber "rings" that are used to make airtight seals. If one of the O-rings breaks air can get in and gas can get out -- a very combustible combination -- and one that proved tragic in this instance. A terrible explosion just seconds after liftoff and the impact was not only felt but actually seen around the world on the TV broadcast.

What people had trouble coming to grips with was how could such a small and seemingly insignificant component -- a tiny O-ring -- cause such a huge catastrophe?

If you are at all like me, you wrestle at times with **feelings of being insignificant** not talking about the kids ... you guys know you are significant ... we parents make it a point to tell you that all the time ... but sometimes as adults we forget that. It's a huge world out there and we often ask: What can little old me accomplish for the Lord? What's my mission? Why doesn't Christ just come back and kickoff the big celebration? What am I doing here?

CONTEXT / REVIEW:

Christ certainly knew His Mission -- **Matt. 4:23-25;**

Matt. 9:35 -- teaching / preaching / healing

Remember the Beatitudes that we studied last week in Matthew **Chapter 5** from the Sermon on the Mount. As members of the kingdom we should be progressing in a number of key character areas ... as we pursue the blessedness that is associated with conformity to the righteousness of God. We learned **what type of people we have been called to be.**

Finished with the reality of **persecution**.

Today we are going to look at the very simple instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples to help them focus on their true mission -- This is how we are going to find significance in our life here on earth -- **What have we been called to do?**

Pastor Brian knew this was a good passage to give to me ... You see I love to dig into a passage and come up with an outline that really helps to explain the flow of thought in the text. I will look at the tiniest details by making grammatical diagrams in the Greek and then try to put the passage back together by capturing what I call the **Big Idea** of the paragraph. I worked long hours on this and here is what I have come up with ... see what you think:

2 major points:

- 1) You are the **Salt of the earth**
- 2) You are the **Light of the world**

Kids, what do you think? Pretty impressive, eh? You're going to be able to follow me just fine ... we are going to talk about Salt and Light -- 2 very simple pictures -- nothing very fancy here (hold up objects)

- Significance of the Metaphor -- Why did Christ pick these 2 simple phenomena
- Underlying Assumption: Why is the world in such desperate need of salt or light
- Try to come to grips with our Mission as Salt or Light -- What are the implications for us
- Look at the Pathway to Ineffectiveness -- what would negate the type of powerful impact we are supposed to have on the world

I. (:13) SALT -- THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT WORKS THRU BELIEVERS TO COUNTERACT THE DECAY AND ROTTENNESS IN THE WORLD AS WE TAKE A STAND FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS METAPHOR OF SALT

Must first understand how salt was used at the time of Christ ...

In our contemporary society, we may miss the real value of salt. Many ancient societies understood the value of salt far better than we. The Romans believed, for instance, that salt was very valuable. Sometimes Roman soldiers even received their pay in salt. How would you like that ... Go home be warmed and filled! Some have said that it was from this practice that the phrase "*not worth his salt*" originated.

Primarily in the days before refrigerators, salt was rubbed on to the meat to keep it from going bad so quickly; it was a preservative ... cf. the American Indians and the early settlers with their practice of salting the meat to preserve it

This seems to be the main emphasis in this passage; the fact that salt also is used to enhance the taste seems to be suggested by vs 13 "*tasteless*" ... but the context seems to argue more for a rendering of: if the salt has lost its **distinctive essence** ...

Interesting word: "*moronized*" -- we get the word moron; I don't think Jesus is talking about believers giving the world some pizzaz; although by virtue of counteracting the process of decay we do make the world a more palatable place -- both for ourselves and for others -- bringing out the true meaning of life

B. UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION: Apart from the impact of believers as salt and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in restraining sin, the world would be much more ROTTEN.

How rotten would it be? lots of examples where God sets something good in motion and man wrecks it with a downward spiral of increasing wickedness

1) Look at the Fall -- God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good ... Until man chose to disobey and go his own way .. Happened very quickly!
What type of offspring did Adam and Eve raise? the kind where brother murders brother!
Doctrine of **Total Depravity** ... Sin Nature .. Man incapable on his own of even responding to God; dead in his trespasses and sins apart from God's redeeming grace

2) Look at the Days of Noah -- **Gen 6: 5, 11-12**

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.. . Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth"

Noah = a good example of trying to function as Salt and Light in his culture; called a preacher of **righteousness** (good example of putting the Sermon on the Mount into practice)

3) Look at the Days of Sodom and Gomorrah -- **Gen. 18**

God couldn't find 10 righteous people there; He was merciful to hustle Lot out before bringing judgment; his wife was so attached to the world, so compromised, she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt

4) Look at the nation of Israel -- Removal of the Shekinah Glory from the Temple -- **Ezekiel 10-11**; all that God had done to plant the nation, cultivate it, look for it to produce good fruit ... What was the output??

5) Look at **Romans 1** -- the account of progressive wickedness
how does that play out in the Roman Empire; what about in the United States?

6) Look at the description of the Last Days in **2 Pet. 2**

7) Look at the description of the Tribulation Period in the Book of Rev. -- what happens when all the believers are removed at the Rapture and God starts over with the 3 Witnesses?
picture of Babylon in **Rev. 18:2-3**

What is the **consistent thread** as we look at these different time periods throughout the history of man? Man's natural depravity has a tendency to cycle downward in spirals of increasing wickedness ... no matter how good things were at the beginning ...
Not to say that there cannot be revivals for a period of time ... but when you look at the overall trend...

Does that mean I am a pessimist when it comes to what kind of impact can we expect the gospel to have on the world?? I would say that I am a realist ..

I am certainly not of the postmill camp that see the kingdom gradually taking over the world and things improving until we reach some type of millennial fulfillment of the OT promises and then Christ returns

Look at our culture today? How rotten has it become ... just in our lifetime
and all of this is with the presence of some measure of salt ... let's look at our Mission as the salt of the earth

C. COMING TO GRIPS WITH OUR MISSION AS BELIEVERS - THOSE INDWELT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT -- TO BE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

"You are the salt of the earth"

Why do I throw in the ministry of the Holy Spirit here? Not mentioned in the text in **Matt 5** ...
It is primarily the Holy Spirit that performs this ministry of restraining evil; of sanctifying and purifying;
cf. **1 Cor. 7:14** -- very interesting passage

IMPLICATIONS:

1. Salt has no impact unless it **touches the meat** -- **Called to be Radically Associated with Unbelievers**

what type of contact do we have with non-Christians? with our culture?
Christ came and spent quality time building into the lives of His disciples;
general teaching time reaching out to the multitudes; and personal outreach
by rubbing shoulders directly with the publicans and sinners to the extent that the Separatist Pharisees blasted Him for it

cf. book title: *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World*

If salt just hangs around all day with salt, it will not fulfill its intended function;
O-rings in the box are worthless ... they have to be applied to where a seal is needed

Where does my life touch non-Christians? What type of an impact am I having there?

cf. quote from book -- p.124 -- **John Stott** -- rabbit hole Christianity
Probably more of us need to change our approach in this area than any other
Our schedules are structured around doing things with other believers ...
We know that ... but are we committed to changing that??
As we head this direction we must remember a second key implication:

2. Salt has no impact unless it retains its **distinctive essence** -- **Called to be Radically Different from the World**

As Christians, do we stand out as different from the world?
emphasis on the ministry of the **HOLY** Spirit
Some Christians wrestle much more in this area ... they have plenty of contact with unbelievers ... but they have become worldly so there is no distinction

Look at the music artists who try to appeal to the more popular crowd ...
What kind of testimony do you end up with??

Do we laugh at the same jokes? some uncomfortable moments at work
Do people change what types of jokes they will tell around you ...

Do we use the same vocabulary as unclean vessels?
Oh pardon my French
do people change their vocabulary around you??

Problem: That's what nonbelievers at work think a Christian is: someone who is not allowed to laugh at dirty jokes and can't use coarse language ... we are giving the wrong impression.. What about the heart attitudes of how we treat other people, how we love others and are concerned for their well-being ...

- What about mercy triumphing over judgement?
- What about having pure motives rather than a selfish agenda?
- What about pursuing the ministry of a peacemaker as a reconciler?
- What about a servant type heart as we help others?
- What about loving our neighbor as ourself?? something the Pharisees couldn't stomach

It is much harder to bring this type of understanding home to those we are trying to reach for Christ

Do we watch the same TV shows with all of their sexual innuendos?
Do we have the same value system ... the materialism of the world?
Are we friends of the world or friends of God?

Problem with some of the seeker church mentality: if it thinks that it can sneak an entrance into non-believers hearts by being as much like them as possible without crossing the line ... and thus attract them (or trick them) into Christianity ...

- so we present a service that differs very little from the style of entertainment the world finds attractive
- so we use a vocabulary that has been cleansed from any words that might offend the conscience or stir up conviction -- no mention of sin, of hell, of God's holiness and justice and righteousness
- so we present a very man-oriented type of message ... more of a manual on how to be happy and fulfilled as a person ... manology ... rather than theology which presents truth from God's perspective with a vision to glorifying God ...

Where is the power there to counteract the decay and rottenness of the world??

2 Pet 2:9 *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."*

Are we authentic? Are we the real thing? --- We can only impact the world if we are yielded to the Holy Spirit

Consequences of being salt

3. Salt is not always welcomed with open arms -- it carries a bit of **a sting, a bite** to it --

Called to be Radically Committed to Righteousness

speaking the truth in love ... but there is something of a confrontational tone at times;
not just going with the flow; fitting in with the crowd

That is why the context speaks of persecution ...

"all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"

4. Implications in terms of **Political Activism** here in the United States?

But Are we **Called to Be Radically Immersed in Political Activism?** Difficult Question ...
Defining the arena ... no question that our personal relationships with others are primarily in view ...
But what about our responsibility to our larger community and overall culture?
I might not be the best one to respond here ... always a danger of our perspective being distorted by
our own sin or our own blind spots in certain areas ... Not an easy question

Safe Question: What would Jesus do?

Certainly would not characterize Him as a political activist; however, our form of government is vastly
different;

cf. the **Moral Majority** -- even Dr. Jerry Falwell has tempered his approach and expectations in this
area

cf. our family joking about "*being on Alert*" -- many causes seek to cast a millstone of a guilt trip
around your neck if you do not support their cause by doing X, Y, and Z

cf. Pietistic approach; almost isolated from the world you live in ...not advocating that;
not criticizing the efforts of those who feel called to such a political role;

However, not going to be intimidated into some type of legalistic response by way of obligation;

How does my Lord want me to function as salt in the context in which He has put me???

D. PATHWAY TO INEFFECTIVENESS = LOSING OUR DISTINCTIVENESS

conformity to the world around us-- friendship with the world = enmity to God;

failure to develop biblical convictions or lack of backbone to stand by them;

unwillingness to expose wickedness for what it really is

*"but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good
for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."*

Do we want lives that are characterized as good for nothing ... or lives that really have an
impact for Christ?

Kids ... here's an illustration you might be able to identify with:

A **Peanuts cartoon**, showed Peppermint Patty talking to Charlie Brown. She said, "Guess
what, Chuck. The first day of school, and I got sent to the principal's office. It was your fault,
Chuck."

He said, "My fault? How could it be my fault? Why do you say everything is my fault?"

She said, "You're my friend, aren't you, Chuck? You should have been a **better influence** on
me."

While Peppermint Patty was seeking to pass the buck, she was in a very real sense right. We
should be a good influence on our friends. We certainly do have an influence, for good or for
bad.

Kids, remember our simple outline?? Salt and Light

**II. (:14-15) LIGHT -- THE INDWELLING PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST WORKS THRU
BELIEVERS TO PROVIDE A BEACON OF LIGHT IN A CONTEXT OF DARKNESS IN
THE WORLD
(AS WE SHINE THE TORCH OF TRUTH AND LIFE TO A WORLD LOST IN DARKNESS)**

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.
15 Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand;
and it gives light to all who are in the house.”*

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS METAPHOR OF LIGHT

Interesting that the Theme of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City =
LIGHT THE FIRE WITHIN

Think about that ... what is supposed to light that fire?? Inspiration ??? What does that mean??

All types of symbolism and imagery of light throughout the pageant ..

At least the world claims to place a value on Light and long for Light .. but of course they are trying to manufacture a false substitute apart from the True Light of the World

Coming from a belief in the inherent **Goodness of Man** (instead of Total Depravity)

Remember the claims of Christ -- presented first by John the Baptist .. the one who came announcing the King; and then reiterated by Christ Himself

Luke 1:76-79 Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesying about his ministry of being the forerunner to Christ

"For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways ... the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

John chapter 1

"In Him (Christ) was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

Remember **John 8** -- Jesus confronted the Pharisees with this same claim:

"I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

One of my all-time favorite illustrations ... you've probably heard it before ... but humor me ...

Think about the difficulty of navigating large ships out in the open seas and then bringing them safely into harbor in all types of nasty weather and conditions of poor visibility. It's amazing that more ships don't ram into one another or end up on the rocks ...

In the darkest part of the night, a ship's captain cautiously piloted his warship through the fog-shrouded waters. With straining eyes he scanned the hazy darkness, searching for dangers lurking just out of sight.

Then His worst fears were realized when he saw a bright light straight ahead. It appeared to be a vessel on a collision course with his ship. Just then this American vessel he was piloting received a radio message from the Canadians he was about to crash into:

Canadians: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Americans: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

Americans: THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES' ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH. I SAY AGAIN, THAT'S ONE FIVE DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP.

Canadians: This is a **lighthouse**. Your call.

* * * * *

Something about **lighthouses** that seem to appeal to everybody.

- They are perched up on some prominent precipice where they can have maximum utility .. you don't find any lighthouses hidden away in some cave or valley
- They are very simple in their mission -- **provide a beacon of light** to those out in the darkness who need that critical help for navigation and safety

cf. all the Christian ministries that have sprung up around this theme ... lighthouse ministries

How can we help others see Jesus??

Not many songs in the hymnal about salt; but plenty about light:

*"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, the light of the world is Jesus;
Like sunshine at noonday His glory shone in, The light of the world is Jesus.
Come to the Light, tis shining for thee; sweetly the light has dawned upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see; The Light of the world is Jesus."*

(That's our testimony and that's the message we take to the dying world around us.)

*"Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings"*
(Hark, the Herald Angels Sing)

"Silent Night! Holy night! Son of God, Love's pure light" (Silent Night)

"Fair is the sunshine, Fairer still the moonlight, And all the twinkling starry host: Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer, Than all the angels heaven can boast." (Fairest Lord Jesus)

"Make me a blessing, Make me a blessing, Out of my life may Jesus shine"

Perhaps the most famous and the most appropriate ... Kids, you all know this one:

"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine
Hide it under a bushel, NO ... I'm going to let it shine ..."

B. UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION: Apart from believers, the world would be completely DARK
No light, No Life

- Ignorance ... but the problem is primarily one of the heart, not of the mind
- Blindness .. Satan has blinded their minds so they are unable to see
- Lack of Direction -- cf. Pharisees: *"the blind leading the blind"*
- Darkness associated with wickedness

John 3:19-21 *"And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."*

do a word study of "darkness" -- see what it is that Christ has delivered us from
"we have been delivered from the domain of darkness" (Col 1:13)

Our mission is to be light to the world. When the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the apostle Paul, he told him,
"I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:17-18).

Mike Eruzione -- got to light the Olympic Torch; interviewed and just didn't have the words to express how thrilled he was to participate.
We have been entrusted with the **torch of the gospel**; our very lives are to be the light that shines in the darkness and gives people an opportunity to see Jesus and be delivered as we have been
What a privilege!

C. COMING TO GRIPS WITH OUR MISSION AS BELIEVERS = THOSE INDWELT BY JESUS CHRIST -- TO BE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"You are the light of the world"

Implications for us:

1) Light needs to make itself **accessible** to those who need it

Light should be easy to spot in the darkness; Christ expresses this by saying that a city on a hill cannot be hidden.

One commentator noted: Hill cities in Palestine were impressive sites. They were built there because the cool sea breezes would act like an air conditioner in the arid climate, and also because a city on a hill was easiest to defend. It is hard to fight going up hill. The mark of Palestinian cities is that they are always in view. At night they glow in the distance. When we are the light of the world everyone will know it. We cannot reflect His light and remain obscure. We cannot hide His light. God does not call us into the secret service. Either secrecy will destroy the discipleship or discipleship will destroy the secrecy. We cannot live light filled lives in our society without standing out, without having people notice us. They may not like us; they may persecute us, but they will know we are there.

2) Light is not a respecter of persons

Not up to us to pick and choose who we think is a good candidate for the gospel; we can easily be influenced by our own prejudices; only reach out to those in our social, economic class; only speak to those who are like us; light is not that way; the beacon shines for all to see and respond to

3) Light needs to provide answers and direction

We use light so that we can see where we are going. As our lives shine forth with the righteousness of Christ, we need to be prepared to give an answer to those who want to know more about the source of this light and how it is associated with life and redemption from this world of darkness

We have been talking mostly about our:

- **Individual implications** of this mission of being the light of the world
- Apparently there are **corporate implications** for us as a church as well
"A city set on a hill cannot be hidden"

As a church, how is our light shining in the community around us?

D. PATHWAY TO INEFFECTIVENESS = HIDING OUR LIGHT

- overcome by the fear of men; fear of ridicule, of embarrassment, of persecution
- lack of compassion for the plight of the lost
- lack of passion to be a true follower of Christ and Fisher of men

"Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it give light to all who are in the house."

cf. attitude expressed by the book: *I'm Glad You Asked*

(:16) CONCLUSION: OUR MOTIVATION = THAT OTHERS MAY GLORIFY GOD ALSO

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus has much to say in the Sermon on the Mount about our **heart motivation**. Remember, the Pharisees majored on the externals of the law ... Christ countered with:
"Blessed are the pure in heart" not the whitewashed sepulchres who were still rotten on the inside

key = our **good works**; not our words

Easy for us to come across as self-righteous ... like the Pharisees ... conclusion of those watching our life ... he's really a good person ... he definitely deserves to go to heaven if anyone does ...
Or: he sure thinks highly of himself ... We want them to see our good works and **glorify our Father** who is in heaven ... Quite a challenge ... Quite an opportunity

Remember our little O-ring that we started off talking about? **Proved to be very significant** in the case of the Challenger launch. It would be a tragedy if we turned out to be good for nothing and lost our distinctiveness as members in the family of God; or if we hid our light under a bushel basket;

We shouldn't have any issues regarding our **significance** ..

We have been called to be Salt and Light to a world that is rotten and dark;

- Not being asked to do something unnatural or impossible .. but act in a way that is totally consistent with our new nature;
- We have within us the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit ... the life of Christ;

What a privilege to reach out to the world around us and impact that world for Jesus Christ, for the gospel, and for the kingdom of God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some ways that we have seen our Christian testimony compromised?

- 2) What do societies look like where there is no Christian influence?
- 3) What are some of the pressures to hide my light instead of position it to shine brightly?
- 4) What is the effect of light on darkness?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Ryrie: Re **Col. 4:5-6** -- Salt is a preservative that retards spoilage. Our speech should be tempered so as never to be insipid, corrupt, or obscene.

Kittel: Re "*tasteless*" -- Denotes a physical or intellectual deficiency in animals or men, in their conduct and actions, also in things. The word can refer to physical sloth or dullness, but the main ref. is to the intellectual life. It takes on various meanings in different contexts. Thus it can mean 'insipid' of insufficiently seasoned foods... The difficulty of the saying as thus attested in three different forms is that salt cannot lose its chemical qualities... It is impossible that what Jesus brought, what He gave His disciples, what He made of them, should become insipid and perish. The Gospel is as incorruptible and indestructible as salt... illustrates indestructibility and permanence of God's gift in Christ ... not dependent on man... The [word] now suggests, not the physical impossibility of a change in the chemical constitution of salt, but the psychical possibility of a change in the faith of disciples. The warning concerns the earthly being of the disciple. He who through the powerful Word of Christ has become an apostle, a fisher of men, a shepherd, a rock, loses all value if his faith vacillates and he falls away.

John Walvoord: Influence of True Disciples -- ... While salt can preserve and flavor almost any food, ... salt without flavor should be thrown away. So disciples, without true moral character and spiritual commitment to the King, are useless in the kingdom of heaven. It also implies the rottenness of the world, which needs the preservative of the salt, as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out.

Lenski: Commentators waver between the single use of salt in counteracting corruption or the double use of doing this and also rendering food palatable. In Christ's word the *tertium comparationis* is a unit idea not a duality. The thought of making the world palatable to God is quite impossible. All that Christ has in mind with the figure of salt is that his disciples check the moral corruption of the world, so that it does not quickly perish in its own moral rottenness. This figure by no means exhausts our function in the world, even also as other figures at once follow.

John Piper: So we can see why a life devoted to righteousness or godliness will be persecuted or reviled or spoken against.

- If you cherish chastity, your life will be an attack on people's love for free sex.
- If you embrace temperance, your life will be a statement against the love of alcohol.
- If you pursue self-control, your life will indict excess eating.
- If you live simply and happily, you will show the folly of luxury.
- If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the evil of pride.

--If you are punctual and thorough in your dealings, you will lay open the inferiority of laziness and negligence.

-- If you speak with compassion, you will throw callousness into sharp relief.

-- If you are earnest, you will make the flippant look flippant instead of clever.

-- And if you are spiritually minded you will expose the worldly-mindedness of those around you.

When you desire to be godly in all your affairs and relationships -- when you follow the righteousness of Jesus in his strength and for his glory -- there are two possible responses people can have who stay around you. These are described in **John 3:20-21**.

- *For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.* [That is one possible response: hating the light and not accepting it.]

- *But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.* [That is the other possible response: doing the truth and coming to it and freely admitting that all good in us is accomplished by God.]

The two options are **persecution** or **conversion**. (See these two options in **Matthew 5:10** and **16**.) But, we ask, what about all the unbelievers in my life who are neither converted nor persecuting -- who are just civil, or even polite? There are at least two possible explanations.

- One is that your light is under a bushel. You are keeping the stumbling block of the cross well concealed (**Galatians 5:11; 6:12-13**). You don't let your distinctive values show.

- The other is that you are letting them show and the people around you are moving toward one or the other of these two polls: persecution or conversion.

Neither of these must happen immediately. There are all kinds of factors that can hinder expressions of persecution. We see these often in the gospels when the Pharisees were angered but were hindered by expediency from expressing their anger in outright persecution. Neither persecution nor conversion will always happen immediately. In fact many people are torn inside themselves, partly hating the claims of Christianity in your life, partly attracted by them.

So we should all examine ourselves to see if we are playing a kind of cowardly Christian incognito. And if so we should repent and resolve to be more sincere in the expression of who we really are. But we must not assume that, because there is no persecution right now and no conversion right now, the fault must lie with us. The gestation period for the new birth may be nearing a happy end. Or the storm may be ready to break against you.

John Kolkebec: Message - "**Are you Worth Your Salt?**" **Mt 5:13-14**

I. Uses of Salt

1. Season - Do you bring out the true meaning of life?

Man's reality/Purpose in life **Acts 17:27/ John 17:3**

Who are you helping to find reality/Salvation/Relation?

2. Preserves Food -
Used to roll meat in Salt & place in ground.
Do you preserve and promote proper relationships?
Authority-Government, Work, Family, Enemies -- **Rom 13, Col 3:23, Eph 5, Rom 12:19**
3. Promotes Thirst -
i.e. on Popcorn
Do others thirst for your relationship with God?
Mat 7:6 Blessed who thirst
4. Cleansing - Do you encourage righteousness?
Babies washed in salt. **Ps 119:9,11** Cleanses us/Others
We have answers- Flee Flesh / Fight Satan / Pray when World Tempts
5. Provide Foundations for Roads/Roofs -
Salt with dirt of life can give meaning to life.
Do you share foundational truths?
6. Heals - Do you show God's Love?
Know you are disciples by your love. **Jn 13:35**
7. Given as Salary -
Are you really Christ's possession?
We are bought with a price **1 Cor 6:20**. His inheritance!
8. In Battle -
Killed soil's ability. **Lk 14:33-35?** (light fertilizer)
9. Prevented Stench of Society's Waste -
Does your presence help to prevent sin? **Lk 14:35**

II. God's promise of Provision - "Covenant of Salt"

- A. Provision for God's Priests, **Lev. 2:13; Num 18:8,11,19**
- B. We are Priests of God, **Ex 19:5/ 1Pet 2:9-12; Mt 6:33**

III. Need for a choice Lk 14:25-35/ Mt 5:13

- A. Hate (not person) but demand of relation that would make you disobey God.
- B. You are Salt! Are you useful for Battle?

Bill Prater: Sermon on the Mount -- Matthew 5:13

In the previous verses the Lord presented the principles and qualities that make a Christian **distinctive**. Beginning with **verse 13** He goes on to give a striking picture of what it really means to behave as a Christian. In describing the Christian as the salt of the earth, Jesus provides a powerful illustration of the impact and impression we are to be making on the society in which we live.

The size of our influence is not the focus in this verse, but rather the strength of it.

I. A DIVINE OPPORTUNITY

We must keep in mind as we approach this verse that this is not a call for volunteers. Jesus is telling

those of His day, as well as those of us today, that as believers we ARE salt whether we want to be or not. It is not a matter of whether or not we are influencing others, but it is a matter of how we are influencing them.

As salt, we have an awesome opportunity to make an eternal difference in the lives of those around us.

A. Salt is Visible

1. Notice that as Christians we are the salt of the earth. Our ministry is to a lost and dying world. We are to win lost souls and establish them in the faith.
2. The only way we can accomplish our God-given mission is to be a visible part of our society. We are not to hide ourselves within the confines of the four walls of the church building, totally isolated from the rest of the world.
3. We must remember - NO CONTACT, NO IMPACT!
4. **Matthew 9:10-13; John 17:14-15**

B. Salt is Valuable

1. In today's society, we tend to miss the impact of what Jesus was saying in this verse. However, those in ancient societies understood the value of salt far better than we. The Romans believed, for instance, that there was nothing as valuable as salt, except for the sun. Many Roman soldiers received their pay in salt. Some have said that it was from this practice that the phrase "not worth his salt" originated.
2. Those listening to Jesus may not have understood all of what He was saying, but they knew that to be called "*the salt of the earth*" was to be something very special and valuable.
3. Jesus has chosen us (**John 15:16**), as believers, to do His work here on earth. We are of great value to Him. But not only are we of value to the Lord, but we are also of great value to the world, although they may not realize it or acknowledge it.

C. Salt is Vital

1. Among its many other uses, salt is essential to the health of both humans and animals. In ancient days it was a vital part of the economy in terms of a source of revenue.
2. Our existence as believers and our influence as "*the salt of the earth*" is vital to the preservation of our society. Right now it is the existence of believers in the world that is staying the awful punishment of a holy and righteous God.

II. A DEFINITE RESPONSIBILITY

By nature and by purpose believers are to be distinctly different. By nature we are a new creation, born of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:23**). By purpose we are to:

A. Be Pure

1. Its color being white, salt symbolizes purity.
2. Purity is a must on the part of God's people (**1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 1:3**).

B. Preserve

1. To the people of Jesus' day salt was a preservative vital to their way of life. The only way fishermen could get their product to the market in good condition was to salt it and pack it between layers of salt. The salt kept the fish fresh and edible.
2. "*Ye are the salt of the earth*" implies that there is a rottenness in the earth. It implies a tendency to pollution and to becoming foul and offensive. The world's tendency is to evil. It's like meat which has a tendency to putrefy and become polluted. Ever since the fall of man in the garden, the world has become more and more corrupt. It is the purpose of believers to be a preserving influence to retard the

moral and spiritual decay in the world.

3. The most effective way of halting the corruption in society is by bringing individuals in society to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

C. Be Pungent

1. If something is said to be pungent it means that it has a stinging or biting quality causing an irritating sensation.

2. In our own unique way, as believers we are to be somewhat irritating to the world. Just as salt in a wound stings, believers are to prick the conscience of the world and be an irritant to ungodly behavior.

3. Our life as a Christian ought to be a positive witness for Christ, but it should also be a negative condemnation to the person who refuses to believe.

4. **2 Corinthians 2:15-16**

D. Penetrate

1. Once salt has been applied to food, it penetrates that food and changes the way it is. As Christians we are to penetrate the world and change the way it is. The apostles penetrated the society in which they lived and made such a difference that it was said that they had "turned the world upside down" (**Acts 17:6**).

2. As salt penetrates the food to which it is applied, it adds flavor to that food. And in much the same way, we as Christians are to add flavor to the world around us. If as a Christian we are not making the world around us a better place by our presence, we are not fulfilling our function as salt. Our life as a Christian ought not to be dull and tasteless (**Job 6:6**). We ought to be a living example of the "flavor" that Jesus Christ can add.

3. Salt also creates thirst. Christians ought to create a thirst for God in those around them.

III. A DREADFUL POSSIBILITY

"It is a well-known fact that the salt of this country [ie. Palestine] when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless. From the manner in which it is gathered, much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all; and such salt soon effloresces and turns to dust--not to fruitful soil however. It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown...No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street; and there it is cast, to be trodden under foot of men." (*The Pulpit Commentary*, Volume 15, page 152)

There is danger, disgrace, and possible disaster here in terms of our Christian testimony. The possibility of a Christian losing his or her testimony is as real as salt losing its saltiness. The above quote gives us some idea as to how salt loses its savor and how we can lose our testimony as a child of God.

A. Association "It is a well-known fact that the salt of this country [ie. Palestine] when in contact with the ground, or exposed to rain and sun, does become insipid and useless..."

1. Just as salt can become insipid and useless through exposure to the wrong elements, so can a Christian.

2. **Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

3. Nothing will cause a child of God to be stale and tasteless and render them useless any quicker than associations with worldly people and worldly activities.

B. Contamination "...From the manner in which it is gathered much earth and other impurities are necessarily collected with it. Not a little of it is so impure that it cannot be used at all..."

1. **James 1:27**

2. As we discussed at the beginning of this lesson, Jesus did not pray that the Father would remove

believers from the world but that He would keep them from the contamination of the world (**John 17:14-15**).

3. Prolonged association with the world will ultimately mean being contaminated by the world.

C. Devastation "...It is not only good for nothing itself, but it actually destroys all fertility wherever it is thrown..."

1. The Christian who through prolonged association with world becomes contaminated by the world will have a devastating effect upon the world in terms of his or her testimony.

2. Not only does a contaminated Christian become ineffective in having an influence upon the lost, but they also render other Christians around them ineffective.

D. Repudiation "...No man will allow it to be thrown on to his field, and the only place for it is the street; and there it is cast, to be trodden under foot of men."

1. While the world may not embrace them, they will tolerate a "salty" Christian, but they have absolutely no use for a tasteless one. They will reject them and the God they supposedly served.

2. A Christian who has lost their testimony is good for nothing. It is a sad reality that there are a lot of "good for nothing"

TEXT: Matthew 5:17-20

TITLE: JESUS FULFILLING THE LAW -- SHARPENING THE FOCUS . . . RAISING THE BAR

BIG IDEA:

WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRED BY GOD, CHRIST BOTH SHARPENS THE FOCUS AND RAISES THE BAR

INTRODUCTION:

Pastor Brian has called the Sermon on the Mount, **Christ's stump speech** – in other words this same message or at least its major themes were probably repeated by Christ numerous times and in many settings throughout His 3 ½ years of earthly ministry. I like that designation. Some of us just listened to the third presidential debate this past week ... the stump speeches ... the standard lines of the two candidates are already boring me ... there is so much rhetoric ... so much twisting of the truth and misrepresentation ... so many big promises and so little power to make things happen ... to really make a change in people's lives ... I admit I am somewhat of a political cynic ... not to minimize the importance of our responsibility to evaluate the issues and to vote ... and certainly not painting both candidates with the same brush when it comes to character and convictions ... but when it comes to stump speeches ... they tire me out ..

The Sermon on the Mount is 2000 years old ... for me it is about 50 years old ... but I'm not tired of it ... I don't find it boring It is exciting and fresh ... because it is the Word of God and it is powerful ... it communicates **the essence of kingdom life** ... it shows me what **true righteousness** looks like when Christ reigns in our hearts ... you want the true message of Peace and Security and Prosperity ... it is all here in the Sermon on the Mount ...

Christ is no mere politician of some local time and place

He is the fulfillment of everything the OT promised in terms of the coming Messiah:

- He is the **ultimate prophet** who would not only communicate God's message ... but Himself be the incarnate Word of God
- He is the **Sympathetic Priest** – the one mediator between God and man ... who Himself is the very sacrifice that has paid the penalty for our sins
- He is the **Reigning Eternal King** who is ushering in His kingdom according to His sovereign Reign

Don't forget what we have covered already in the Sermon on the Mount ... review your notes ...

Today we come to a **pivotal short paragraph** that sets up the specific topics Christ is going to address to contrast His explanation of the law of God with that of the scribes and Pharisees. He takes up the topics of murder, of reconciliation and forgiveness, of adultery and divorce, of the swearing of oaths, of retaliation vs love, of almsgiving, of prayer, of fasting, of materialism, of anxiety ... the list goes on.

The **contrast is going to be severe** at every point ...

- you have those who pride themselves on being the experts in the law ... those who have made a profession out of telling others how to live in a way that will please God – the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who are going to be exposed as white-washed sepulchres ... trying to look pretty on the outside but stinking of death and condemnation on the inside

- vs. the Lawgiver and Lawfulfiller Himself – the Lord Jesus Christ

He never backs away from a confrontation where He sees an opportunity to shed light on the true nature of the kingdom of God and His righteousness

Let's see who the **real expert is on the subject of the law of God** and the type of righteousness that is demanded by Him

Charles Swindoll: For many long years, faulty information had been taught by the religious aristocracy. With unquestioned authority, these religious leaders twisted the meaning of Holy Scripture, offered interpretations that were simply wrong, and demanded applications that were frankly impossible. Not content to let God's Word speak for itself, they added to the commandments of God and required that everyone obey their additions without hesitation. When Jesus sat down and delivered His illustrious Sermon on the Mount, jaws must have dropped as His audience heard an entirely different interpretation, delivered in an entirely different mode of communication.

With boldness and clarity, He explained crucial truths in such a way that anyone could grasp the meaning. His teachings were both insightful and convicting. They stood in sharp contrast to the traditional religious instructions the people had been taught throughout their lives. And just as these truths were impactful among Jesus' original audience, they have immense bearing for us today. . .

So, rather than setting aside, rejecting, or replacing the Word of God, Jesus had come to "*fulfill*" and to "*accomplish*" it (**5:17-18**). Jesus Himself would fulfill God's Word doctrinally, ethically, prophetically, and personally. He would live its laws and interpret its words as God originally intended. He would fulfill its prophecies and promises as predicted.

Grant Osborne: The body of the sermon begins here. The central issue is the relationship of Jesus' kingdom teaching (in a sense, a new Torah) to the old Torah or law. When one realizes the radical nature of this new ethical teaching, it is understandable that Jesus begins with this issue. He wants to make clear that he is **unswerving in his adherence to the Torah**. This supplements but does not replace Torah; rather, it is the **true explication of Torah**, the implications that have not previously been understood.

Moreover, Torah is caught up and fulfilled in this new kingdom teaching. It is clear that Jesus brings something entirely new to the table—a new righteousness; but that new righteousness is not opposed to the old but is the **true implication** of it. The six antitheses in **5:21–48** draw out and exemplify this fact.

The scribes and Pharisees had developed the oral tradition in order to explicate the law more clearly for the people; they wanted to make its meaning evident on the practical level of living it rightly. Jesus is saying in effect that they have failed to do so. Only he can "*fulfill*" it, that is, **bring it to its intended end or goal**.

I. (:17-18) CHRIST SHARPENS THE FOCUS ON OT REVELATION BY WAY OF FULFILLMENT ... NOT BY WAY OF ANNULMENT

ILLUSTRATION: SHARPENING THE FOCUS

This past week Karen and I enjoyed travelling throughout the gorgeous mountains of Vermont – the changing leaves were just in their prime ... God's glorious beauty shouted from every mountaintop .. a dazzling array of colors ... sometimes muted ... sometimes very bright and vivid ..

Locals know us as "leaf peepers"

Now that we have advanced into the modern age with a digital camera ... Karen can take pictures to her heart's content (cell phones .. that's a story for another day ... not going there yet)

These new cameras with their Auto-Focus features are great ... you don't have to play with a lot of complicated dials and settings ... just point and click ...

But the **level of light** vs shadows available is a crucial variable you cannot control ... you might have the same shot of a quaint old-fashioned church with a high steeple in the town square ... set against the backdrop of some trees with every shade of orange and red imaginable... but if the sun is behind the clouds or you are in the shadows ... the picture will not be the same as when the lighting is just right ... The reality of the scene is the same ... the church is what it is ... but until you have the proper lighting you don't get the full impact

That is the analogy we are going to look at this morning as we examine the relationship between the revelation of God's righteousness in the OT Law and Prophets and the sharpened focus on God's revelation brought about by the light of God's glory in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The OT was a period of types and shadows. The New Covenant revelation is one of completion and fulfillment.

- Look at the feasts ... what they were intended to signify ..
- Look at all the different sacrifices
- Look at the laws associated with cleanliness
- Look at the OT characters themselves

Abraham – the father of those who would be called into the family of faith

Moses – picture of God redeeming His people

Joshua – a type of the Savior who would lead his people into the promised land

David – a type of the righteous King who would come

Christ was viewed as a threat by those who made it their business to major in God's revelation. Not welcomed with open arms; not recognized as the Messiah; but treated with suspicion and attacked as an enemy of the law of Moses

PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION: THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF GOD'S REVELATION DOES NOT ANNUL THE CONTINUITY OF THAT REVELATION

A. (:17a) Wrong View of OT Revelation = Failing to see Progression in the context of Continuity
“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets”

Def of “*the Law and the Prophets*”

More than just five books of OT

Seems to be a reference to entire revelation of OT

Sometimes a reference to just “the Law” can also speak of the whole (vs. 19)

The law itself divided into 3 components: moral, ceremonial, civil – but an integrated whole with special application to the nation of Israel

(Caution: will be using some labels here ... helpful in being able to speak to a system of thought)

1. Forget About the OT = Deny the Continuity of God's Revelation

(cf. my marketing campaign: “Forget About Bob”)

scribes and Pharisees had invested everything in trying to be experts on the OT law

a. Unfounded Charge made against Christ (and later against the Apostle Paul)

Abolishing the Law -- Christ speaking against the commands of Moses; not submitting to them – Why would they make such a charge?

(Warren Wiersbe:)

- 1) His **authority** didn't fit their mold (7:29)
"He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes"
- 2) His **associations** didn't fit their mold
 This man rubs shoulders with the lowest class of sinners in society
- 3) His **activities** didn't fit their mold
 How could He perform acts of healing on the Sabbath
 Didn't conform to their traditions ... which they had elevated to
 The same degree of authority as scripture itself
- 4) His **message** didn't fit their mold
 Message of a call to repentance – not what the self righteous want to hear

b. Ultra Dispensationalists – Sermon on the Mount has no application to today
 Application: How do evangelicals forget about the OT?
 Yes, the keeping of the law cannot save or sanctify us
 Yes, believers are no longer under the law as the rule of life
 But there is much of value in the OT and much that applies to us today ...

2. Reduce the Message of the OT to one of External Legalism

- a. Scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day
 misunderstanding of the communication of God's message in the OT –
 especially regarding the true nature of righteousness
- b. Legalists of Today
 - Seventh Day Adventists
 Application: How do evangelicals fall into legalism in their approach to spirituality?

the practice of adding extra commandments to the Law that Christ:

"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matt. 23:4, NIV).

3. Deny the Progressive Nature of God's Revelation – 2 Examples:

a. **Theonomists** -- want to see the civil laws and associated penalties promoted in our society today; fail to recognize the distinctive program that God has for the nation of Israel ... since they see the church as fulfilling all that pertains to the nation of Israel (except they do allow for the cessation of the sacrifices) (Rushdoony, North – very intellectual ... heavy stuff ..)
 But they are compensating for the failure of the evangelical church to give enough attention to God's revelation in the OT – a swing of the pendulum

b. **Messianic camp** needs to be careful here – They come from a cultural emphasis of wanting to retain their special Jewish heritage while celebrating the fulfillment that Christ has brought to the types and shadows of the OT feasts, etc. Sounds good ... but has some areas where we need to be cautious:

- aren't we supposed to be promoting a unity in the body of Christ where we no longer form cliques around areas of distinctive race or culture?? I would have the same issue of caution with other distinctive groups (Korean Presbyterian churches, Chinese churches) – I see the value ... yet we live in a world of people of all backgrounds ... shouldn't our church be one that could attract everyone who wants to be a disciple of Christ??

- areas of emphasis – too easy to get on a soapbox about peripheral issues and get the attention diverted away from what should be primary

Application: How do evangelicals deny the progressive nature of God’s revelation?

B. (:17b-18) Right View of OT Revelation = Seeing Progression in the context of Continuity
Christ came to Completely and Entirely Fulfill God’s Revelation in the OT
“I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”

In what sense did **Christ fulfill** God’s revelation in the OT:

- By His **life of obedience** ... completely fulfilled all of the righteous requirements of the law
Gal. 4:4 *“made under the law”*
Remember His baptism – *“it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”*
Submitted to the instruction of his parents
Observed the feasts and the sacrifices
Earned the commendation of His Heavenly Father: *“This is my Son in whom I am well pleased”* – shows that His righteousness was not just external but proceeded from the heart
- By the **fulfillment of all prophecy** – some yet future
- Most importantly, **in His death and resurrection** – He redeemed us, reconciled us
Brought us into a new relationship with God under the New Covenant

Leon Morris: *To fulfil* has been understood in three main ways:

- (1) It may mean that he would do the things laid down in Scripture.
- (2) It may mean that he would bring out the full meaning of Scripture.
- (3) It may mean that in his life and teaching he would bring Scripture to its completion.

Each points to an aspect of the truth, and Jesus may well have meant that he would fulfil Scripture in more ways than one.

Summary: CHRIST SHARPENS THE FOCUS ON OT REVELATION BY WAY OF FULFILLMENT ... NOT BY WAY OF ANNULMENT

II. (:19-20) CHRIST RAISES THE BAR BY EMPHASIZING THE TRUE NATURE OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH GOD HAS ALWAYS REQUIRED = PERFECTION = ONLY THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Remember **5:48** *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

ILLUSTRATION: RAISING THE BAR

My athletic career peaked in the 6th grade ... (Doesn’t seem to surprise any of you) I was a standout in the Junior Olympics that year. One of my best events was the high jump. Different than today when you have fancy techniques like the Fosbury Flop where you leap over backwards, head first ... we just lined up ... took a run at the pole and did a scissor kick to try to clear it. Every time you made the height they would raise the bar ... eventually nobody could make it ...

Our passage this morning serves as the introduction to how Christ will interpret some very specific commands of God from the OT. In each case he sets forth the contrast between what the scribes and Pharisees are teaching the people and the true intent of God’s Law. He raises the bar ... making the

transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant by remaining consistent to the continuity of revelation while introducing the progressive aspects of that revelation.

A. (:19) CHRIST PLACES THE HIGHEST PRIORITY ON BOTH OBEYING GOD’S LAW COMPLETELY AND TEACHING/MODELING IT ACCURATELY -- A STANDARD TO WHICH ONLY HE CAN ATTAIN

“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Some important principles from this one verse:

1. Teaching God’s Word is a Sobering Responsibility

Message of James: don’t just rush forward and babble away; guard the tongue

Not for those young in the faith ... will puff them up

Know your limitations

2. There are Differing Levels of Reward and Recognition in the Kingdom of Heaven

Should not be surprising

Does this primarily refer to privileged positions of responsibility in the Millennial Kingdom?

Certainly nothing to minimize or sneeze at

On the other hand can become a stumbling block to those who pursue with motive of selfish ambition .. must not minister from mixed motives

Remember back to previous context: *“see your good works and glorify your Father”*

But the key here is that we all will fall short ... the only one who is perfect in this area of obedience is **Christ Himself** – really continuing to contrast Himself with the scribes and Pharisees

3. We need to Understand the Transition from the Old Covenant (the dispensation of the law) to the New Covenant –

How does this mesh with our understanding of the New Covenant?? Impossible to cover adequately here ... requires systematic treatment of relationship of the believer to the law – cf. book by [Alva McClain](#) – Law and Grace

Our focus today: What is Christ saying in **verse 19**?? Placing a high importance on the law ... Are there any millennial applications here ... where the civil aspect of the law will once again become more prominent?? I don’t know

This might come as a surprise since we have been taught:

- *“We are not under the law ...”* in what sense?? Is there any sense in which the law is still the rule of life for the believer

- *“Christ is the end of the law”* – in what sense – are we to forget about the OT?

What don’t we mean here?

Some people use this verse as a justification to push for necessary obedience on the Part of believers to:

- keep the **Sabbath day** holy --

But: only of the 10 commandments not repeated in NT

Specifically said that it was given as a sign to nation of Israel

But: principle still has some merit from model of creation

- **give tithes** (10 % of gross or net ...income)

But teaching of NT on giving is that of sacrificial giving ...

The Lord owns it ALL; we are stewards; how to exercise wise stewardship ... not just giving money away ... but investing wisely for eternity ... lot of issues involved

What do we mean here?

What is the standard of life today for the believer?

Alva McClain: “This standard is the will of God in the context of His grace given in our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed perfectly in the entire written Word of God.” (and as enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit who unites us with the life of Christ)

- The law is one law – an indivisible unity including moral, ceremonial and civil elements
 - remember James ... if you break the law in one part ... you have broken the entire law
 - Christ emphasized ceremonial aspects – “*Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses comanded*” (Matt. 8:4)
- The law with its injunctions cannot be separated from its penalties
- The law can save no sinner – no one can keep it perfectly
- The problem is not with the law – it is an accurate expression of the righteous character of God
- Why then was the law given?
 - Remember that the covenants and promises were given first .. law added
 - Necessary for restraint of evil
 - Gives the knowledge of sin and of transgression
- Clearly the Christian believer is no longer under the law – subject to all of its command and liable to all of its penalties – it cannot sanctify us either
- That does not mean that the law has no relevance for us – it remains a valuable part of Scripture and the moral aspect continues to teach us about God’s standard for righteousness

B. (:20) CHRIST RAISES THE BAR WAY ABOVE ANY LEVEL OF SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Christ could not have painted things in more dramatic fashion:

- How do you think the crowd would have reacted to a statement like this? Certainly it got their attention ... made them re-examine their thinking
- How do you think the scribes and Pharisees would have reacted? Stirred up their anger and opposition – who is this man of Nazareth to criticize us ... to question our level of spirituality?

The Righteousness Required by God:

1. Is a Free Gift -- The Only Righteousness that Counts with God is One which He Freely Gives as a Gift of His Grace

Look at the Problem of **Self Righteousness** and **Pride**:

Cf. the problem of the rich man in Matt. 19:16-26 – came to Christ with the right goal: wanting to find out how to obtain eternal life ... but asked the wrong question = “*Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?*” No problem ... just go obey all the commandments ... the standard of righteousness we have already seen = Perfection ... knock yourself out

The law shows us the weakness of our flesh and how far short we fall of God’s standard

Disciples alarmed at Jesus’ answer – “*Then who can be saved ...with God all things are possible*”

Where am I driven by achievement ... doing ... doing ... doing?

Where do I compare myself with others in order to puff myself up?

How do I come across to unbelievers as possessing some sort of special works righteousness rather than proclaiming the true message of the gospel: only a sinner saved by grace?

2. Focuses on the Heart -- The Only Righteousness that Counts with God is One that Flows out of a Heart Changed by God

Grant Osborne: The problem is inherent in all legalistic movements: certain patterns are identified with holiness, but they are too easily external (acted out) rather than internal (truly believed and lived). The result is hypocrisy (see **Matt 23**). Therefore, a mere righteousness by fiat is insufficient. The lifestyle God demands is **of the heart**, lived out in daily actions.

Illustration: When Karen and I got in the car to head off on our trip this past week ... we noticed right away that we couldn't see clearly because our windshield was dirty ... we used the washer fluid and the wipers several times ... but it didn't seem to help .. then we realized that the problem was the inside of the windshield was still dirty!

Message of Matt 15 – Christ not after lip service; not after the external traditions that are man-made; only concerned with the righteousness that proceeds from the heart

Christ described the scribes and Pharisees in **Matt 23:25-28**

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.”

Why do we focus our evangelism on methods of manipulation and emotionalism and intellectual argumentation? We fail to understand the true dynamic of how God works on the inside of a person's heart in accordance with His sovereignty and grace to draw a person to repentance and faith.

Caution: As we study the Commands of Christ ... make sure that we are not setting up another external code of do's and don'ts where the burden is on our discipline and self effort to achieve ... this would be a recipe for defeat.

The New Covenant is all about the law of Christ written on our heart within ... with the empowerment coming by grace through faith in the one who indwells us – the person of Christ made real in our experience by the power of the Holy Spirit

Key passage: **Romans 8:4** *“in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”*

Out of a motive of thanksgiving for having been delivered from the dominion of sin and death ... we now yield the members of our body as instruments to fulfill the righteous intent of God's law with regards to loving God and loving others – and it is all accomplished by grace through faith .. identical to how we entered into the Christian life

The goal of the sanctifying process is nothing short of the perfection which the law of God requires

3. Is Found in Christ -- The Only Righteousness that Counts with God is the One that is Found in Christ

The scribes and Pharisees could not stomach this message; they wanted to protect the empire that they had built around exalting themselves as the experts in both performing and interpreting God's righteousness

Get our focus back to the Person and work of Jesus Christ ...

- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is the **message of the Gospel of John** = Jesus' special sign miracles point us to faith in Him as the promised Messiah, the Son of God – who alone can provide spiritual life
- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is **the message of Romans** = Instead of boasting about prideful distinctions, all believers need to unite in promoting the worldwide message of the gospel which reveals the righteousness of God
- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is the **message of 1 Corinthians** = we preach the foolishness of the cross; *Christ has become to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption .. let him who boasts, boast in the Lord*
- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is **the message of Galatians** = Never surrender the liberty of our new life in Christ to the bondage of religious legalism
- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is the **message of Colossians** = The key to spirituality is living out our union with the supreme and sufficient Christ (understanding that we are complete in Him)
- the message of the Sermon on the Mount is the **message of the Book of Hebrews** .. God's supreme revelation to us today is found in the person of His Son ... the living Word of God

CONCLUSION: SHARPENING THE FOCUS AND RAISING THE BAR

I would like to conclude with four simple points of application:

1) We need to appreciate that **Christ completely fulfills** all of God's righteous requirements as set forth in the Law and the Prophets. What does that mean for us?

- we are no longer under the law
- we enjoy all of the benefits of the New Covenant with the Law of Christ written on our hearts
- grace does not mean that obedience doesn't matter – message of Apostle Paul -- should we continue in sin that grace should abound? Called to Holiness
- as disciples of Jesus Christ, out of love and devotion to Him, we make it our aim to live from The heart in such a way that He will be well pleased

2) We need to **value God's message to us in the OT** – studying it diligently to find those principles that guide us into understanding the will of God for us today in the context of grace.

- Remembering the Principle of Interpretation: the progressive nature of God's revelation does not annul the continuity of that revelation
- 2 Tim 3:16 *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”* – speaking about OT Scripture

3) We need to examine our own lives for any trace of **self-righteousness** or **legalism** and return in humility to living by grace through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit

- we have been justified and given the righteousness of Christ as our own
- we do not want to become puffed up with pride like the scribes and Pharisees – comparing our

so-called level of spirituality to others ... and viewing ourselves as the experts who hold the key to understanding God's truth

4) We need to be on guard against false teachers that will try to bring us back under the burden of the law and compromise the freedom of our new life in the Spirit

We need to look to our Lord Jesus Christ to **sharpen our focus** and **raise the bar** for us on our understanding of God's revelation

As we continue in the coming weeks to examine this **stump speech** of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount .. that is precisely what should take place.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you have a high view of Scriptures and a commitment to its inspiration and inerrancy?
- 2) If Jesus had come to abolish the law and the prophets what would He have taught differently?
- 3) How does your view of progressive revelation impact your understanding of the continuity of revelation?
- 4) How can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Ryrie: Among evangelicals, three primary positions on the Mosaic Law exist. They can be distinguished from each other by one simple test: how they interpret Christ's words, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*" (**Matt. 5:17**, NIV). More specifically, each view can be identified by how it interprets the phrase "*to fulfill*" (Greek: *plerosai*). At the risk of oversimplifying (for variations exist within each viewpoint), the three positions and their adherents are as follows:

1. Christ Revises the Law (Reformed)

In Reformed theology, Christ "*fulfilled*" the Law in the sense of revealing its true meaning and intent — and, to some extent, transcending it. Reformed tradition divides the Law into three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial. The moral laws are seen as still in force for the Church, but Christ's ministry helps us better understand them. The civil and ceremonial laws are considered types and shadows of Christ that no longer function as pointing forward to Him, so they have been set aside.

2. Christ Replaces the Law (Lutherans and Dispensationlists)

Christians are not under the Law of Moses as a "rule of life." This position reads **Matt. 5:17** and **18** together, and the emphasis is placed on the phrase "*until everything is accomplished*" at the end of **verse 18**. Since Jesus has "*accomplished*" (or fulfilled) the entire Law, all of it has "*passed away*" (see **v.18**) for Christians. The Law remains a vehicle of revelation but not regulation.

3. Christ Reaffirms the Law (Theonomians and others)

Theonomians are a small, fringe group of evangelicals whose origin traces back to Reformed scholar **Rousas J. Rushdoony**, who insisted in his 1973 book, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, that the Church should work to bring Mosaic civil laws and penalties (e.g., the death penalty for adulterers, idolaters, and sorcerers) into the law books of modern “Christian societies.” Sometimes called Christian Reconstructionists, their views have spread beyond their Reformed birthplace into Pentecostal circles.

Theonomians depart from the Reformed view in that only the moral aspects of the Law apply today, and they believe that only the ceremonial aspects of the Law passed away in Christ. Thus, **Gothard** is not a Theonomian. However, we can say that, of all the interpretations of **Matt. 5:17**, this one comes the closest to his position. Like the Theonomians, **Gothard** believes Christ’s basic meaning was to reaffirm the validity of the Law for all time.

Nonetheless, **Gothard**’s view goes beyond that of the Theonomians. He, too, believes that modern civil laws should be based on Scripture, but he also strongly promotes the ceremonial requirements of the Law for Christians today. In this, his belief comes closer to that of a group outside of evangelicalism: Seventh-Day Adventists (SDA).

Historic Christian Position:

The historic Christian position on **Matt. 5:17** has not been that Christ came to reaffirm the Mosaic Law; but that, in its original form, the Law was provisional and incomplete at some level. The fact that it was necessary for Christ to come and “*fulfill*” it is proof enough of that. This is a basic area of agreement between the Reformed, Lutherans, and Dispensationalists.

Another area of agreement among evangelicals has been that neither the ceremonial nor the civil aspects of the Law are required of Christians today. Evangelicals take different theological routes, but they arrive at the same conclusion: it is not only unnecessary but wrong for Christians to require others to be circumcised, to keep the Levitical purification rites, or to impose Mosaic civil sanctions.

Van Parunak: It is sometimes suggested that “*fulfill*” implies that the law is “finished” and thus now obsolete. The meaning of the verb πληρωω here should be understood in the light of Matthew’s frequent use of the word throughout the book (16x, more than any other book except Acts). Thirteen of these references (including **5:17**) talk about the **fulfillment of Scripture**.

Most of them deal with **prophecies** or **types** that anticipate our Lord’s life. He “*fulfills*” the prophecy or type by presenting himself as the one to whom it refers. We have already seen this verb used five times by Matthew to describe the fulfillment of Scripture by events in our Lord’s life: **1:22** (the virgin birth), **2:15** (the flight into Egypt), **2:17** (the slaughter of the innocents), **2:23** (being called a Nazarene), and **4:14** (the move to Capernaum). Six more times Matthew uses the word in contexts like this, and twice our Lord speaks of the fulfillment of Scripture (here and in **26:54**), though in these cases he doesn’t point to a specific promise.

So here, he claims that he fulfills, not only the prophets (whose words dominate most of the other “fulfillment” passages) but also the law. The Law describes the man in whom God is well pleased. By claiming to fulfill it, the Lord is saying that the law has a particular man in view, the Messiah, the last Adam.

Sometimes people say that he fulfills the law by keeping it. It is true that he keeps it, but “fulfill” implies more than this. It implies that **when God gave the law, he intended it to point to the Messiah**.

Application: We ought to be very suspicious of claims that the law of God is no longer in effect. Indeed, it is impossible for us to obey certain parts of it, because the kingdom of God has no worldly form in this present age. But this entire section pre

Craig Blomberg: Fulfillment of Scripture, as throughout **chaps. 1-4**, refers to the **bringing to fruition of its complete meaning**. Here Jesus views his role as that of fulfilling all of the Old Testament. This claim has massive hermeneutical implications and challenges both classic Reformed and Dispensationalist perspectives. It is inadequate to say either that none of the Old Testament applies unless it is explicitly reaffirmed in the New or that all of the Old Testament applies unless it is explicitly revoked in the New. Rather, all of the Old Testament remains normative and relevant for Jesus' followers (**2 Tim 3:16**), but none of it can rightly be interpreted until one understands how it has been fulfilled in Christ. Every Old Testament text must be viewed in light of Jesus' person and ministry and the changes introduced by the new covenant he inaugurated. Nor is there any evidence here for the common Christian division of the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories or for elevating the Ten Commandments above others. This is not to say that the law cannot or should not be subdivided, but valid divisions will probably require greater thematic nuance and sophistication.

Verse 18 reaffirms the absolute authority of all of the Scriptures down to the smallest components of individual words. They will endure for all time but with the important qualification “*until everything is accomplished.*” With the coming of Christ, many aspects of the law are brought to complete fruition (e.g., the need for sacrifices, on which see Hebrews). In other instances certain requirements of the law endure until Christ's coming again (e.g., classically, love of neighbor and God). In short, Christian application of the Old Testament must always take into account both the continuities and the discontinuities with the New Testament. Given this hermeneutic, correct teaching and practice of all “*these commandments*” (**v. 19**, almost certainly referring back to the Old Testament law just mentioned) are crucial. Jesus will give six illustrations of such correct interpretation shortly (**vv. 21-48**).

R. T. France: Matthew is conscious of two opposite tendencies with which he is concerned, on the one hand a tendency to claim, in line with Paul's “*freedom from the law*” teaching, that the OT laws no longer matter and can be abandoned, and on the other hand a tendency to emulate the scribes and the Pharisees in careful literal observance of the law as if nothing had changed with the coming of the Messiah. The former of these tendencies is confronted in **vv. 17-19**, the latter in **v. 20** (illustrated by the examples which follow in **vv. 21-47**). It is likely that the material Matthew has brought together for this two-pronged attack is derived from teaching which Jesus gave on different occasions and in relation to different groups. What we must investigate is whether in bringing these contrasting strands of teaching together in this discourse he has produced an incompatible mixture, or whether there is a consistent principle with regard to Jesus and the law which underlies the correctives which he offers to the two opposite extremes. The key to this issue must be what is meant by Jesus “*fulfilling*” the law and the prophets. . .

There is an intriguing little saying of Jesus recorded in **11:13** which throws light on this issue. In speaking of the pivotal role of John the Baptist as the point at which the **time of fulfillment** has dawned, Jesus is recorded as commenting that “*All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*” The law is thus linked with the prophets as **looking forward to a time of fulfillment** which has now arrived. The Torah, then, is not God's last word to his people, but is in a sense **provisional, looking forward to a time of fulfillment through the Messiah**.

In the light of that concept, and of the general sense of “*fulfill*” in Matthew, we might then paraphrase Jesus' words here as follows: “Far from wanting to set aside the law and the prophets, it is my role to

bring into being that to which they have pointed forward, to carry them on into a new era of fulfillment.” On this understanding the authority of the law and the prophets is not abolished. They remain the authoritative word of God. But **their role will no longer be the same**, now that what they pointed forward to has come, and it will be for Jesus’ followers to discern in the light of his teaching and practice what is now the right way to apply those texts in the new situation which his coming has created. From now on it will be the **authoritative teaching of Jesus** which must govern his disciples’ understanding and practical application of the law.

John MacArthur: After all, where all the scribes and Pharisees were always expounding the law, Jesus wouldn’t do that. He was busy talking about grace, and busy talking about mercy. And where the Pharisees and Scribes were binding the law on people, He was busy forgiving people. And where they were always talking about the outside, He was always talking about the inside. And He even blasted away at some of the most sacred of their traditions. Is this a new theology?

Well, right here, Jesus puts it all in perspective, and what He says, in effect, is this: “This is nothing new, nothing new at all. I’m going to reiterate to you, and I’m going to fulfill the whole Old Testament law. I will not set aside one jot, I will not set aside one tittle of that law till all of it is fulfilled.” And so the amazing manifesto of the king is in direct confrontation to their thinking. He wouldn’t lower the standard, He would raise it where it belonged. . .

Now you say, “Which law is the Lord speaking of?” Now watch this one. He is speaking of all three, people. Some people say He’s just talking about the moral law. No, He’s not. He came to fulfill the **whole thing**, whether it was the moral law, the outgrowth of the moral law in Israel, the judicial law, or the law of worship, the ceremonial law; He came to fulfill **every bit of it**. It was all **authored by God**; it is all **preeminent** – all the principles, all the patterns, all the prophecies, all the types, all the symbols, all the pictures. Everything in the Old Testament is authored by God, and **it all is fulfilled in Jesus Christ**.

So we see, first of all, that the **law is preeminent**, because it is authored by God. Secondly, the law is preeminent, because it is **affirmed by the prophets**. It is affirmed by the prophets. Look at *verse 17*. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets.”

You know, the prophets – and just introducing that term “prophets” – cracks this thought open to us. The prophets simply reiterated, reinforced the law. They would say to the people of Israel, for example, “You’d better keep God’s law. You’re breaking God’s law. You’re falling away from His law.”

Thirdly, accomplished by Christ. And this is the heart of the matter. It is accomplished by Christ. . .

Now there are four things in these four verses as we break it down into an outline. Four aspects of the Lord’s view of God’s law. This is the Lord looking at the law of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and He sees four things: The preeminence of the law, the permanence of the law, the pertinence of the law, and the purpose of the law. The preeminence, the permanence, the pertinence, and the purpose of the law. These are all factors of Christ’s statement regarding God’s word. It is preeminent, it is permanent, it is pertinent, and it is purposeful. . .

The Jews were looking for a more **lax system**. They couldn’t keep up with the scribes, and they couldn’t keep up with the Pharisees; and, body, they were hoping somebody’d come and drop the standards a little bit so they could make it. And the Lord Jesus Christ lifts the standard even higher, and then He just wipes out the Pharisees and the scribes for their hypocritical approach to God’s law.

You see, what they were doing; they had substituted human tradition for the law of God, and Jesus came in and just wiped the human tradition away, just cleaned it off. The judicial law was fulfilled, for the most part; the ceremonial law was fulfilled, for the most part. Even some of the moral laws; I said the Sabbath was fulfilled. But God's righteous standards never changed, and so He says, just so they don't ever forget it, "Nothing is going to pass, nothing, until it's all fulfilled." . . .

It's a **timeless Book**. People have the stupid audacity to say, "What does a 2,000-year-old book have to say today?" Everything. It's authored by the eternal, living God. It is His eternal, living Word. These words are alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and are a discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And so till heaven and earth pass, this Word shall abide. Every type will be fulfilled; every prophecy will be realized; every law will be verified. . .

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ and were united with Him in His death, then you died to the law in terms of its **power** and **penalty**, and you have risen in new life, no longer under the law in that sense. So **Rom. 7:6** says, "*We are now delivered from the law, delivered from the law.*" . . . When you become a Christian, you don't become lawless, you're under the **law of Christ**. (**1 Cor. 9:21**) . . .

Now what's he saying? He's saying, "I'm not under the law anymore, in terms of its penalty. I'm not under the law anymore in terms of its power to dominate my life, because I've been freed by the cross, and I've been given a greater power in the Holy Spirit. But I'll tell you; that doesn't mean that I don't have to keep it anymore. Oh, **I delight in God's law**, and **I will keep God's law**. **The law of God is good**; the problem is me, see. The problem is me." . . .

Now let me **summarize**. Listen carefully. What do the Epistles teach? The Epistles teach what I call the **clarification of Matthew 5:19**. And what is it? On the one hand, in some sense, the law passes away, is no longer binding ceremonially, civilly, and in the sense of its moral consequence, in the **penalty**.

But in another sense, the law is still binding, so that Paul can say, "*I delight in the law of God.*" So that the apostle Paul can say, in **Romans 8:4**, "*So the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" He's says, "*I delight in it,*" in **chapter 7**. He says, "*I fulfill it,*" in **chapter 8**. Beloved, that's the message that the Lord was giving there.

TEXT: Matthew 5:21-26

TITLE: DEALING WITH ANGER AS RELATED TO MURDER

BIG IDEA:

UNRESOLVED ANGER EXPRESSES MALICE TOWARDS OTHERS (SIMILAR MOTIVATION TO MURDER) WHILE ACTUALLY HURTING OURSELVES

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The six antitheses (on murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, love of neighbor) function in two ways: they exemplify the “better righteousness” Jesus has just demanded, and they further explain how Jesus has fulfilled/deepened the law in the new ethics of the kingdom (introduced in **5:17–20**). There is a deliberate contrast between the literal, legalistic teaching of the Pharisees and the high standards demanded here. The form is **rabbinic**: “*You have heard that it was said*” commonly introduced rabbinic discussion of a point of law, but the second half (“*but I am telling you*”) goes beyond Jewish teachers to give Jesus’ authoritative interpretation of the true meaning of the commands. It means in effect, “This is how you were taught, but I will now tell you what it really means.” . . .

His purpose is not to contravene but to provide the true messianic understanding of the commands. Jesus is not contravening the law in essence but rather a shallow, external understanding of it. **Davies and Allison** calls this “not contradiction but transcendence,” meaning that Jesus’ “ideas surpass those of the Torah without contradicting the Torah.”

R. T. France: Four ways of seeing these examples of “going beyond” the law and the tradition of the Pharisees:

- (1) an “inward” concern with motive vs. an “outward” concern for a literal observance of regulations;
- (2) moving behind the rule itself to ascertain the greater principles for conduct as God’s people;
- (3) centering not on the negative aspect of avoiding sin but on the positive purpose for “discovering and following what is really the will of God”;
- (4) substituting for what can be completely achieved (a distinct set of rules) a “totally open-ended ideal” of perfection (**v. 48**), which will not be ultimately achievable in this life.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus took six important Old Testament laws and interpreted them for His people in the light of the new life He came to give. He made a fundamental change without altering God’s standards: He dealt with the **attitudes and intents of the heart** and not simply with the **external action**. The Pharisees said that righteousness consisted of performing certain actions, but Jesus said it centered in the attitudes of the heart.

Leon Morris: Jesus is protesting against a strictly literal interpretation of the commands, an interpretation that indicates an apparent willingness to obey what God has said, but which imposes a strict limit on obedience and leaves scope for a good deal of ungodly behavior. He is laying down authoritatively how these commands of God should be understood.

Donald Hagner: The antitheses, which consist basically of the material introduced directly by the repeated twofold formula (“*you have heard . . . but I say to you*”), are accompanied in each

instance by **illustration, application, or clarification** of some kind (the first antithesis includes the most such material, the third the least). In this way the radical significance of the antithesis and the extent to which it involves a departure from common understandings of the law are dramatically clarified. . .

Despite his affirmation of the continuity between Jesus and the law, Matthew at the same time stresses the authority of Jesus as the eschatological Messiah who in bringing the law to a new, definitive interpretation can also transcend it. Messianic transcending of the law is not understood as involving a violation of it.

I. (:21-22) JESUS' TEACHING REGARDING THE COMMANDMENT NOT TO MURDER

A. (:21) Traditional Teaching of the Rabbis

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'"

Gordon Osborne: Jesus begins with **murder** as the most egregious of the sins, taking the life of another human being. The point is that anger is murder in the heart and so must be confronted as the basis of most murders. Jesus' purpose is to show that God's demands are deeper than the usual shallow understanding; murder in the heart is just as serious as murder in action.

Craig Blomberg: "*Murder*" is the correct rendering since the underlying Hebrew (*ratsach*, sometimes translated "*kill*") did not include killing in self-defense, wars ordered by Yahweh, capital punishment following due process of law, or accidental manslaughter.

Bruce Hurt: Their misapplication of the Law led to a liberal attitude toward murder, adultery, divorce, vows, retaliation and love. Therefore Jesus calls His listeners and we the readers of His sermon to exhibit allegiance to a higher standard, a standard of righteousness that far surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees and which shines a beacon of supernatural light that points the lost to the great and mighty supernatural Father of lights, the Heavenly Father.

B. (:22) Transcendent Teaching of Jesus

1. Anger Leads to Guilt and Judgment

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court,"

Charles Swindoll: The Messiah caught them off guard with His "*but I say to you*" statement (**Matt. 5:22**). He moved from the outward act that none of them had committed to the inner attitude that went deeper—to the actual cause of the chain reaction of attitudes, thoughts, emotions, and actions that leads people to commit murder. Ever been angry with your brother? You may be innocent before the city magistrate, but you are guilty before God's court. Ever call your brother useless or a fool? You're guilty before God's bench of perfect justice and are liable to eternal fire! You've murdered that person in your heart or slain that person with your tongue. Though no physical wounds are visible, the words themselves leave a mark on the mind and emotions. . .

Here Jesus applies the principles of the Beatitudes—particularly the ones involving mercy and peacemaking—to very concrete situations.

Scott Harris: Jesus now goes on to destroy their self-righteousness by teaching that things they thought were of no consequence such as anger, calling other people names and attacking other people's character, brought about the same or greater danger of punishment.

Leon Morris: It is not correct to say that he replaces the law with his own commands, for in no case does he relax a provision of the law. Rather, he shows that, rightly understood, the law goes much further than his hearers had reckoned.

John Nolland: Matthew considers three parallel cases by way of example. Because there appears at first sight to be an ascending order of seriousness of the sphere of answerability ([local?] court, high court, God), interpreters have struggled to find some ascending sequence in being angry, saying 'Raka', and saying 'Fool'. But such efforts are probably misplaced.

E. Michael Green: The rabbis, aware that they were not inspired, never spoke on their own authority. They normally introduced a saying either by repeating it from some previous rabbi or by saying, 'There is a teaching that ...' But here is one who quietly but with immense authority juxtaposes his own view, fully supportive of the authority of the Old Testament, to centuries of its scribal interpreters: 'But I tell you ...' Who is this 'I', who speaks with such breathtaking assurance?

2. Intensified Anger Leads to More Severe Guilt and Judgment

"and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court,"

Craig Blomberg: First, he considers those who accost their fellow believers with the epithet "Raca" (a quasi-swear word in Aramaic). The expression probably meant something like empty-headed. So too those who call someone a "fool" commit a sin. This word (*mows*) carries overtones of immorality and godlessness as well as idiocy. As with the commands against anger, both of these prohibitions against the use of insulting names undoubtedly carried the implicit qualification of "**where unjustified**," since Jesus himself uses the term in **23:17,19** (in direct address) and in **7:26** (in indirect address) when the label is accurate.

Bryce Morgan: But murder is just one example of what this kind of anger can do. As Jesus points out in **verse 22**, this anger is also manifested in our speech; in how we **demean others**. Jesus' words are more specific than the ESV word "*insults*". Literally, Jesus is saying, "*whoever says to his brother, 'Raka'*"! That's an Aramaic word meaning *empty*. A comparable insult today might be something like, "You, blockhead!" or "You good-for-nothing". Jesus adds another example at the end of **v. 22**... literally, from the Greek *moros*, the insult is "*You, moron!*"

<https://www.wayofgracechurch.com/sermons/sermon/2018-11-04/when-anger-turns-deadly-matthew-5:21-26>

3. Contempt Leads to Ultimate Guilt and Judgment

"and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Gordon Osborne: Jesus' point is that each of the three lead a person to judgment both on the earthly and the heavenly planes. Moreover, it is clear here that **name-calling** is at the core of showing **angry contempt**. This was even more true in ancient Judaism, where the name bespoke

the essence of what a person was (e.g., “Jesus” = “Yahweh saves,” 1:21). “Gehenna” is a metaphor for hellfire, used seven times by Matthew, which refers to the Hinnon Valley, where in ancient times human sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Molech (2 Kgs 23:10) and where in Jesus’ day garbage was burned day and night, making it a perfect metaphor for eternal fiery judgment.

II. (:23-26) URGENCY OF RECONCILIATION

A. (:23-24) Reconciliation with a Brother

1. (:23) Perception of an Offense

*“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar,
and there remember that your brother has something against you,”*

Gordon Osborne: We must remember that Jesus’ disciples were from Galilee and rarely got to Jerusalem, so this only happened once or twice a year and was an important event (the “*altar*” is the sacrificial altar in the inner court of the temple). Also, there were probably long lines waiting, so the picture is of one who had been there some time and was finally able to perform his solemn duty. . . Jesus’ point is that as long as there is sin in the church between members, worship is compromised.

John Nolland: The key to the big picture is almost certainly the recognition that the murder commandment is being interpreted in the light of the **love commandment** (which will become the specific focus of attention in the final antithesis) and therefore attracts to itself the same relational focus. The murder commandment becomes to some degree a negative formulation of the love commandment.

2. (:24) Priority of Reconciliation over Worship

*“leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way;
first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”*

Leon Morris: *Leave your gift* is a sharp command; there is something more urgent than completing the act of sacrifice. The worshiper is to leave the animal right there, in front of the altar, and go. The interruption of so solemn an act emphasizes the overriding importance of reconciliation. *First* has a time reference: “in the first place, before doing anything else.” It is important that the worshiper get his priorities right, and the first thing to do is to effect reconciliation. He must take whatever steps are needed to restore harmony, and only when this is done may he come back and resume his offering. The act of sacrifice is not as important as the spirit in which it is done.

B. (:25-26) Reconciliation with an Adversary

1. (:25a) Arbitration Preferred to Going to Court

*“Make friends quickly with your opponent at law
while you are with him on the way,”*

Craig Blomberg: Jesus’ second illustration of the urgency of reconciliation pictures an out-of-court settlement between fellow litigants. These verses offer good advice at the literal level of legal proceedings, but in light of vv. 21-22 they obviously refer primarily to the spiritual goal of averting God’s wrath on Judgment Day before it is too late to change one’s destiny.

D. A. Carson: In the ancient world, debtors were jailed until the debts were paid. Thus **v.26** is part of the narrative fabric and gives no justification for purgatory, universal restoration, or urgent reconciliation to God. It simply insists on **immediate action**. Malicious anger is so evil—and God’s judgment so certain (**v.22**)—that we must do all in our power to end it (cf. **Eph 4:26–27**).

2. (:25b-26) Avoid Intensifying Your Liability

a. (:25b) Process of Judgment Can Quickly Escalate

“in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.”

b. (:26) Penalty Can Be Severe

“Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.”

Gordon Osborne: At one level, this passage shows beyond doubt that **Jesus is the transcendent interpreter of Torah**, for he turns to the heart of the law, the Ten Commandments, for his first example, and it shows it must be understood in a deeper sense. At another level, Jesus establishes a key ethical standard for the kingdom people, showing that **anger/hatred is tantamount to murder**.

The community of the new covenant is clearly all about **relationships**. There can be no anger or contempt marring the life and worship of God’s people, either inside (the first illustration) or outside (the second illustration) the community. Theology is not just about God and the spiritual life. Broader ethical issues are also theological because in Scripture the way we relate to others is the way we relate to God. To be angry or feel contempt for another is to disparage God’s child and, therefore, God himself. We cannot separate relationships with others from our relationship with God.

Bryce Morgan: Brothers and sisters, friends, **are you angry this morning?** Maybe you've buried that anger deep inside of you. Maybe it's right at the surface, ready to break out. Wherever it is, however it's affecting you, don't avoid it. Don't minimize it. Don't rationalize it. And please don't feed it. Instead, face it. Face it in light of Jesus. Let his words from Matthew 5 convict you and drive you to God's forgiveness. But also let his words lead you down a new path, a path of humility, patience, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace. If we are following Jesus through the forgiveness of his cross, then we should be giving attention to and guarding our hearts from the **poisonous anger** God spoke to us about this morning.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When are we guilty of justifying ourselves based on external conformity when our heart is far from God’s desired goal?
- 2) What types of offenses stir us to anger and contempt towards others?
- 3) Are we secure in the deliverance that Christ has provided from guilt and condemnation?

4) Are we quick to address relationships that need reconciliation as much as we can initiate on our part?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gordon Osborne: Contempt for Others, Human Pride, and God's Judgment

Self-centeredness is the core of sin, and it is total arrogance alone that can account for the human tendency to look down on others. When we look down on a small insect, they all look the same, and we do not disparage one more than another. When God looks down on us, the distance is far greater than that between us and an insect. How dare we consider ourselves better than another? We are all so inferior to God that we are equal to one another, and there is no basis for feeling superior. It is only our sinful desire to build ourselves up that enables us to feel contemptuous toward another. Our thought should be to help another in their area of weakness, knowing that we will need them to help us in our areas of weakness.

William Barclay: In [this passage], Jesus speaks with an **authority** which no other man had ever dreamed of assuming. The authority which Jesus assumed always amazed those who came into contact with him. Right at the beginning of his ministry, after he had been teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, it is said of his hearers: "*They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*" (**Mark 1:22**). Matthew concludes his account of the Sermon on the Mount with the words: "*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*" (**Matthew 7:28–9**).

It is difficult for us to realize just how shocking a thing this authority of Jesus must have seemed to the Jews who listened to him. To the Jews, the law was absolutely holy and absolutely divine; it is impossible to exaggerate the place that the law had in their reverence. . .

But, to Jesus, a statement required no authority other than the fact that he made it. **He was his own authority.**

Clearly, one of two things must be true – either Jesus was mad, or he was unique; either he was a megalomaniac, or else he was the Son of God. No ordinary person would dare to make such a claim, to take and overturn what up to that point had been regarded as the eternal word of God.

The amazing thing about authority is that it is **self-evidencing**. No sooner does someone begin to teach than we know at once whether or not that person has the right to teach. Authority is like an atmosphere about people. They do not need to claim it; they either have it, or they do not. . .

Jesus took the highest human wisdom and corrected it, because he was who he was. He did not need to argue; it was sufficient for him to speak. No one can honestly face Jesus and honestly listen to him without feeling that this is God's last word beside which all other words are inadequate, and all other wisdom out of date. . .

The judgment court is the local village council which dispensed justice. That court was composed of the local village elders, and varied in number from three in villages of fewer than

150 inhabitants, to seven in larger towns and twenty-three in still bigger cities. . .

So, Jesus forbids forever the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge. If we are to obey Jesus, all anger must be banished from life, and especially that anger which lingers too long. It is a warning thing to remember that we cannot call ourselves Christians and lose our temper because of any personal wrong which we have suffered.

Immediately, Jesus goes on to speak of two cases where anger turns into insulting words. The Jewish teachers forbade such anger and such words. These teachers spoke of ‘oppression in words’ and of ‘the sin of insult’. They had a saying: ‘Three classes go down to Gehenna and return not—the adulterer, he who puts his neighbour openly to shame, and he who gives his neighbour an insulting name.’ **Anger in a person’s heart and anger in a person’s speech are equally forbidden.**

First of all, the person who calls another *Raca* is condemned. *Raca* is an almost untranslatable word, because it describes a **tone of voice** more than anything else. Its whole accent is the accent of **contempt**. To call a man *Raca* was to call him a brainless idiot, a silly fool, an empty-headed blunderer. It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt. . .

Then Jesus goes on to speak of the person who calls someone else *mōros*. *Mōros* also means fool, but the person who is *mōros* is a **moral fool**, someone who is playing the fool. The psalmist spoke of *fools who say in their hearts that there is no God (Psalm 14:1)*. Such people were moral fools, who lived immoral lives, and who in wishful thinking said that there was no God. To call people *mōros* was not to criticize their mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on their **moral character**; it was to take their name and reputation from them, and to brand them as loose-living and immoral. . .

As we have said, all these **gradations of punishment** are not to be taken literally. What Jesus is saying here is this: ‘In the old days, people condemned murder; and truly murder is forever wrong. But I tell you that not only are your outward actions under judgment; your inmost thoughts are also under the scrutiny and the judgment of God. Long-lasting anger is bad; contemptuous speaking is worse, and the careless or the malicious talk which destroys a person’s good name is worst of all.’ Those who are the slaves of anger, those who speak in the accent of contempt, or who destroy another’s good name, may never have committed a murder in action; but they are murderers at heart.

Sinclair Ferguson: Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. In fact, as we have seen, Jesus teaches that the Law of God is an essential diagnostic tool. Whether we break it or keep it, and whether we encourage others to break it or keep it, is an indication of our true spiritual condition. It is the **standard for evaluation** in the kingdom of God (**Matt. 5:19**), but **not the standard for entrance** into the kingdom. Rather than dispensing with righteousness, Jesus tell his disciples that unless their righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven... It is no accident that these contrasts ("*you have heard... but I say*") are set in the context of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Exodus: He is the Son God has called out of Egypt (**Mt 2:15**); He passes through the waters in His baptism (**Mt 3:13, 14, 15, 16, 17**); He is tested in the wilderness (**Mt 4:1-11**); He expounds the law of God in the mountainous region (**Mt 5:1**). Rather than displace the teaching God had given through Moses, Jesus' whole ministry is identified by Matthew as the fulfilment of God's teaching.

Warren Wiersbe: Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (**Dt 9:8, 20; Ps 2:12**). The Bible often speaks of anger “*being kindled*” (**Ge 30:2; Dt 6:15**), as though anger can be compared to fire. It is difficult for us to practice a truly holy anger or righteous indignation because our emotions are tainted by sin, and we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. The NT principle seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people. The fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder (**Mt 5:21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26**), because anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and Satan is a murderer (**Jn 8:44**). Satan hates God and God’s people, and when he finds a believer with the sparks of anger in his heart, he fans those sparks, adds fuel to the fire, and does a great deal of damage to God’s people and God’s church. Both lying and anger “*give peace to the devil*” (**Eph 4:27**-note).

Spurgeon: **Murder lies within anger**, for we wish harm to the object of our wrath, or even wish that he did not exist, and this is to kill him in desire. Anger “without a cause” is forbidden by the command which says “Thou shalt not kill;” for unjust anger is killing in intent. Such anger without cause brings us under higher judgment than that of Jewish police-courts. God takes cognizance of the emotions from which acts of hate may spring, and calls us to account as much for the angry feeling as for the murderous deed. Words also come under the same condemnation: a man shall be judged for what he “shall say to his brother.” To call a man *Raca*, or a worthless fellow, is to kill him in his reputation, and to say to him, “*Thou fool*,” is to kill him as to the noblest characteristics of a man. Hence all this comes under such censure as men distribute in their councils; yes, under what is far worse, the punishment awarded by the highest court of the universe, which dooms men to “*hell fire*.” Thus our Lord and King restores the law of God to its true force, and warns us that it denounces not only the overt act of killing, but every thought, feeling, and word which would tend to injure a brother, or annihilate him by contempt.

John MacArthur: Who Is a Murderer?

Now if you know anything about the Bible, you know that this was the **very first human crime**. In Genesis chapter 4 it says this, “*And Cain talked with Abel his brother: it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and murdered him.*” And of course God said, “*What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood cries unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.*”

And so it is that from the first human crime, murder, on through the Revelation of God, murder is a biblical issue. Now if we study the Scripture, we know how God feels about it. It is forbidden. It is **punishable by death**. We learn other things about murder in the Bible. For example, we learn that murder is a **crime authored by the devil** himself. **John 8:44** says the **devil is a murderer**. And murder is basically authored by Satan.

We find something else about murder in Matthew chapter 15:19, for example, we find that murder is a manifestation of an evil human heart. **Matthew 15:19** says, “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*” . . .

Now Jesus is saying, “You know, you believe that it’s wrong to murder because if you do you’ll be in danger of judgment.” And at that point the scribes and the Pharisees would have

said, “Amen, Amen. We’re against murder. We have been taught by them of old by the rabbinical tradition that murder is an evil thing.” In fact, the thought that they did not murder - now listen to this. This is the key. The thought that they did not commit murder was one way in which they convinced themselves they were righteous. We would not murder. We would never murder anyone. And consequently, we must be righteous. We have kept the law of God, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ We wouldn’t murder anyone. And so their not murdering was one of their favorite ways to **justify themselves**. . .

Jesus simply says, it isn’t the issue of murder alone, it’s the issue of anger and hatred in your heart. You cannot justify yourself because you don’t kill. Because if there’s hatred in your heart, you are the same as a murderer. And so I say the first point in this statement is that Jesus’ words affected their own self-righteousness. It affected how they viewed themselves, how we view ourselves. . .

First question, who is a murderer? Second question, who deserves death and hell? Who does, who deserves death and hell? You do, I do, we’re all guilty of murder. We’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is what? Death. And so you say, “Well, how do we escape? I mean if we’re all murderers and no murderer will inherit the kingdom, if we’re all murderers, and we all deserve death and hell, then how do we escape? I mean we’ve all worshiped in hypocrisy. We’ve all been angry. We’ve all said malicious things. We’ve all thought a curse, or said a curse. We’ve all been unreconciled to a brother. We’ve all done that. **What are we going to do?**”

And that is exactly what Jesus is after. He wants to drive them to the fact that they cannot be righteous on their own, which will drive them to their knees at the foot of the cross to accept the imputed righteousness that only Jesus Christ can give. You see? Everything that He says here is to drive them to frustration and inadequacy so that they come to Him.

Justin Imel, Sr: The Urgency of Reconciliation

If we come to the altar and remember that our brother has something against us, we are to leave our gift and first be reconciled with our brother, and then come offer our gift.

Jesus here shows us the urgency of reconciliation—reconciliation is always to precede worship. Reconciliation must precede worship, for if we have hatred and strife in our hearts, we will be separated from God. Hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath will keep one from heaven (**Gal 5:19-21**). “*If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has seen?*” (1 **Jn 4:20**). Reconciliation must precede worship, for true worship involves the fellowship of believers—The Corinthian church was not able to take the Lord’s Supper properly because of all the division which existed in that congregation (**1 Cor 11:17-22**). Reconciliation must precede worship, for we worship the great Creator and if we have hate toward those made in God’s image, how can we properly worship God?

God expects us to worship without strife: “*I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*” (1 **Tim 2:8**). Does someone have something against you? Do you need to go to someone and say, “I’m sorry?”

We are to agree with our adversary quickly, lest we are thrown in prison and must pay the last penny.

Jesus again shows the urgency of reconciliation. We need to reconcile while some openness still exists between us and the other party.

Elsewhere we're told to reconcile quickly. "*Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil*" (Eph 4:26-27). If we allow the sun to go down on our wrath, we give a place to the devil, because our brooding and anger lead to other sins. "*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (Js 1:19-20). We are to be slow to anger—Not become angry quickly, and we're to get rid of anger quickly. We're to do so, you see, for when we're angry, we act in ungodly ways.

If we do not agree with our adversary quickly, he may deliver us over to the judge, the judge hand us over to the officer, and we might be thrown into prison. We will not get out until we pay the last penny. This goes back to the practice of a "debtors' prison" where one could have one thrown into prison for not repaying a debt. The idea is prevalent in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21-35).

This shows an earthly danger in holding a grudge against a brother—we can be taken to court and even imprisoned. This would ruin our reputation and make it much more difficult to set a good example for others to follow. Legal action could leave a black mark on our record and make it difficult to find employment or obtain a loan.

<https://drjustinimelsr.com/expository-sermon-on-matthew-521-26-the-danger-of-anger/>

Chip Bell: If Looks Could Kill

We finished last week with Jesus' statement that "*your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees*", the most carefully righteous people of his day. I'm sure his followers then wondered how that could be possible that they could be even more righteous than the Pharisees.

But what Jesus meant was that although the Pharisees were very concerned with obeying the external requirements of the code, they followed it in a very legalistic, wooden, joyless way. Jesus called them "actors". They cared very little about whether they were doing what God wanted. They only cared that they did exactly what God told them to do. In fact, they had even added a few extra rules (and some of them were actually the opposite of what God wanted). And so, Jesus tells his disciples that the true meaning of the law, the Kingdom Code, is to honor God not just with your actions, but also with your thoughts, your motives and your attitudes. The Kingdom Code is deeper and more personal than the law of any country. It delves into the innermost parts of a man that no other man can judge and only God can know.

What follows are six comparisons between external performance of the law and internal obedience to the law. Jesus deals with anger, lust, divorce, lying, revenge, and hatred. In each case, he calls us, his followers, to commit ourselves not just to obeying the external requirements of the law, but also to allowing the Kingdom Code to govern our thoughts, our motives and our attitudes. . .

There are a couple of misunderstandings about this verse:

It is NOT saying that anger is the same as murder or just as bad as murder. (Just for the record, I would much rather you were angry with me than...)

It is NOT saying that anger itself is sin. From other passages, we know that Jesus himself was sometimes angry and that we can be angry without sinning. (We'll see that in a minute.) Anger is initially a response, not a choice. We probably respond with anger so often because we're fallen—so in that sense even that initial anger is sinful. But it's not a sin in the sense of a choice I make to disobey God. When it first strikes, I think **anger is more of a temptation than a sin**. It's what we choose to do with anger and what we choose to do because of anger that makes it sinful. As we'll see from later verses, it's **unresolved anger** that is sinful.

Some Practical Advice about Anger...

I'd like to close today with some practical advice about anger. These are not explicitly from the Bible. And I'm not a psychologist. (here comes the email) But here are some practical things I have learned about trying not to sin when I'm angry.

ANGER IS AN ALARM.

A warning light. Treat it as such. Find out what's setting off the alarm.

Something is wrong—maybe in someone else's actions

Injustice, a personal attack

Like all warning systems, you can have false alarms. You can be angry even if you haven't been wronged. (Something amiss in me.)

assumptions, inconvenience,

DON'T LET ANGER ACT.

Commit yourself to not allow anger to either act or speak.

In anger we say things and do things that we wouldn't say or do if we were sober. Don't let anger control you. Exercise self control. (fruit of God's Spirit)

WAIT. BREATH DEEPLY.

Most of the time, that means waiting. When I'm hot, that's a bad time to try to deal with the problem. Anger passes away. So why not wait a little. Let your emotions calm down. Take a few deep breaths. Get some perspective. Let the emotional part of your anger dissipate so that you can think about both the situation and your response more objectively and rationally.

CAN YOU PUT IT AWAY?

I think that sometimes, things bother me that are best left ignored.

If you bring up every little thing that bothers you or makes you angry, then you will constantly have some conflict to resolve. And life is more than conflict resolution.

If you're married, you have either discovered this principle, or you are constantly living in conflict. Opposites attract and that means that usually your husband or your wife is basically designed by God to drive you crazy. So rather than bring up every little thing that bothers you, I think that sometimes you can apply "automatic forgiveness" and just ignore it.

I put it in a big box called "grace" and then put it away in the closet where it won't get in the way of our relationship.

So when you find yourself angry, ask yourself, "Can I just overlook this?" If you can, put it in the grace box and put it away. Don't let it tear down your relationship.

STILL BOTHERS YOU? TALK TO THEM! NOW.

Sometimes anger is too big to fit in the grace box. And sometimes, even though we fit it inside and put the box away, the lid keeps popping off and there's our anger again, right in the middle of the living room floor.

What I'm talking about is that sometimes our efforts to overlook an offense and "let go" of anger—sometimes that doesn't work well. If you find you're still angry or angry again, then it probably means that it's time to take action. No, I don't mean kill the other person. I mean talk to them. Take the initiative and speak with them. And do it now. If the anger is popping back out, then you need to act now.

Be as calm as you can be. Don't attack, just explain. Take responsibility for your own actions—anything that you did to contribute to the conflict. Take responsibility for your own beliefs and feelings. (Not, "You made me angry.") Try saying something like "I believe that what you did was wrong." Or, "I felt angry when you did that."

Be willing to listen. You may have missed something. This may be just a huge misunderstanding. It's good to be as open as possible to hearing the other person's perspective. Hopefully, as you approach this person with prayer and with a loving attitude, they will respond.

FORGIVENESS IS FOR YOU.

There's always a chance that they will not listen to you or will not respond in a good way. But whether they respond in repentance or whether they respond in stubbornly doing the same thing again, there is only one healthy thing you can do: forgive them.

A lot of times we think of forgiveness as what we are supposed to do when someone apologizes. But the truth is that forgiveness is a one-party transaction. Even if someone is blatantly and stubbornly sinning against you, the very best thing you can do about it is to forgive them. Somehow we get it in our heads that if we withhold our forgiveness, then we're really going to let them have it. We're going to show them what real pain feels like! We won't forgive them. That'll teach them.

But in reality, when we do that, it doesn't hurt the other person at all. We only hurt ourselves. The more we indulge our anger, the more it consumes us, distorts our perspective on all of life, ruins our other relationships, eats away at our health, and turns us into bitter old men and women.

Unresolved anger is a sin. And like all sins, it destroys us. The reason God tells us to stay away from sin is because he doesn't want us to get hurt.

Sometimes you might feel so angry you could kill. Very often you can't help that. But it's what you do next that really matters. Because whenever you harbor anger in your heart, whenever you refuse to forgive or refuse to reconcile, the life that's really in danger is yours.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/2-if-looks-could-kill-matthew-521-26>

TEXT: Matthew 5:27-30

TITLE: DEALING WITH LUST AS RELATED TO ADULTERY

BIG IDEA:

AVOIDING ADULTERY DOESN'T GIVE YOU A PASS TO INDULGE IN LUST

INTRODUCTION:

William Barclay: It is necessary that we should understand what Jesus is saying here. He is not speaking of the natural, normal desire, which is part of human instinct and human nature. According to the literal meaning of the Greek, the man who is condemned is the man who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention of lusting after her. The man who is condemned is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust, the man who looks in such a way that passion is awakened and desire deliberately stimulated.

John Nolland: In this second antithesis the adultery commandment is expanded to include indulgence in illicit sexual activity in the realm of the imagination. The challenge is given to go to the limit to eliminate sin.

Craig Blomberg: Either way, the present tense participle refers to one who continues to look rather than just casting a passing glance, and in either case the mere viewing or mental imagining of a naked body is not under consideration. Instead Jesus is condemning lustful thoughts and actions—those involving an actual *desire* (the most literal translation of the verb *epithyme*) to have sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. Yet despite the danger of overapplying this verse, an even greater danger is that of underapplying it. Adultery among Christians today is a scandal, yet it almost never occurs without **precipitation**. Christians must recognize those thoughts and actions which, long before any overt sexual sin, make the possibility of giving in to temptation more likely, and they must take dramatic action to avoid them.

Donald Hagner: He shifts the attention from the external act to the inner thought. There, in the inner person, lie the real problem and the initial guilt. To lust after someone sexually is to **nurture a burning desire** for that person in one's heart. Such lust has a **consuming effect**. Where lust exists, the discipleship of the kingdom requires dramatic and determined action to rid oneself of the cause.

Robert Gundry: True discipleship, then, will show itself through sexual self-discipline in the heart as well as in act.

John MacArthur: And in the text before us, our Lord is giving us several perspectives on sin. First of all, in the very passage I just read, we see the depth of sin. And that is not only an act, it is an **attitude**. It is much deeper than just committing adultery. It is even looking on a woman to lust after her. And so our Lord shows us the depth of sin.

Also, I think we see here the deceit of sin, that it's never as simple as it looks. Sin would like to make us think that if we're highly respectable on the outside, we're all right. Jesus shows us that you could be **highly respectable on the outside and be rotten on the inside**.

We see not only the depth and the deceit of sin, but we see the destructiveness of sin. Our Lord is showing us that sin will cast someone into hell. At the end of **verse 29** He says it, and at the end of **verse 30**. Sin is so severe that the ultimate end of sin is to cast people into an eternal hell.

This is the destructiveness of sin. So serious is it that we would be better to maim ourselves if that would prevent it. We would be better to deal with ourselves in a very harsh and brutal way to prevent sin because of what sin can do.

I. (:27-28) JESUS' TEACHING ON ADULTERY FOCUSES ON LUST

A. (:27) Traditional Teaching of Jewish Religious Leaders

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery';"

J. Ligon Duncan: But the Lord Jesus wants to make it clear that that command cannot nearly be kept by literally refraining from adultery in sexual immorality. It must be kept at a deeper level because the law is a matter of the heart. He teaches us that in this passage. Notice again, that Jesus is not attacking the Old Testament, He's not attacking the moral law, but the Lord Jesus is attacking the interpretation of the moral law by the Pharisee in His day.

B. (:28) Transcendent Teaching of Jesus

"but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Richard Gardner: Adultery does not begin in the neighbor's bedroom, Jesus says, but in the craving in one's heart to possess the neighbor's spouse.

David Thompson: Now in **verse 28** Jesus wants to take an understanding of adultery to a whole new level. When He says, "*But I say to you,*" it is very **emphatic** in Greek. Jesus is speaking as Divine King and He is addressing God's perspective of what is classified as adultery, namely, "*looking on a woman to lust for her.*" One might say, "I've never committed adultery because I never divorced my mate." Jesus says think again; just as you have a speech problem in that you've committed murder, so you have an **eye problem** in that you've committed adultery

(Grammatical Point #1) - The participle "*looks*" is **present tense** which means Jesus is speaking about a **continual habitual looking**. This is not a one moment in time glance; this is a repeated gazing.

(Grammatical Point #2) - The infinitive "*to lust*" is a **purpose infinitive**. In other words, the premeditated purpose of the looking is to lust. The tense of the infinitive is aorist, which would seem to indicate that the action of lusting occurs before the action of looking (**Dana & Mantey**, p. 230).

Now here is Christ's point—if a man or woman continually and habitually is prompted by lusts to continually look at something immoral—this one is guilty of committing adultery in his/her heart.

Paulson: So, in Jesus's terminology, lust is a **desire to possess**. It's an **intention to dominate**. Which then inflames to a **coveting desire**. So when a man lusts after a woman, he takes the mystery of personhood and reduces her to a consumer item and covets her as a thing, rather than

a person. . . It's impossible to live in the kingdom of God when we objectify his crown creation. Human beings. . .

Do you know one of the best spiritual disciplines you can embrace if you're struggling with lust is fasting? Because we remind

our soul that our body doesn't control us. We start to rewire parts of our brain to go no, no, I don't need that. I can feed on something a little bit different.

<https://southfellowship.org/sermon-on-the-mount-directing-desire-matthew-527-30-week-5/>

II. (:29-30) RADICAL REMOVAL OF THE PATHWAY TO TEMPTATION ADVOCATED

A. (:29) Picture of Removal of Right Eye

“And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

William Barclay: “*stumble*” -- Behind it there are two pictures.

- First, there is the picture of a hidden stone in a path against which someone may stumble, or of a cord stretched across a path, deliberately put there to make them trip.
- Second, there is the picture of a pit dug in the ground and deceptively covered over with a thin layer of branches or of turf, and so arranged that, when unwary travellers set foot on it, they are immediately thrown into the pit.

The *skandalon*, the stumbling-block, is something which trips people up, something which sends them crashing to destruction, something which lures them to their own ruin.

Grant Osborne: The idea of gouging out and cutting off, needless to say, demands a **violent, decisive measure for removing the source of the temptation**. The reason is seen in “*to fall away*” (σκανδαλίζει), a strong term that does not simply indicate temptation to general sin but that which leads one virtually into apostasy. This would be **moral apostasy** or very serious sin.

Thomas Constable: It is extremely important for us to monitor our thoughts carefully because of the depth, and power, and subtlety, and perverting nature, and effect, and danger, and pollution of sin (cf. **Rom. 8:13-14; 1 Cor. 9:29; Col. 3:5**).

B. (:30) Picture of Removal of Right Hand

“And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

William Barclay: Of course, the words of Jesus are not to be taken with a crude literalism. What they mean is that anything which helps to seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life. If there is a habit which can be seduction to evil, if there is an association which can be the cause of wrongdoing, if there is a pleasure which could turn out to be our ruin, then that thing must be surgically excised from our life. . .

If people are harassed by thoughts of the forbidden and unclean things, they will certainly never defeat the evil things by withdrawing from life and saying, I will not think of these things. They

can do so only by plunging into Christian action and Christian thought. They will never do it by trying to save their own lives; they can do it only by flinging their lives away for others.

Craig Blomberg: The “*right*” eye and hand refer to those viewed in antiquity as **more valuable**. Again, eternal judgment appears as the punishment for those who fail to heed Jesus' words. Sin that is not dealt with leads inexorably to judgment. Jesus is not implying, however, that sexual sin cannot be forgiven when there is true repentance.

William Hendriksen: Sin, being a very destructive force, must not be pampered. It must be “*put to death*” (**Col 3:5**). Temptation should be flung aside immediately and decisively. Dillydallying is deadly. Halfway measures work havoc. **The surgery must be radical.** Right at this very moment and without any vacillation the obscene book should be burned, the scandalous picture destroyed, the soul-destroying film condemned, the sinister yet very intimate social tie broken, and the baneful habit discarded. In the struggle against sin the believer must fight hard. Shadow-boxing will never do (**1 Cor 9:27**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the specific areas of temptation where lust presents a potential problem for you?
- 2) How can you devise and implement specific drastic plans to ensure that you minimize the possibility of temptation in those areas?
- 3) How can we manage to live in the world but not be of the world in this area of visual and graphic sexual temptation that is so pervasive in today’s culture?
- 4) What are some of the areas of self-discipline and spiritual tactics needed to have victory over sexual temptation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: How do we get victory? By purifying the desires of the heart (appetite leads to action) and disciplining the actions of the body. Obviously, our Lord is not talking about literal surgery, for this would not solve the problem in the heart. The eye and the hand are usually the two “culprits” when it comes to sexual sins, so they must be disciplined. Jesus said, “Deal immediately and decisively with sin! Don’t taper off—cut off!” Spiritual surgery is more important than physical surgery, for the sins of the body can lead to eternal judgment. We think of passages like **Colossians 3:5** and Romans **6:13; 12:1–2; 13:14**.

Grant Osborne: In light of the number of Christian leaders and laypeople whose ministries are being destroyed by sexual sin of late, this is truly one of the critical passages to be preached and discussed. It has been estimated that better than one-half of men in the average congregation are caught up in internet pornography, and lust has become a way of life in our culture, caused by the dress codes of our day as well as the soft-porn movies that proliferate. Jesus’ call for extreme

measures must be heeded before it is too late. Adults as well as children should purchase the software to lock themselves out of X-rated sites, and accountability groups need to be set up in every church. All too many males (as well as many females) should be admitting, “I am a sexoholic,” and should be getting help. This issue has become a pandemic, and every church and Christian group should be seeking solutions even more vigorously than in the past.

Charles Swindoll: Jesus wasn’t advocating literal self-mutilation as a solution for sexual lust. However, the **hyperbolic** figure of speech does point to a severe, uncompromising moral self-control and self-denial. Lust enters through the eyes and sends a message to the mind, where the imagination takes over. So we shouldn’t look at things we know are treacherous, like pornographic images, and we shouldn’t stare at people as if they are merely objects of physical attraction. We should, to interpret Jesus’ figure of speech, be “blind” to them! Likewise, through the act of touching, lust is stimulated. If your hands go where they shouldn’t, then you have ignited your imagination and poured gasoline on the fire. Keep your hands to yourself!

R. T. France: The theme is impediments to ultimate salvation, and the importance of eliminating them at all costs, a theme which could have many different applications to relationships, activities, mental attitudes etc., certainly not only to sexual temptation. It is probably not helpful to speculate whether the eye and the hand were chosen to represent specific sins or temptations. As “removable” parts of the body they serve to make the point that any loss, however painful, is preferable to the total lostness of *geënnā*. The throwing of the “whole body” into hell belongs to the pictorial imagery as the alternative to physical amputation; it is not the basis for a doctrinal debate over either the nature of human existence after death or the physicality of hell. Nor should this passage be used to suggest that amputees will be raised in an imperfect body.

Daniel Doriani: While Jesus probes the heart of the matter, our public discourse becomes ever more superficial. Our comedies treat adultery and fornication as jokes. Our commercials and clothing styles promote lust. Our public policies assume that everyone over the age of eighteen is sexually active. And we deride the concept of absolute standards. But then we fret over the consequences of sexual immorality, such as teenage pregnancy and the host of sexually transmitted diseases, starting with AIDS. The solution, society proposes, is not fidelity within marriage and abstinence outside of marriage, but “safe sex” and condom distribution. . .

We cannot prevent certain thoughts from entering our minds. But once they enter, we may either entertain them or cast them aside and turn our minds elsewhere. **Martin Luther** said that we cannot stop birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from building nests in our hair. We cannot keep impure thoughts from flitting into our minds, but we can refuse to let them roost and find a home there. . .

Discontentment with a spouse drives out love and respect for her. Discontentment is prideful, for the discontented think they deserve better. Discontent is distrust in God’s providence, for it accuses God of providing the wrong spouse.

The culture says, “Get the best partner you can.” But we should say, “God has given me this man, this woman.” Then we should ask not what our spouse can do for us, but what we can do for our spouse. **Contentment** is the partner of love and the scourge of the roving eye.

Contentment breeds faithfulness.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Jesus says, “*But I say... .*” He does not diminish the Law; He goes beyond and **extends the Law**. Now this is where some might differ. The question is whether Jesus is just giving the interpretation of the Law that always should have been, or is He actually extending the Law beyond that which anyone in the Old Testament saw it to be?

My sense is that while Jesus is giving us the proper interpretation of the Law, He is also taking us beyond that which anyone thought it to be. We’ll see that further in our next lesson, when we talk about divorce. When Jesus gets through teaching about divorce, no one, not even the conservatives, were willing to go where Jesus went on the matter of adultery and divorce. Nobody! The disciples were saying, “My goodness, Lord. If that is the case, we shouldn’t even marry!” (**Matthew 19**) Everybody is shocked at where Jesus takes us on this matter. Jesus brings us to the heart of the matter, to the root of sin, but I think there is a sense in which He goes beyond it. . .

There is a fairly clear pattern here. Jesus states the Law, then He adds His enhancement (raising the bar), and finally He gives an illustrative application. . .

Verses 31-32 deal with **divorce** and will be addressed in our next lesson. Various Bible translations may include **verses 27-32** in one paragraph, while other versions may divide these verses into two paragraphs. We must understand that these two sections are **closely related**, and that the reason divorce is viewed as being so evil in **verses 31** and **32** is because it **often results in adultery**. So understand that while I have chosen to end this lesson at **verse 30**, we will address the relationship between adultery and divorce in our next lesson. Divorce and adultery are very closely related in this text, so do not think that it all ends at **verse 30**, since our teaching here focuses on the sin of adultery. . .

But in this text in Matthew, Jesus tells me that when I sin, I don’t just break the Law in this one point; I break the Law in every point! Think of it! Here are the scribes and Pharisees saying, “Murder and adultery! On these we are clean. This is going to be a cake walk!” But before Jesus gets done, they are guilty across the board. That is total depravity, folks! If you take sin the way Jesus does, and you go to the heart of it, there is no sin of which you and I are not guilty! I’m guilty at every point! Not because I failed at one point, but because I failed at every point! This is hopeless. Jesus talks in these dark terms about sin and the consequences of it.

Van Parunak: The “*right eye*” is the aiming eye for a right-handed archer, and losing it would make a man ineffective in battle. In spite of its great value, if it causes sin, it must be discarded immediately. How much more should lesser things be rejected, if they lead us into sin? Paul teaches,

Rom 13:14 *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

In the case of sexual sin, Job shows us how to apply this principle:

Job 31:1 *I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*

Recall Solomon’s exhortation in Proverbs,

Prov 4:25 *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.*

In their very helpful book *Every Man’s Battle*, **Stephen Arterburn** and **Fred Stoeker** discuss implementing Job’s principle in the “**bounce reflex**,” resolving not to allow one’s attention to

linger on the lustful stimulus, but to bounce one's eyes away from it immediately. The starting point is "*a covenant with mine eyes,*" a solemn, deliberate decision to avoid stimulating materials that might lead us into sin.

This same principle can be applied to any sin. Make a resolve to flee from temptation, not to dally around and allow yourself to be teased by it. If you play with the idea, you will progress to the action.

TEXT: Matthew 5:31-32

TITLE: DEALING WITH DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE AS RELATED TO ADULTERY

BIG IDEA:

WHEN A DIVORCED PERSON REMARRIES THE RESULTING UNION CONSTITUTES ADULTERY

INTRODUCTION:

This passage deals with an additional way (other than lusting after a woman in your heart) to become guilty of **breaking the commandment regarding adultery**. The teaching of Jesus brings us back to God's original intent for marriage that the sacred contact be **permanent** and **exclusive** until death. Divorce cannot be used as a legitimate excuse to take another man's wife. The complicating factor in the text is the extra phrase "*except for the cause of unchastity.*" Why is that included here and not in other parallel passages on the subject?

D. A. Carson: The introductory formula "*It has been said*" is shorter than all the others in this chapter and is linked to the preceding by a connective *de* ("and"). Therefore, though these two verses are innately antithetical, they carry further **the argument of the preceding pericope**. The OT points toward insisting not only that **lust is the moral equivalent of adultery** (vv.27–30) but that **divorce is as well**. This arises out of the fact that the divorced woman will in most circumstances remarry (esp. in first-century Palestine, where this would probably be her means of support). That new marriage, whether from the perspective of the divorcée or the one marrying her, is adulterous.

Leon Morris: In the other passages in this section Jesus is dealing with a specific command of God. But people were not commanded to get divorced; this passage **assumes the practice of divorce** and speaks of the way it was regulated in the Mosaic law. The bill of divorce was a protection for the woman; a capricious husband could not drive her from his home and afterward claim that she was still his wife. He must give her the document that set out her right to marry someone else. It was accepted throughout Judaism that a man was entitled to divorce his wife (the procedure is given in **Deut. 24:1-4**). A wife was not permitted to divorce her husband, though she could petition the court, and if her plea was accepted the court would direct the husband to divorce her. The husband's right was regarded as inalienable, and the only question was the ground on which he based his action. The school of Shammai took a hard line and saw the meaning of "*some indecency*" (**Deut. 24:1**) as adultery, whereas the school of Hillel allowed a much wider range of interpretation, and, for example, permitted a man to divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner (Mishnah Git. 9.10; it adds the further information that R. Akiba allowed divorce "Even if he found another fairer than she"). Against such a background Jesus calls on people to appreciate the true meaning and solemnity of marriage. We should bear in mind that he is laying down great principles that should guide conduct; he is not making laws or giving a precise list of occasions when divorce might take place.

John Nolland: It is, therefore, likely that the intention of the present Gospel text is to challenge easy divorce, whether initiated by the husband or provoked by the wife, in each case by labelling the subsequently formed relationship as adulterous. In each instance the challenge is addressed to the man: whether he be the one contemplating divorce or the one planning to collude with the

stratagems of a woman who has found her way out of a marriage in pursuit of something better. Marriage is not a contract to be cancelled when no longer convenient but rather, as testified to in **Mal. 2:14-16, a covenant relationship that calls for sustained faithfulness.**

E. Michael Green: The plain meaning of Jesus' words is that **divorce followed by remarriage is tantamount to adultery in the eyes of God.** Jesus is even **stricter than Shammai!** As we see from **19:3**, Jesus takes his hearers back to the **purpose** for which God instituted marriage. It was intended to be **exclusive** and **lifelong**. That is the ideal. To fail to keep this ideal is to spoil God's plan for man and woman. It does not mean that failure cannot be forgiven, or that a subsequent marriage cannot be happy and fruitful. It simply asserts that **such a marriage is adulterous** and can never bear testimony to the one-man-one-woman relationship, for good or ill, which marriage was intended by the Creator to be. And that was a shattering statement by the new Moses, going back behind the Mosaic concession in **Deuteronomy 24:1** (designed, incidentally, not to facilitate divorce but to restrict it) to the original purpose of God. In the kingdom, as at the creation, **marriage is meant to be exclusive and lifelong.**

Donald Hagner: The husband who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery because in the culture of that day, unlike ours, a single woman could hardly survive on her own, except through prostitution. She was therefore bound to take another husband and so be made into an adulteress. And the man who married such a divorced woman himself committed adultery in so doing, because he has married the wife of another man. This viewpoint presupposes the permanent character of the marriage bond. For Jesus, not even divorce can change that fact.

I. (:31) TRADITIONAL TEACHING BY JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

“And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'.”

Walter Wilson: The unusual brevity of the unit itself (it is the only section of the antitheses without supporting illustrations) is offset by the extended treatment devoted to the question of divorce in **Matt 19:1-9** (cf. **Mark 10:1-12**).

R. T. France: the debate concerns not one of the ten commandments but a single piece of regulatory law which occurs in **Deut 24:1-4**. This, the only pentateuchal passage which directly speaks of divorce, served perforce as the basis for subsequent Jewish teaching on the subject, even though it was not concerned with the rightness or wrongness of divorce in itself, nor with permissible causes of divorce, but only with the **aftermath of a divorce** which is assumed to have taken place.

Van Parunak: Grammatically, the text does not **authorize** the issuing of a “bill of divorcement,” but simply **describes the fact** that such a custom existed. It contains, not three commands, but only one, with a lengthy condition that includes the existence of one or more divorces. The only command is that under these conditions,

***Deut 24:4** then her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled.*

I discuss the reasons for this translation extensively in chapter 4 of *Except for Fornication*. One important piece of evidence is Jeremiah's summary of this law:

Jer 3:1 *If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted?*

Jeremiah treats the putting away as a **condition**, not as a command or permission. . .

The references to the certificate of divorce and putting away in **Deuteronomy 24** are a regulation of an ungodly practice, not an endorsement of the process and certainly not a command. . .

II. (:32) TRANSCENDENT TEACHING BY JESUS

A. Divorcing Your Wife Puts Her in Jeopardy of Committing Adultery (Unless She Has Already Committed Adultery)

“but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery;”

R. T. France: What effect then does Jesus’ new teaching have on the understanding of **Deut 24:1–4**? Ideally it makes it obsolete, if God’s purpose for marriage is truly honored, since the prior divorce for which it legislates will not in fact occur in the ethics of the kingdom of heaven. In opposing current divorce legislation Jesus is rescuing **Deut. 24:1–4** from misuse for a purpose for which it was never intended. It was not meant to provide a positive basis for the ethics of God’s people, but only a trouble-shooting provision in case things went wrong. In **19:4–5** he will ground his positive understanding of marriage on a different pentateuchal source, and if that prior principle is observed there will be no divorce and therefore no use for the remedial legislation of **Deut 24:1–4**.

Robert Gundry: “*Except for the reason of sexual immorality*” means that it won’t be the wife’s first husband who makes her to be adulterated by divorcing her. **She has already been adulterated.** But emphasis falls on the responsibility of husbands not to put their unadulterated wives in a position that pretty much dooms them to adulteration by remarriage out of economic necessity. The passive voice in “*be adulterated*” reflects **male dominance** in Jewish marital culture. Strikingly, on the other hand, the man who marries a divorcée adulterates himself whether or not he himself is divorced.

B. Marrying a Divorced Woman Always Constitutes Adultery (if Her Former Husband Is Still Alive)

“and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Was Moses sanctioning the legitimacy of divorce in the **Deut. 24** passage?
- 2) Was the teaching of Jesus intended to be even more severe than the position held by the **School of Shammai**? If so, then how could you have a legitimate exception clause for the sin of sexual immorality?

3) How can we stress that God provides forgiveness and grace to those marriage partners who repent so that they are not viewed as some type of second class Christians?

4) What should your response be once you become aware that you have committed an act of adultery?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

One of my major objections to the position that allows for divorce and remarriage for an exception clause of adultery is that if one partner wishes to get out of the marriage commitment, he or she then has an incentive to drive the other partner to commit adultery. That would then constitute “legitimate” grounds for divorce and subsequent remarriage. This type of loophole would then incentivize bad behavior. In light of the preponderance of biblical data where no “exception clause” is found it seems far better to hold to the stricter interpretation of **No Divorce and No Remarriage** unless the former partner has died.

John Piper: Divorce and Remarriage: A Position Paper

Eleven Reasons Why I Believe All Remarriage After Divorce Is Prohibited While Both Spouses Are Alive:

1. **Luke 16:18** calls all remarriage after divorce adultery.
2. **Mark 10:11-12** call all remarriage after divorce adultery whether it is the husband or the wife who does the divorcing.
3. **Mark 10:2-9** and **Matthew 19:3-8** teach that Jesus rejected the Pharisees' justification of divorce from **Deuteronomy 24:1** and reasserted the purpose of God in creation that no human being separate what God has joined together.
4. **Matthew 5:32** does not teach that remarriage is lawful in some cases. Rather it reaffirms that marriage after divorce is adultery, even for those who have been divorced innocently, and that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of the adultery of her second marriage unless she had already become an adulteress before the divorce.

4.1 Jesus assumes that in most situations in that culture a wife who has been put away by a husband will be drawn into a second marriage. Nevertheless, in spite of these pressures, he calls this second marriage adultery.

4.2 The remarkable thing about the first half of this verse is that it plainly says that the remarriage of a wife who has been innocently put away is nevertheless adultery: *"Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her (the innocent wife who has not been unchaste) an adulteress."* This is a clear statement, it seems to me, that remarriage is wrong not merely when a person is guilty in the process of divorce, but also when a person is innocent. In other words, Jesus' opposition to remarriage seems to be based on the unbreakableness of the marriage bond by anything but death.

4.3 I will save my explanation of the exception clause ("*Except on the ground of unchastity*") for later in the paper, but for now, it may suffice to say that on the traditional interpretation of the clause, it may simply mean that a man makes his wife an adulteress **except in the case where she has made herself one.**

4.4 I would assume that since an innocent wife who is divorced commits adultery when she remarries, therefore a guilty wife who remarries after divorce is all the more guilty. If one argues that this guilty woman is free to remarry, while the innocent woman who has been put away is not, just because the guilty woman's adultery has broken the "one flesh" relationship, then one is put in the awkward position of saying to an innocent divorced woman, "If you now commit adultery it will be lawful for you to remarry."

5. **1 Corinthians 7:10-11** teaches that divorce is wrong but that if it is inevitable the person who divorces should not remarry.

6. **1 Corinthians 7:39** and **Romans 7:1-3** teach that remarriage is legitimate only after the death of a spouse.

7. **Matthew 19:10-12** teaches that special Christian grace is given by God to Christ's disciples to sustain them in singleness when they renounce remarriage according to the law of Christ.

8. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** does not legislate grounds for divorce but teaches that the "one-flesh" relationship established by marriage is not obliterated by divorce or even by remarriage.

9. **1 Corinthians 7:15** does not mean that when a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving spouse he or she is free to remarry. It means that the Christian is not bound to fight in order to preserve togetherness. Separation is permissible if the unbelieving partner insists on it.

10. **1 Corinthians 7:27-28** does not teach the right of divorced persons to remarry. It teaches that betrothed virgins should seriously consider the life of singleness, but do not sin if they marry.

11. The exception clause of Matthew 19:9 need not imply that divorce on account of adultery frees a person to be remarried. All the weight of the New Testament evidence given in the preceding ten points is against this view, and there are several ways to make good sense out of this verse so that it does not conflict with the broad teaching of the New Testament that remarriage after divorce is prohibited.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper>

Voddie Baucham: The Permanence View of Marriage – Matt. 5:31-32

Context of Sermon on the Mount: Key Principles:

- The law of God is perfect, timeless and relevant and yet insufficient for our salvation.
- Jesus is our key to interpreting the OT in light of the Kingdom.
- Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Must look at Pharisaism thru lens of original hearers – think of the most righteous people you can imagine (not as group of hypocritical, self-righteous wicked people).

Consistent pattern throughout these 6 antitheses.

- "You've heard this"
- "But I say this"

It is as wrong to keep the law as if that will justify you as it is wrong to not keep the law. Continuing discussion with the 7th commandment relating to adultery. Now Jesus brings in the issue of Divorce and Remarriage.

These are forgivable sins. Person may have a fulfilled life of service after repentance. God also blesses second union after repentance.

Overwhelming number of Christians today do not hold to this permanence view of Marriage that we hold.

Shortest and most concise of these 6 antitheses. Jesus referring to the case law here of **Deut. 24:1-4**, not directly to the Ten Commandments. The case law is the outworking of God's moral law to particular situations.

Two schools of thought in Jesus' day regarding reference to "indecency":

- School of **Shammai** – gross indecency or immorality
- School of **Hillel** – more liberal and generous – extended meaning to all types of real or imagined offenses including an improperly cooked meal

(comes into play more in **Matt. 19** text)

Major Views on Divorce and Remarriage in the church:

1) Permanence View – no divorce; no remarriage under any circumstances – Dwight Pentecost, James Montgomery Boice, John Piper

2) Semi-Permanence View – allows for divorce, but doesn't allow for remarriage

3) Permissive View – allows for divorce and allows for remarriage – John MacArthur, John Frame, D. A. Carson

- One Clause view -- Some say remarriage allowable in the case of adultery only; but not abandonment or anything else
- Two Clause view – In the case of adultery and in the case of abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse
- Liberal View – For just about anything

Nuances within each of these views. Not a deal-breaker; doesn't mean we can't fellowship with others. Not arguing that everybody that disagrees with us is out in the weeds.

Argument: Difficult to hold to Permanence View from a pastoral perspective because of so many people in difficult situations. But there's **difficulty regardless of your position**. Still people you have to look in the eye and say "No you may not divorce; No you may not remarry."

e.g. what about abuse or neglect or incompatibility or fiscal irresponsibility or idolatry or blasphemy or lying and deceit or refusing to have children or drunkenness or addiction or lengthy imprisonment or unbelief in prior marriage = not biblical grounds for divorce and then remarriage even if you hold to Two Clause Position

Only difference is that despite the thousands of difficult situations that we might encounter, the Permanence View has only 2 more difficulties to deal with than the Permissive View.

It's difficult regardless of the position you hold. But it is a moot view because we don't base our position on the pastoral difficulties involved in counseling others.

Principles of the Permanence View:

1) The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death.

Matt. 19 – look at what happens before you get to the exception clause. Pharisees questioning Jesus on a number of things that he had preached on. Jesus points them back to marriage ordinance in Genesis. Jesus only gives the exception clause after He has been asked another question. This first question is asked and answered with no exception clause given. Unequivocal answer of “No” – you cannot separate them.

Mark 10:9

In our vows we say “For better or worse, forsaking all others until death do us part” – otherwise we should change our vows

Next antithesis Jesus addresses in Matt. 5 = oaths and vows – marriage vows are permanent

2) Initiating a divorce is never lawful.

Next question in **Matt. 19** – diving into the case law; Jesus says you are reading the case law wrong; Moses did not command Israel to give certificate of divorce; Deut. 24 is about remarriage; Moses assumes that divorce is already happening – not addressing that; putting restrictions on the existing practice

1 Cor. 7:10-11 – don't get divorced

1 Cor. 7:12-16 – don't get divorced

3) Remarriage after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

Rom. 7:2-3 – no exception clause in any of these passages; only death paves the way for remarriage without adultery [notice that it says “act of adultery” – not perpetual adultery]

Mark 10:10-12 – no exception clause; whoever does this commits this

Luke 16 – the other parallel passage

Matt. 5:31-32 – What's this a statement about? If she has committed this act she has already made herself an adulteress – you haven't made her an adulteress. But if you divorce her for some other reason you have made her an adulteress when she goes and remarries.

Whoever marries a divorced woman for any reason for any circumstance as long as her former spouse is still alive (doesn't say “Unless her divorce was a lawful one”) – no exception clause

Exception Clause – Only in **Matt. 5** and **Matt. 19** --

Porneia used – instead of word for adultery – sexual immorality – Why use this broader term; associated with **Jewish betrothal law** not a consummated marriage; betrothal was a covenant; a legally binding document; Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience; Joseph was going to put Mary away for porneia

3 Purposes for Marriage: Procreation / Sanctification / Illustration – think about divorce and

remarriage within this framework

1) Procreation

Mal. 2 – God was seeking godly offspring

2) Sanctification

1 Cor. 7 – legitimate desires God has given for sex can be legitimately fulfilled within context of marriage

3) Illustration of the relationship between Christ and His Church

Divorce and Remarriage is a perversion of this intended picture;

Unthinkable under any circumstance to think that Christ would divorce the bride for whom He died.

What about principle that your *righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees*?

- Hillel School – no problem here
 - Shammai School – big problem – Jesus would be saying: “The Pharisees say that you can only divorce in the case of gross immorality; I say to you exactly the same thing”???
- You don’t have to do any better than they do.

Pastoral Implications:

1) We will always encourage you to stay married. To keep your vows.

No reasons you can give that would change our mind to say that divorce is allowed in your extreme situation.

2) We will always walk with you through difficult marriage circumstances with a view towards repentance and reconciliation. No loophole that allows you to check out and be completely righteous. We will not perform wedding ceremonies for those seeking a second marriage while the first spouse is living. Go be reconciled.

Pastoral responsibility to protect a spouse who is being abused. But still would not advise divorce.

What this does not mean:

- That couple is committing new acts of adultery with every instance of intimacy thereafter
- Does not mean you should divorce current spouse and return to initial spouse; you don’t re-commit a sin to demonstrate your repentance for the first time you did it; Instead, now grab ahold of the Permanence View and don’t let go
- Does not mean that divorced and remarried people are second class citizens in the kingdom of God

Don’t mess with God by presuming on His grace and reasoning: I know that God forgives this sin as with any other so I will go ahead and sin and then look for forgiveness

I tell my wife: “If you leave me, I’m going with you.”

Marriage is not difficult because of the person you are married to. You are the problem. If leave and enter another marriage you take with you the problem = You!

Van Parunak: Most commentators neglect **the position of the exception**, and assume that it applies to the entire verse. If the Lord had meant the exception to apply to both clauses, he could

made that clear.

He could have repeated it with each half:

*I say unto you,
whosoever shall dismiss his wife, **saving for the cause of fornication**, causeth her
to commit adultery:
and whosoever shall marry her that is dismissed, **saving for the cause of
fornication**, committeth adultery.*

He could have put it before the pair:

*I say unto you, that **saving for the cause of fornication**,
whosoever shall dismiss his wife causeth her to commit adultery:
and whosoever shall marry her that is dismissed committeth adultery.*

Or he could have put it after both conditions:

*I say unto you,
whosoever shall dismiss his wife causeth her to commit adultery:
and whosoever shall marry her that is dismissed committeth adultery,
saving for the cause of fornication.*

But there is no grammatical precedent for a modifier that falls in the middle of one clause to be applied to neighboring clauses as well.

The solution to the problem lies, not in twisting the grammar of the verse, but in the verb “dismiss” ἀπολυω. Recall that this is not the OT verb for **divorce**, but a secular verb from the Greco-Roman culture of the first century. It was used for divorce, but it has a much broader meaning, and three places where it occurs in the Greek Bible give us an important clue.

Gen 15:2 *And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go [middle of ἀπολυω] childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

Num 20:28 *And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. 29 And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead [passive of ἀπολυω], they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.*

Luk 2:27 *and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart [ἀπολυω] in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*

In each of these cases, the verb means “to dismiss from life,” a meaning that it commonly has in other Greek literature. The biblical way to deal with fornication in a marriage is by **executing the guilty party**. When that is done, the other party is of course free to remarry.

So the Lord’s message turns on a **double meaning of this verb**. If a man dismisses his wife for any reason other than fornication, her remarriage makes both her and her future husband adulterers, for the bond with her previous husband is still in place. However, if he dismisses her for fornication, following the instructions of **Deuteronomy 22**, **he dismisses her from life**. Now

she cannot remarry, and her widower is certainly free to remarry without adultery.

Application: The Lord's teaching on divorce leaves **no loophole**. Throughout the Bible, the Lord **hates divorce**. His law recognizes that it takes place, and regulates it, but it is still sin, and **remarriage is adultery**. The Scriptures provide **no exceptions**. This is the most important single thing for a young person to keep in mind when entering into marriage: if you intend to live pleasing to the Lord, the marriage commitment is permanent, and there is no godly exit except by the death of the spouse.

TEXT: Matthew 5:33-37

TITLE: INTEGRITY SHOULD MAKE OATHS UNNECESSARY IN NORMAL SPEECH

BIG IDEA:

OATHS ARE UNNECESSARY IN NORMAL SPEECH SINCE GOD DESIRES SIMPLE TRUTHFULNESS BASED ON PERSONAL INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION:

Craig Blomberg: Jesus' followers should be people whose words are so characterized by integrity that others need no formal assurance of their truthfulness in order to trust them.

Grant Osborne: The OT allows oaths for anchoring the truth value of a statement, but the Jewish people had taken this to incredible lengths with the variety of oaths accepted or rejected and the frequency of their use. To Jesus this was an issue of honesty and integrity, for any statement of a citizen of the kingdom should be self-authenticating and should be true at the core. There is no need to use oaths to support an assertion.

R. T. France: Two different but related subjects are at issue here. Oaths, invocations of God or of some sacred object to undergird a statement or promise, shade into vows, solemn promises to God of an action to be performed. The OT passages summed up in v. 33 apparently relate to both issues, though Jesus' response focuses on the use of oaths to support one's word rather than on vows (he will touch on the latter question in 15:3-6). His simple command not to use oaths at all (v. 34a) is illustrated by a number of possible oaths each of which is shown to be inappropriate (vv. 34b-36), and explained in the pronouncement of v. 37 that any elaboration of a simple affirmation or denial is "from evil." Since the OT law not only provided for but in some cases demanded such elaborating oaths (e.g. Num 5:19-22), there is a prima facie case to be made that Jesus is here opposing the intention of one aspect of the law. At least he is doing what he did in v. 32, declaring that these provisions should never have been needed if people practised the **uncomplicated truthfulness** which is what God desires. . .

Jesus' prohibition of **all swearing** (its comprehensiveness is indicated by the emphatic *holōs*, "at all") will be explained in principle in v. 37. With regard to vows, which were voluntary, Jesus is not so much opposing OT legislation as telling his disciples not to take up an option which the law offered but did not require. His words recall the comment of Deut 23:22 that while vows once undertaken must be fulfilled (vv. 21, 23) if you do not make a vow at all "there will be no sin in you." Oaths too could be voluntary (Lev 5:4; Num 30:3-15), and such oaths are found frequently throughout the OT history, but there were also occasions when the law required an oath (Exod 22:11; Num 5:19-22; cf. the general expectation that oaths will be taken in Yahweh's name, without specific context, in Deut 6:13; 10:20), and these too are swept aside by Jesus' blanket prohibition if it is taken as a literal regulation.

William Barclay: The ideal is that people should never need an oath to buttress or guarantee the truth of anything they may say. The character of an individual should make an oath completely unnecessary. The guarantee and the witness should lie in what that person is. **Isocrates**, the great Greek teacher and orator, said: 'A man must lead a life which will gain more confidence in him than ever an oath can do.' The second-century Christian theologian **Clement of Alexandria**

insisted that Christians must lead such a life and demonstrate such a character that no one will ever dream of asking an oath from them. The ideal society is one in which no one's word will ever need an oath to guarantee its truth, and no one's promise will ever need an oath to guarantee its fulfilling.

Charles Swindoll: Apparently, people had become **untrustworthy** in their promises and nonchalant about actually following through on commitments. To get others to take their promises seriously, people had to swear by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by their own lives, in an almost superstitious sort of way (see **Matt. 5:34-36**). But even in this swearing, there was a catch—none of them actually used the name of God. As such, some were interpreting these oaths as allowing for a bit of flexibility. If a man broke a vow sworn “*by Jerusalem*,” only Jerusalem would be offended, but not God. **Stan Toussaint** puts it well: “The Jewish concept of taking oaths was based on a false interpretation of **Leviticus 19:12**, ‘*You shall not swear falsely by My name.*’ They thought that any oath, therefore, which did not include the name of God was not binding. Sometimes these oaths even came to be used as a means of deceit.”

I. (:33) TRADITIONAL TEACHING OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS BASED ON MOSAIC LAW

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told,”

D. A. Carson: The Mosaic law forbade irreverent oaths, light use of the Lord's name, broken vows. Once Yahweh's name was invoked, the vow to which it was attached became a debt that had to be paid to the Lord.

A sophisticated casuistry judged how binding an oath really was by examining how closely it was related to Yahweh's name. Incredible distinctions proliferate under such an approach. Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, nor was swearing by Jerusalem, though swearing toward Jerusalem was. That an entire Mishnaic tract (m. Šebu.) is given over to the subject (cf. also m. Sanh. 3.2; t. Ned. 1; Str-B, 1:321–36) shows that such distinctions became important and were widely discussed.

John MacArthur: Now, you'll notice it says in **verse 33**, “*Again you have heard that it hath been said by them of old, ‘Thou shalt not perjure thyself but shall perform under the Lord thine oaths.’*” Now, that statement is not included in the Old Testament. It was kind of a **composite statement** of their Jewish tradition, but it is **based upon Old Testament reality**, for oaths are a part of the Old Testament. Now, you'll notice the word “*oath*” and you'll notice the word “*perjure*.” Both come from the same root. The word “*swear*” in **verse 34** is a synonym. . .

The missing ingredient in their system was **it never told them when oaths were proper**, and so you might say the missing ingredient led to **frivolous swearing**. They were swearing oaths for every little thing through every day. Swearing by this and swearing by that and swearing to this and swearing to that, and all the time swearing and taking oaths indiscriminately, ad-libbed, glibly, taking them as a common matter of conversation.

The second thing, not only a missing ingredient but a misplaced emphasis. Notice the phrase, “*Unto the Lord.*” That was their little catch. As long as you swore unto the Lord, you had to do it. But if you swore to anything else, you didn't have to. Right? It was King's X. Remember when you were a little kid? “I know I told you that, but I had my fingers crossed.” Remember

that? It's exactly what they were doing. "I know, but I had them behind them behind my back, they were crossed." "Oh, no, they weren't." And you know those little arguments. King's X. That's what they were playing.

If you don't swear to the Lord, you don't have to keep it, see? So they were saying I swear by heaven, I swear by earth, I swear by Jerusalem, I swear by my head, I swear by the temple, I swear by this, I swear by that, and they go right out and just do the very opposite. And they didn't have any impunity at all, no sense of guilt, because they didn't swear by the name of the Lord, and all it did was make a network of lies going everywhere.

A. Prohibition of False Vows

"You shall not make false vows,"

William Hendriksen: What we have here in **Matthew 5:33-37** (cf. **James 5:12**) is the condemnation of the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oaths, used in order to make an impression and to spice daily conversation. Over against that evil Jesus commends simple truthfulness in thought, word and deed.

B. Performance of Legitimate Vows

"but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord."

There is a legitimate use of oaths in special and solemn circumstances.

Leon Morris: The use of both the **negative** ("*You shall not break your oath*") and the **positive** ("*you shall keep your oaths*") gives emphasis to the importance of respecting sworn testimony.

Justin Imel, Sr.: Jesus is about to do two things with this commandment:

- (1) He will speak of the Law's true intent; and
- (2) He will raise the Law to a new level.

But, in no way, does Jesus encourage the breaking of this commandment. Jesus cannot encourage breaking this commandment in any way, shape, or form, for it is the Word of God.

<https://drjustinimel.com/sermon-on-matthew-watch-what-you-say-matthew-533-37/>

II. (:34-37) TRANSCENDENT TEACHING OF JESUS EXPOSING THEIR HYPOCRISY AND DECEITFULNESS

"But I say to you,"

D. A. Carson: If oaths designed to encourage truthfulness become occasions for clever lies and casuistical deceit, Jesus will abolish oaths, for the direction in which the OT points is the fundamental importance of thorough and consistent truthfulness. If one does not swear at all, one does not swear falsely. . .

Jesus insists that whatever a man swears by is related to God in some way, and therefore every oath is implicitly in God's name; heaven, earth, Jerusalem, even the hairs of the head are all under God's sway and ownership (**v.36**).

Leon Morris: To swear means "To make a solemn declaration or statement with an appeal to God or a superhuman being, or to some sacred object, in confirmation of what is said" (*Shorter*

Oxford Dictionary). **J. Schneider** understands swearing to be “primarily self-cursing should one not be speaking the truth” (TDNT, V, p. 458). Such a solemn statement is sometimes called for, but Jesus is saying that it should not be necessary for his followers. He is not forbidding the taking of an oath in a law court or the like. The law said, “*you shall ... swear by his name*” (**Deut. 6:13; 10:20**), and Jesus himself responded when the high priest put him on oath (**26:63-64**). He is saying in the strongest terms that those who follow him **must speak the truth**. They must never take the line that only when an oath is sworn need they be truthful. *At all* with the negative excludes the oath altogether. There must never be the need for it.

A. (:34-36) Prohibition of Unnecessary and Convoluted Vows

1. (:34-35) Don't Invoke God

a. (:34) By Referencing Heaven

“make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,”

Craig Blomberg: To “*swear*” (v. 34) does not mean to curse or use bad words but to affirm the truth of a statement while calling on God to judge oneself if it is in fact untrue.

b. (:35a) By Referencing Earth

“or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet,”

Leon Morris: At one and the same time the footstool brings out subjection and nearness. It is perhaps relevant that God’s footstool is associated with worship (**Ps. 99:5**).

c. (:35b) By Referencing Jerusalem

“or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.”

R. T. France: Oaths normally invoked God as the guarantor of the person’s word, and it was this which made it so serious a matter to break them: it was a **misuse of God’s name (Exod 20:7)**, a **profanation (Lev 19:12)**. In response some Jews had already developed the habit, which underlies much of our “social swearing” today, of finding more **innocuous substitutes** for the actual name of God; here Jesus lists oaths by heaven, earth, Jerusalem and one’s own head, while in **23:16–22** he will add a further list (the temple, the gold of the temple, the altar and the gift on the altar). Such casuistry, of which the Mishnah provides numerous examples, receives very short shrift, since heaven, earth and Jerusalem are inseparably linked with God as his dwelling and possession; the point is made by allusions to **Is 66:1** (“*Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool*”) and **Ps 48:2** (“*Mount Zion, the city of the great King*”). The oath by one’s head might have been given parallel treatment, since the head too is God’s creation, but the point is made more obliquely by pointing out that you have no power over your own head; the implication is that it is God, not you, who determines the color of your hair (some early patristic interpreters took this verse as a ruling against the use of hair-dye!), since he is its creator and sustainer. All such surrogate oaths display not reverence but **theological superficiality**.

Grant Osborne: To swear by heaven is to invoke God’s very throne (**Ps 2:4; 11:4; Isa 66:1**), and that is God’s prerogative, not ours. To swear by earth also goes back to God, for he created it and it is his. It is God’s right to use earth as his own footstool, not our right to use earth to bolster our own petty claims. To swear (facing) “*toward*” (εἰς) Jerusalem is to pretend that you can tell God what to do; it is his (the “*great king*,” **Ps 48:2**) city, not yours to control.

2. (:36) Don't Invoke Yourself

*“Nor shall you make an oath by your head,
for you cannot make one hair white or black.”*

Leon Morris: The first three rejected oaths all in one way or another refer to God, but now comes an oath that centers on the person of the swearer. You are not to swear by your head, Jesus says. For this final example the verb swear is repeated, which may be for emphasis, but more probably in order to give balance to the sentence. To swear by the head means that the swearer “would give his head (i.e., his life) if he were not speaking the truth” (**Ridderbos**). The reason for not swearing moves from the greatness of God to the littleness of people: no one is able to change the color of even one hair, a very small part of the human body. Such an impotent being is not one by whom to swear oaths!

William Barclay: Here is a great eternal truth. Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved, and in others of which He is not involved. There cannot be one kind of language in the church and another kind of language in the home. There cannot be one kind of standard of conduct in the church and another standard of conduct in the business world. The fact is that God does not need to be invited into certain departments of life and kept out of others, He is everywhere, all through life, and every activity of life.

He hears not only the words which are spoken in His name, He hears all words, and there cannot be any such thing as a form of words which evades bringing God into any transaction. We will regard all promises as sacred if we remember that all promises are made in the presence of God.

B. (:37) Performance of the Simple Truth

1. Stand on Your Word Alone

“But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no';”

Leon Morris: The conclusion of the matter is that it is never necessary for Christ's people to swear an oath before they utter the truth. Their word should always be so **reliable** that nothing more than a statement is needed from them. God is in all of life, and every statement is made before him. Your statement will refer to anything you say. I have translated the Greek fairly literally, but the meaning may well be as in REB, “*Plain 'Yes' or 'No' is all you need to say.*” That would suit the context. Another possibility is that the words signify much what James says: “*Let your 'yes' be yes, and your 'no' no*” (**Jas. 5:12**), that is, your statement should be thoroughly reliable and thus make an oath unnecessary.

Walter Wilson: the invocation of special witnesses by means of the oath is seen to have the paradoxical effect of actually trivializing one's speech, since the practice represents a tacit admission that one's speech is unreliable without it. Moreover, if it is true that “*the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*” (**12:34**), then the practice of swearing runs the risk of trivializing not only one's speech but also one's self, that is, one's moral integrity. That being the case, in the requirement that Jesus imposes, “all places of appeal outside the self are rejected.”

John Nolland: The challenge is to stand, as far as one's word is concerned, nakedly on one's own integrity: neither by the introduction of an oath implicitly to downgrade the committedness of one's word without an oath nor by the use of the oath to seek to take hostage the honour of anything else to our own claim to truthfulness. Nothing by which I might swear can be made to carry responsibility for my truthfulness; the responsibility is my own.

John MacArthur: And what He's saying is keep it for those times when it is needful, when invoking God's name is a right thing because of the seriousness of the matter. But on other occasions, in your normal logos and by the way, that word is translated in the New Testament probably 50 times as common speech, just the word speech. Let your **normal speech** be yes means yes, and no means no. And you don't have to swear by anything because your word is your bond, right? So Jesus is merely reiterating what I said at the beginning, the two Old Testament standards.

2. Shun Going Beyond That

"and anything beyond these is of evil."

Leon Morris: This may mean that it originates in evil or, more probably, that it comes from the devil (so **Lenski**).

Grant Osborne: anyone who centers on more and more oaths rather than personal integrity is following Satan.

William Barclay: Let us look at the last part of this verse. The Revised Standard Version has it that the answer given must simply be yes or no; '*anything more than this comes from evil*'. What does that mean? It can mean one of two things.

(a) If it is necessary to take an oath from someone, that necessity arises from the evil that is the individual. If there was no evil in that person, no oath would be necessary. That is to say, the fact that it is sometimes necessary to make someone take an oath is a demonstration of the evil in Christless human nature.

(b) The fact that it is necessary to put people on oath on certain occasions arises from the fact that this is an evil world. In a perfect world, in a world which was the kingdom of God, no taking of oaths would ever be necessary. It is necessary only because of the evil of the world.

What Jesus is saying is this – the truly good person will never need to take an oath; the truth of the sayings and the reality of the promises of that person need no such guarantee. But the fact that oaths are still sometimes necessary is the proof that people are not good and that this is not a good world.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some legitimate contexts today where taking an oath is still legitimate and appropriate?
- 2) What is the distinction between a vow and an oath?
- 3) What type of unnecessary expressions do we use to try to reinforce the validity of our words instead of just standing on our words alone (e.g. "Honestly . . .").

4) Do we have the reputation that our word is reliable?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

D. A. Carson: In the Scriptures God himself “*swears*” (e.g., **Ge 9:9–11; Lk 1:72–75**; cf. **Ps 16:10** and **Ac 2:27–31**), not because he sometimes lies, but in order to help people believe (**Heb 6:17**). The earliest Christians still took oaths, if we may judge from Paul’s example (**Ro 1:9; 2Co 1:23; 1Th 2:5, 10**; cf. **Php 1:8**), for much the same reason. Jesus himself testified under oath (**26:63–64**).

David Thompson: JESUS CHRIST, THE RIGHTEOUS KING, GIVES HIS DISCIPLES TEACHING CONCERNING THE IMPORTANCE OF THEM BEING **MEN WHO KEEP THEIR WORD**, NOT MEN WHO MAKE A BUNCH OF OATH PROMISES.

Walter Wilson: In terms of its ramifications for the evangelist’s readers, the list provided in **5:34b–36** is best interpreted against the backdrop of **contemporary practice**. According to certain rabbinic authorities, oaths sworn by heaven, by earth, or by one’s own head were not considered legally binding. Assuming such rulings as a background for the Matthean community, “any casuistic attempt to circumvent 34a is excluded; appeal to non-binding oaths—such as the rabbis specified—is rejected.” The opposition of heaven and earth in the first two illustrations (**5:34b–35a**) functions rhetorically to reinforce the sense of totality applied to the prohibition. Having moved from heaven to earth, the scene then moves to Jerusalem, the center of the earth (e.g., **Ezek 5:5; 38:12**). The logic in each of the first three explanatory clauses involves associating each referent with the sacral majesty of God. The significance of heaven and earth resides not in themselves but in the fact that they are related to God by virtue of being, respectively, God’s throne and footstool, the imagery being derived from **Isa 66:1** (cf. **Acts 7:49**). The same reasoning is then applied to Jerusalem, which is described as “*the city of the great King*” (cf. **Ps 48:2**). Each formula is shown to be unacceptable because each refers (albeit indirectly) to God, and therefore does not avoid the problem of calling upon God as witness.

William Barclay: But in the time of Jesus there were two unsatisfactory things about taking oaths.

The first was what might be called **frivolous swearing**, taking an oath where no oath was necessary or proper. It had become far too common a custom to introduce a statement by saying ‘By thy life’, or ‘By my head’, or ‘May I never see the comfort of Israel if ...’. The Rabbis laid it down that to use any form of oath in a simple statement like ‘That is an olive tree’ was sinful and wrong. ‘The yes of the righteous is yes,’ they said, ‘and their no is no.’

There is still need of warning here. Far too often, people use the most sacred language in the most meaningless way. They take the sacred names upon their lips in the most thoughtless and irreverent way. The sacred names should be kept for sacred things.

The second Jewish custom was in some ways even worse than that; it might be called **evasive swearing**. The Jews divided oaths into two classes, those which were absolutely binding and those which were not. Any oath which contained the name of God was absolutely binding; any oath which succeeded in evading the name of God was held not to be binding. The result was

that if a man swore by the name of God in any form, he would rigidly keep that oath; but if he swore by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his head, he felt quite free to break that oath. The result was that evasion had been brought to a fine art.

The idea behind this was that if God's name was used, God became a partner in the transaction; whereas if God's name was not used, God had nothing to do with the transaction. The principle which Jesus lays down is quite clear. In effect, Jesus is saying that, far from having to make God a partner in any transaction, no one can keep God out of any transaction. God is already there. Heaven is the throne of God; the earth is the footstool of God; Jerusalem is the city of God; our own heads do not belong to us; we cannot even make a hair white or black; our lives are God's; there is nothing in the world which does not belong to God; and therefore it does not matter whether God is actually named in so many words or not. God is there already.

Justin Imel, Sr.: Jesus is calling upon his disciples to live with such integrity that no oath is necessary. Every time I go to the DMV or to vote or am called upon to testify in court, those there likely do not know me well enough to realize my truthfulness. Even if they know I'm as honest as "Honest Abe," others may come along to examine such records who have no idea who I am; they don't know if I'm telling the truth or not. However, in my day-to-day associations, that had better not be the case!

Scripture calls upon us to be a people known for our integrity. *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (**Matt 5:16**). *"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation"* (**1 Pet 2:12**).

Scripture likewise calls upon us to be people of the truth. *"Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another"* (**Eph 4:25**). *"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator"* (**Col 3:9-10**).

If we are people of integrity and speak the truth, we do not need oaths. I don't need to take an oath so that you know what I say I'll do. All I will need to do is simply to say "Yes" or "No." I won't need God to witness my truthfulness; my life will demonstrate that truthfulness. David spoke of such truthfulness: *"O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart"* (**Ps 15:1-2**).

Steven Molin: Have you ever wondered how this idea of swearing, and taking oaths, and placing ones hand on the bible came to be? It came from the assumption that people lie – we frequently lie – and that we will not tell the truth unless we are compelled to do so. So when someone thinks we may be lying, they say "Do you swear to God?" "Do you swear on your mother's grave?" "Do you...Cross your heart and hope to die if you should ever tell a lie?" Somehow, we figure that if someone is invoking their mother's grave, or bargaining with their own life, they will certainly tell the truth.

And if we swear to God, and yet lie, it means that we are prostituting God's name in order to get away with our lie. We are using God's honor to deceive someone else. All along, we thought the

Second Commandment meant that we weren't supposed to spit out the name of the Lord when we cut ourselves shaving or hit our thumb with a hammer. But Luther had it right when he wrote in the Small Catechism:

*“We are to fear and love God
so that we do not use his name superstitiously,
or use it to curse, to swear, to lie, or to deceive.”*

So what is Jesus' antidote for swearing on his name, or swearing on anyone else's name? Just don't do it. When you are asked for your answer, you simply say “yes” or “no.” And you tell the truth. Followers of the Savior do not need extra encouragement or more reasons to tell the truth. We don't need legalistic rules, or the threat of perjury, or the weight of our mother's graves to compel us to speak the truth. We only need to be reminded that it is our duty as followers of Jesus to be honest. Always honest.

<https://sermonwriter.com/sermons/matthew-533-37-the-power-of-a-promise-molin/>

Tom Wright: Yes or No Is Enough

We live in a culture in which the truth is often the first casualty of interactions between men. We have an incredibly elaborate system of lawyers and contracts and notaries and binding signatures to ensure that we do what we say we will do, at least when it's perceived to be important enough. And none of it makes people any more truthful. In fact, most people don't even believe truth is an objective reality! . . .

As with Jesus' previous commands in the Sermon on the Mount dealing with murder, adultery, and divorce, the Law of Moses had already spoken to this issue, but the scribes and Pharisees had perverted the teaching of the Law and had chronically missed the spirit of the Law. Throughout this sermon, Jesus is zeroing in on the **spirit of the Law** in keeping with its purpose as the reflection of God's holy character. . .

I don't believe Jesus' point in Matthew 5 is that oaths are evil or that an oath can never be legitimate. I believe His point is that the swearing of oaths as practiced by the scribes and Pharisees was evil, in its entirety – because they deliberately swore their oaths by everything EXCEPT God in a foolish effort to sidestep their accountability TO God!

Our Lord emphatically points out in **Matthew 5** that God alone is sovereign over all things – heaven, earth, Jerusalem, even the hairs on your head. And you – you are sovereign over nothing, not even your own hair. No matter what you choose to swear by, it is God to whom you and I and every other created thing are accountable, and you're accountable to Him whether you swear an oath or don't swear an oath. **You're accountable to Him every time you open your mouth.**

It would be better to swear no oath at all than to think you can contrive a way to avoid accountability before God to be a truthful person. . .

If we reserve truthfulness only for declarations that take the form of oaths or vows, and we neglect truthfulness the rest of the time, that is Phariseeism, and it is evil – and it makes oaths an instrument of evil.

Oaths must not become devices for lowering the standard of truthfulness that applies to us at all times as children of God. . .

Let's focus on the goal of godly lives from godly hearts. We will not speak truth in our hearts if we are not in love with the One who is Truth.

- Brothers and sisters, let us be truthful people because we hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Let us be truthful people because God re-created us to be pure in heart.
- Let us be truthful people because we desire to be salt and light in a world that desperately needs our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Let us be truthful people because we long to live out the lovely character of the One who gave us life at the cost of His own life's blood.
- Let us be truthful people because we are our Father's children.

That's reason enough.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/16-yes-or-no-enough-matthew-533-37>

TEXT: Matthew 5:38-42

TITLE: GOING THE EXTRA MILE INSTEAD OF RETALIATION FOR PERSONAL WRONGS

BIG IDEA:

KINGDOM ETHICS REQUIRE GIVING UP OUR RIGHTS WHEN WE ARE WRONGED INSTEAD OF RETALIATING

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: The wheels of justice turned on the principle of payback. However, God gave these guidelines to govern civil and criminal justice. They prevented judges and courts from exacting excessive punishments on people. They also served as a deterrent to criminal acts because people could be sure that, in such a system of justice, what they did to others would come back upon them in equal measure.

This law of retribution was not intended to govern personal, everyday relationships between family members, friends, and neighbors. Yet many were applying this principle in a tit-for-tat, this-for-that style of vigilante “justice.” Such an interpretation left no room for grace and mercy, forgiveness and forbearance. Jesus knew human nature. He knew that if all individuals felt it was their legal obligation to retaliate against every little wrong, it would lead to an escalation of aggression and a breakdown of society.

So Jesus urged His listeners to respond to personal offenses with grace and mercy. When an evil person insults you, take the insult. If they take their aggression one step further and slap you on the cheek, refuse to retaliate (**Matt. 5:39**). If somebody tries to unjustly take from you or force you to do something, voluntarily give up your right to personal dignity and respect, and cooperate (**5:40-42**). Jesus knew that such alarming and unexpected responses to wicked behavior often disarm and disorient people and lead not to an escalation of wickedness and violence but to repentance and reconciliation.

Walter Wilson: In his response, Jesus does not reflect on the appropriateness of the *lex talionis* as a judicial rule, his concern instead being with its inappropriateness as a standard of communal ethics. By instructing his followers not to resist evildoers, Jesus repudiates both the concept of (equivalent) retribution upon which the law rests and the use of violence that it sanctions. In its place, he lays out an alternative strategy, one that fulfills the law (**5:17**) not by curtailing retaliation further but by eliminating it altogether. Moreover, this strategy entails not simply refraining from retribution but responding to injustice with actions that constitute a visible protest against the use of force, actions through which one’s “light” shines before others (**5:16**). The sorts of situations presented in the unit would have had special meaning for a group experiencing persecution.

Craig Blomberg: Striking a person on the right cheek suggests a backhanded slap from a typically right-handed aggressor and was a characteristic Jewish form of **insult**. Jesus tells us not to trade such insults even if it means receiving more. In no sense does **v. 39** require Christians to subject themselves or others to physical danger or abuse, nor does it bear directly on the pacifism-just war debate. **Verse 40** is clearly limited to a **legal context**. One must be willing to give as collateral an outer garment—more than what the law could require, which was merely an

inner garment (cf. **Exod 22:26-27**). Coat and shirt reflect contemporary parallels to “cloak” and “tunic,” though both of the latter looked more like long robes. **Verse 41** continues the legal motif by referring to Roman conscription of private citizens to help carry military equipment for soldiers as they traveled.

Each of these commands requires Jesus' followers to **act more generously than what the letter of the law demanded**. “*Going the extra mile*” has rightly become a proverbial expression and captures the essence of all of Jesus' illustrations. Not only must disciples reject all behavior motivated only by a desire for retaliation, but they also must positively work for the good of those with whom they would otherwise be at odds.

Leon Morris: The principles

- that we are to refrain from asserting our rights and
- that we should put the needs of others before our own

run through all of life and mark the difference between the servant of God and the worldling.

Richard Gardner: Instead of succumbing to an escalating cycle of hostile acts, eager to secure or defend our rights, we are to act in such a way that the cycle is broken. This might mean letting go of wounded pride, in order to deescalate a conflict situation. It might mean yielding ground in a legal or other dispute, in order to pacify one or more irate parties. Or it might mean pursuing a new level of reciprocity, in which we seek to meet evil with good stronger than evil (cf. **Prov. 24:29; Rom. 12:17-21; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:23**). In these and other ways, we act as the **peacemakers** Jesus commends in **5:9**.

Donald Hagner: Jesus again expounds the **ethics of the kingdom**. What he presents is ethics directed more to conduct at the personal, rather than the societal, level. These directives are for the recipients of the kingdom, not for governmental legislation. Rather than demanding strict justice, or allowing for retaliation of any kind, the disciple of the kingdom defers to others. The disciple does not insist on personal rights. Furthermore, the true disciple **does more than is expected**. He or she is free from society's low standards of expectation, being subject only to the will of the Father. The conduct of the disciple is filled with surprise for those who experience it. This element of surprise relates closely to and reflects the grace that is central to the gospel. It is the unworthy who have experienced the good things of the kingdom; and as they have experienced the surprise of unexpected grace, so they act in a similar manner toward the undeserving among them (cf. **Luke 6:34–35**). Jesus himself provides the supreme example of the fulfillment of this ethic (cf. passion narratives and **1 Pet 2:23**), and the disciples are called to follow in his path. Kingdom ethics demands not mechanical compliance to rules but a lifestyle governed by the free grace of God.

Ray Fowler: There are two mistakes people make with these commands of Jesus. Some people try to explain them away, which takes away the punch of Jesus' commands. While others find them impossible to obey, and so give up on them altogether. We need to be careful that we look at these commands within their immediate context and also in conjunction with other related commands of Scripture. Otherwise, like my friend in California, we may put these commands so far out of reach that we never even attempt to obey them.

So let's look at the immediate context first. And the immediate context is the Old Testament teachings on justice. Look at **verse 38** where Jesus says: “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’*” Jesus is speaking here about what is often referred to as the *lex*

talionis (**law of retaliation**) or “*the law of the tooth.*” It is mentioned three times in the Old Testament: in **Exodus 21:24**, **Leviticus 24:20** and **Deuteronomy 19:21**. It sounds gruesome to us, because we tend to think of it in terms of personal revenge, but that was not the original intent of the law.

I. The Old Testament taught justice – “eye for an eye” (38)

- A. Excessive punishment was prohibited (**Deuteronomy 19:16-21**)
 - 1) The punishment fit the crime
 - 2) Evil was restrained
- B. Personal revenge was forbidden (**Deut 32:35; Romans 12:19**)
 - 1) Let the courts do their job
 - 2) God will repay

II. Jesus taught radical love over revenge (39-42)

- A. Do not resist an evil person (**39a**)
 - 1) Spoken to individuals in their personal relationships
 - 2) Different set of Scriptural commands for governments, courts, military, police, etc. (**Romans 13:1-4**)
- B. Four examples of radical love over revenge:
 - 1) Personal insults: turn the other cheek (**39b**)
 - 2) Lawsuits: Let him have your cloak as well (**40**)
 - 3) Forced actions: Go the second mile (**41**)
 - 4) Requests: Give to the one who asks you (**42**)

CONCLUSION: Let me close today’s message with three applications.

- 1) Practice mercy rather than justice (**James 2:13**)
- 2) Go beyond what is required (**Matthew 5:47**)
- 3) Trust God with the results (**1 Peter 2:23**)

<https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/radical-love-over-revenge/>

I. (:38) TRADITIONAL TEACHING OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS = LEX TALIONIS

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’”

Warren Wiersbe: The original law was a fair one; it kept people from forcing the offender to pay a greater price than the offense deserved. It also prevented people from taking personal revenge.

John MacArthur: God instituted judges and magistrates and authorities to take care of civil matters. Now watch this. You have three times in the Old Testament where the phrase, “*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,*” is mentioned. All three of those times [**Ex. 21; Lev. 24; Deut. 19**] relate to a **civil situation**. They relate to something occurring within a duly constituted authority (a judge, a magistrate, et cetera). “*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*” is not a statement that is in any way related to personal relationships. But in fact that’s precisely what the Pharisees had done with it. They took a divine principle of judicature, a divine principle for the courts, and they made it a matter of **daily vendettas**. . .

You know how to get rid of evil in your society? Give just punishment speedily for people who commit crimes, even perjury, as in this case [Deut. 19]. “*And those which remain shall hear and fear, and henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity.*” Now, notice this: There is no place in a law court for pity. You see? Pity is not in a law court. The law demands justice. If society is to be preserved, there must be justice. The court is not the place for pity.

II. (:39-42) TRANSCENDENT TEACHING OF JESUS

“*But I say to you,*”

Kent Hughes: Jesus changes our lives! **We no longer consider it our duty to get even.** “*Eye for eye, tooth for tooth*” is fine for the court, but not for our relation to others—even our enemies. Thanks to Jesus, **we have let go of our legalistic obsession with fairness.** We are glad that Jesus was not fair with us, for if we were to have gotten what was coming to us, it would not have been good. As Jesus’ followers we give ourselves to the highest welfare of others, even our enemies. We put up with the sins and insults of others for Christ’s sake and theirs. Though hurt many times before, we refuse to withdraw into the shell of self. **We do not run from hurt.** We appear weak, but we are strong, for only the most powerful can live a life like this. But the power is not ours, but Christ’s. Everything comes from Christ.

A. (:39a) Governing Principle

“*do not resist him who is evil;*”

Leon Morris: “*Do not resist the evil person*” does not mean that we should let evil triumph throughout our communities. Jesus is referring to **private retaliation**, not to public order, and he is instructing his followers not to be intent on getting their own back when someone wrongs them. To be the victim of some form of evil does not give us the right to hit back.

Donald Hagner: The articular τῷ πονηρῷ here clearly does not mean “*the evil one,*” i.e., Satan (as in v 37; cf. 6:13). If an evil person were in view, one would expect an anarthrous noun. It is much more likely that the evangelist has in mind “*the evil deed.*” This is interpreted first in terms of **nonretaliation**, as in the first illustration, then in terms of compliance with unreasonable requests (vv 40–41), and finally in terms of simple charity (v 42).

Van Parunak: This negative is followed by four positive examples, the last doubled and adorned with a negative to show that it is the last. This initial statement as the summary, which is then expounded in four specific examples.

Each example presents an offense to which we might react with a spirit of revenge, but instead are told to receive graciously. The examples are ordered from the most severe offense to lesser ones, perhaps to help us recognize how pervasive is the self-centeredness that leads us to seek revenge. . .

In each of the four specific cases, an action by another that would offend the flesh and might invite thoughts of getting even, instead is to stimulate us to a gracious, kind response. In each case later teaching, and even the personal example of our Lord, shows that we are not completely passive. The Spirit has given us examples to help us apply these principles, but we should not miss the basic point of the principles. The believer, faced with an offensive world, does not take

offense. Where the unbeliever seeks revenge, the believer seeks the good of those who give offense.

David Thompson: The word “*resist*” is a Greek word that means to stand against, to oppose (Smith, p. 37). Jesus is telling His disciples that your job is not to stand against or oppose those who are evil. What we may observe from Scripture is there were times when the right thing to do was to resist evil. For example, Jesus went into the Temple and physically drove out sellers and money changers (**Matt. 21:12; John 2:15**). Paul withstood Peter to his face because he was to be condemned (**Gal. 2:11**). We are to resist the devil (**James 4:7; I Pet. 5:9**) and the evil he promotes (**Rom. 12:9**). There are times when people are to be put out of the church (**I Cor. 5:13; Matt. 18:15-17**). Righteousness does not continually stand against evil; it presents the Gospel to evil.

B. (:39b-42) 4 Illustrations to Reinforce Practical Application

1. (:39b) Attacking Your Dignity

“but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

R. T. France: Such a response follows the model of God’s servant who “*gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard* (LXX has “to slapping”); *I did not hide my face from insult and spitting,*” **Isa 50:6**. In a culture which took honor and shame far more seriously than ours, this was a paradoxical and humiliating demand.

John MacArthur: What Jesus is saying is this: “When someone treats you in a way that is less than you deserve, when someone takes the right to dignity that you have, don’t retaliate. Be slapped again before you would ever think to retaliate. Take as much as they want to give but don’t retaliate.” If you’re worried about your dignity, beloved, someday you’re gonna be a Son of God in the image of Jesus Christ and you’re gonna stay that way forever, and God’s gonna pour out all the goodness of his great grace on you forever and ever and ever. So if you’re worried about your dignity, just hang on, you’ll get it. Don’t fight for it here, because if you do, you’re gonna disavow the fact that you’re a Son of God and that you’re related to Jesus Christ, because you won’t be acting in a way consistent with them.

2. (:40) Attacking Your Security

“And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.”

Michael Wilkins: The **tunic** was the basic garment, a long-sleeved inner robe similar to a nightshirt that a person wore next to the skin. It was often worn short by men and ankle length by the women. The “**cloak**” was the outer robe (cf. **27:35; John 19:23–24**), which was an indispensable piece of clothing. When it was given as a pledge, it had to be returned before sunset, because it was used by the poor as a sleeping cover.

John Nolland: A number of **assumptions** seem justified in order to flesh out this illustration.

- First, we have no reason to doubt that the indebtedness implied is genuine: the plaintiff has a good case.
- Second, the one being summoned to court is extremely poor: there is nothing but the clothing in which he or she stands to sue for in compensation for the unpaid debt.

- Third, the attempt to gain possession of the tunic, while probably not technically in violation of OT law, is clearly in violation of the spirit of **Ex. 22:25-27**.

3. (:41) Attacking Your Liberty

“And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.”

Michael Wilkins: Persian royal post officers could force a civilian to carry official correspondence, and Roman military personnel could organize bands of unpaid laborers from the common people to construct roads, fortifications, and public buildings. The most familiar New Testament scene is when Simon of Cyrene was forced into service by the Roman guards to carry Jesus’ cross (27:32; Mark 15:21). The Greek term *milion* means a “*thousand paces*,” which measures approximately 4,854 feet (just under the distance of a modern U.S. “mile”).

John Nolland: In the third example we are dealing with a practice of compulsory and often unpaid or poorly paid **public service**. We have no specific knowledge of the forms in which this was practised in Roman Palestine, but since Persian times impressing people and animals without notice for temporary service to the authorities had been customary and legal; the practice has been well documented. It is understandable that the populace experienced this requirement as irksome, that they often resented it, and that it was all too subject to abuse. Hostility to Roman rule would make such **impressment** yet more distasteful. **The recommendation is to generous and ungrudging compliance**. Presumably such compliance has the power to turn an exaction into genuine public service, generously given to a representative of the government who has ‘need’ of it. This is not necessarily an endorsement of the practice of impressment as such, but in a situation in which changing the rules was not a possibility, the proposed response would have the capacity of turning the nature of the transaction from one in which both parties felt worse about each other after the encounter to one in which positive human interaction might become possible.

R. T. France: This oppressive practice was of course deeply resented by the people of occupied Palestine, but it was a Roman legal provision and they would have no choice about complying up to the limit required (“mile” was a Roman, not a Jewish measure). But Jesus calls on the disciple not only to accept the imposition but also to volunteer for a double stint. To do this for anyone would be remarkable, but to do it for the enemy was unheard-of. This cameo thus serves not only to illustrate Jesus’ demand to renounce one’s rights, but also prepares us for his equally revolutionary command to **love one’s enemies** (v. 44), and suggests that Jesus advocated a response to the Roman occupation which not only full-blown Zealots but even the ordinarily patriotic populace would have found incomprehensible.

4. (:42) Attacking Your Property

*“Give to him who asks of you,
and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”*

Walter Wilson: With respect to the overall structure, it appears that the scenarios have been arranged in descending order of severity, beginning with physical assault (**5:39b**) and concluding with financial importunity (**5:42**).

Michael Wilkins: to give freely to whoever seeks assistance, especially to those from whom there is little chance of repayment, is the height of generosity.

R. T. France: The point they are making is that in the kingdom of heaven self-interest does not rule, and even our legal rights and legitimate expectations may have to give way to the interests of others. It is for each disciple to work out for themselves how this principle can most responsibly be applied to the issue of giving and lending in the different personal and social circumstances in which we find ourselves.

John MacArthur: Let's pray together. Father, instead of fighting for our rights, may we live for what is right before you. The spirit of humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and love to those who are set against us, that we may truly be the sons of our Father, that people may see in us the wondrous forgiving love of Jesus Christ. It grieves our heart, Lord, to know that so often we preach a Christ of forgiveness, a God of forgiveness, and then we live unforgiving lives which must literally destroy the validity of our testimony. May we, as Paul said to Titus, "*adorn the doctrine of God.*" May our living may match our message that people will see in us that forgiving Christ, see in us that forgiving God, as we, even though the rights of **dignity, security, liberty, and property** be taken away, may we never retaliate with less than love, bringing to them a certain amount of shame that they may know that they're missing a dimension of life that we possess and in so knowing seek the only one who can give it, our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How difficult is it for us to refrain from insisting upon our rights and from trying to retaliate against those who have wronged us?
- 2) How do these verses apply to the issue of vigilante justice?
- 3) How did the Lord Jesus apply these verses in His own life?
- 4) How does **verse 42** apply to the common situation of being approached by panhandlers who camp out at a particular intersection in your community and seem to make it their full time job to ask for donations?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Jesus' statements must be understood in their overall context. Nowhere in Scripture are we instructed to be submissive victims to physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, rape, terrorism, murder, or other threats of true harm. It's noble to bite your tongue when some guy insults you in the checkout lane, or to refuse to lean on the horn when an aggressive driver cuts you off in traffic, or to take a step back when an upset mother slaps you for scolding her out-of-control child. But it's deplorable to sit back passively as a bully injures a defenseless victim, or to refuse to defend your children if a kidnapper tries to drag them off, or to raise the flag of surrender if an army of terrorists rolls across your nation's border. **John Stott** puts Jesus' words into perspective: "Christ's illustrations are not to be taken as the charter for any unscrupulous

tyrant, ruffian, beggar or thug. His purpose was to forbid revenge, not to encourage injustice, dishonesty or vice. . . . True love, caring for both the individual and society, takes action to deter evil and to promote good.”

William Barclay: That law [*lex talionis*] became part and parcel of the ethic of the Old Testament, where we find it laid down no fewer than three times. “*If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe*” (**Exodus 21:23–5**). “*Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered*” (**Leviticus 24:19–20**). “*Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*” (**Deuteronomy 19:21**).

(1) The *lex talionis*, the law of **tit for tat**, so far from being a savage and bloodthirsty law, is in fact the **beginning of mercy**. Its original aim was definitely the **limitation of vengeance**. In the very earliest days, the vendetta and the blood feud were characteristic of tribal society. If a man of one tribe injured a man of another tribe, then at once all the members of the tribe of the injured man were out to take vengeance on all the members of the tribe of the man who committed the injury; and the vengeance desired was nothing less than death. This law deliberately limits vengeance. It lays it down that only those who committed the injury must be punished, and their punishment must be no more than the equivalent of the injury they have inflicted and the damage they have done. Seen against its historical setting, this is not a savage law but a law of mercy.

(2) Further, this was never a law which gave a private individual the right to extract vengeance; it was always a law which laid down how a judge in the law court must assess punishment and penalty (cf. **Deuteronomy 19:18**). This law was never intended to give the individual person the right to indulge even in the vengeance of tit for tat. It was always intended as a **guide for a judge** in the assessment of the penalty which any violent or unjust deed must receive.

(3) Still further, this law was never, at least in any even semi-civilized society, carried out literally. The Jewish jurists argued rightly that to carry it out literally might in fact be the reverse of justice, because it obviously might involve the displacement of a good eye or a good tooth for a bad eye or a bad tooth. And very soon the injury done was **assessed at a money value**; and the Jewish law in the tractate Baba Kamma carefully lays down how the damage is to be assessed. If a man has injured another, he is liable on five counts – for injury, for pain, for healing, for loss of time and for indignity suffered.

- In regard to **injury**, the injured man is looked on as a slave to be sold in the market place. His value before and after the injury was assessed, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay the difference. He was responsible for the loss in value of the man injured.
- In regard to **pain**, it was estimated how much money a man would accept to be willing to undergo the pain of the injury inflicted, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay that sum.
- In regard to **healing**, the injurer had to pay all the expenses of the necessary medical attention, until a complete cure had been effected.
- In regard to **loss of time**, the injurer had to pay compensation for the wages lost while the injured man was unable to work, and he had also to pay compensation if the injured man had held a well-paid position and was now, in consequence of the injury, fit for less well-rewarded work.

- In regard to **indignity**, the injurer had to pay damages for the humiliation and indignity which the injury had inflicted. In actual practice, the type of compensation which the *lex talionis* laid down is strangely modern.

(4) And most important of all, it must be remembered that the *lex talionis* is by no means the whole of Old Testament ethics. There are glimpses and even splendours of mercy in the Old Testament. “*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people*” (**Leviticus 19:18**). “*If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink*” (**Proverbs 25:21**). “*Do not say, “I will do to others as they have done to me”*” (**Proverbs 24:29**). “*It is good to give one’s cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults*” (**Lamentations 3:30**). There is **abundant mercy in the Old Testament** too.

So, we see that ancient ethics were based on the law of tit for tat. It is true that that law was a law of mercy; it is true that it was a law for a judge and not for a private individual; it is true that it was never literally carried out; it is true that there were accents of mercy speaking at the same time. But Jesus obliterated the very principle of that law, because **retaliation, however controlled and restricted, has no place in the Christian life.**

R. T. France: Here more than anywhere in this section we need to remind ourselves that Jesus’ aim is not to establish a new and more demanding set of rules to supplant those of the scribes and Pharisees. It is to establish a “*greater righteousness*,” a different understanding of how we should live as the people of God, **an alternative set of values**. In place of the principle of retribution he sets non-resistance; in place of the defence of legal rights he sets uncalculating generosity; in place of concern for oneself he sets concern for the other. The disciple may be forced to conclude that in an imperfect human society Jesus’ illustrations of these principles could not work as literal rules of conduct, that unlimited generosity to beggars would not only undermine the economic order but also in the end do no good to the beggars themselves. But instead of therefore dismissing Jesus’ teaching as starry-eyed utopianism, a proper response to this challenging section is to ask in what practical ways Jesus’ radical principles can be set to work in our very different world. Our answers will vary, but if they are true to Jesus’ teaching they will represent an essentially non-self-centered approach to ethics which puts the interests of the other before personal rights or convenience.

D. A. Carson: While these four vignettes have **powerful shock value**, they were not meant to be new legal prescriptions. **Verse 42** does not commit Jesus’ disciples to giving endless amounts of money to everyone who seeks a “soft touch” (cf. **Pr 11:15; 17:18; 22:26**). **Verse 40** is clearly hyperbolic. No first-century Jew would go home wearing only a loincloth. Nor does this pericope deal with the validity of a state police force. Yet the illustrations **must not be diluted by endless equivocations**. The only limit to the believer’s response in these situations is what love and the Scriptures impose.

The Bible Says: Jesus said that the righteousness of His Kingdom did not consist of obsessively paying back an *eye for an eye*, but it was obtained through **mercy**. Referencing His authority yet again by saying *But I say to you*, He says *not to resist* (seek to pay back) *an evil person* for the evil they have done you. Instead of returning *evil for evil*, return good.

This is at the heart of His kingdom. This is the **mercy principle** Jesus shared in the Beatitudes: “*Makarios (blessed) are the merciful for they shall receive mercy*” (**Matthew 5:7**). This is what

Paul will tell the believers in Rome, “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do not be overcome by evil, but, overcome evil with good*” (**Romans 12:17; 21**). This is what James means when he writes, “*mercy triumphs over judgment*” (**James 2:13**). Righteousness (social harmony) comes when people forgive and overlook offenses done to them, not when they prosecute every wrong. <https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-5/matthew-538-42/>

Gregory Brown: The Kingdom Response to Personal Injustice

The Pharisees applied the law of “*eye for eye*” not only to courts, but to **personal relationships**, which only justified the natural sin within the human heart. However, we as believers are not to be identified by obeying our sinful nature but our new nature. We are to live as citizens of heaven on earth. How then should we respond when others hurt us? Essentially, it could be summarized by simply saying, **we must give up our rights**. In the following verses, Christ describes four ways that we should give up our rights when wrongs are committed against us. These four examples probably have specific applications to being persecuted for our faith. . .

Christ is not commanding believers to never resist an evil person, and he certainly is not forbidding the government and court system from executing justice. This is made clear by the next phrase: “*To the person who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other as well.*” Christ was **forbidding personal retaliation**, not civil justice. He was dealing with how we respond when evil is committed against us personally. In that case, we should give up our right to retaliate and instead respond gently. His teaching doesn’t mean we should never call the police or seek justice from an authority. . .

Application Question: Why is it so hard to give up our right to personal retaliation? Should believers always turn the other cheek when insulted? If not, why not, and how should we discern when to pursue justice? If possible, describe a time when you decided to turn the other cheek and the results. . .

Our possessions are to be held with an open hand before the Lord. This will seem very difficult to those who have zealously strived to accumulate things: books, electronics, homes, and cars. However, Scripture teaches that the whole earth is the Lord’s (**Ps 24:1**). We don’t own anything. We are just stewards of the Lord’s resources. In fact, in **Matthew 6:19-21**, Christ calls us to not store up riches on the earth but to practice simplicity, since riches have a tendency to steal our hearts. Also, in **1 Timothy 6:6-8**, Paul taught that we should learn to be content with food and covering. If we have understood and practiced these principles with our possessions, it will be much easier to relinquish them, if the Lord calls us to, and respond in love to those who persecute us. . .

Are you willing to let go of your possessions out of devotion to Christ and love for those who seek to harm you? These types of sacrifices are commonly the way God saves our enemies and draws them to repentance.

Application Question: Why is it so hard to give up our rights to our possessions? Why should we be willing to give them up, even when they are unjustly taken? . . .

How do you respond when someone imposes on your time and energy? Are you gracious? Do you recognize that your time and energy are the Lord’s and he can use them, as he sees fit? Do you trust God’s sovereignty in the interruptions of the day—including disruptions and impositions by those who are rude and disrespectful, like a difficult boss or family member? Our

time is not ours. It is the Lord's, and we must use it even to serve those who hurt and harm us. This is often God's method of saving the lost and bringing repentance in the lives of the redeemed.

Are you offering your time to the Lord? Are you willing to sacrifice it for the benefit of others, even the rude and unthankful? Sacrifice of time and energy for others, including the unthankful, will mark kingdom citizens in this world. Does it mark you?

Application Question: Why is giving up our time for others so difficult, especially when they are ungrateful? How can we prepare for unplanned interruptions and handle them graciously? Describe a time you willingly sacrificed time and energy for someone who was rude and/or ungrateful and the effects of that sacrifice on them and yourself.

Finally, we must not only sacrifice our rights to retaliate, to our own possessions, and to our time, we also must **give up our rights to our money**. Again, this is very difficult to hear, as money is very hard to earn and even harder to keep. We naturally feel that since we earned our money, it is not right for anybody else to have it. We often struggle with the government taking so much of our money in taxes. In our hearts, we think, "I earned this! Why are they taking it!?" With the poor, we think, "Why don't they work for their own money and stop being lazy!?" But if we are followers of Christ, our money is the Lord's, and we are to be extremely generous with it. . .

In order to do this, we must be willing to use our money to bless the unlovable. When we do this generously and joyfully, we look like God, and God will bless us.

Is your money the Lord's—for him to use to bless others as he wills? Or is your money primarily used for selfish purposes?

Application Question: What makes Jesus' teaching about giving money to whoever asks so difficult? How can we practice this kind of generosity? What are some probing questions to ask ourselves for discerning when to give and when not to?

<https://bible.org/seriespage/16-kingdom-response-personal-injustice-matthew-538-42>

Jacob Gerber: "An Eye for an Eye"

Well, here we are coming to another **unlawful expansion** of what the law taught. You see, when we look at the law for an eye for an eye, Jesus is reminding us that there was a very specific scope, a very specific scope for the eye, for an eye, a law of retaliation. Namely, **the scope was for public justice**. This was a law for public justice. The idea was if you put out the eye of my friend and I'm angry about that and I want justice. I see that, in fact, the retaliation is administered in public by the civil magistrate who is charged with keeping the peace, keeping justice, administers the same kind of punishment to the one who has done this to my friend. That should, I may still be angry about it, but that should settle my desire for wanting to seek justice privately. It limits vengeance. I see that justice has been done and I don't have to do anything.

Furthermore, this **limits the kind of punishments** that could happen if you were the one accused of a crime. If you stole a loaf of bread, you could not have your hand chopped off. If you put out someone's eye, you could not be put to death for it. There was a limitation on how far justice could go, and that was utterly honest. An eye for an eye. . .

The second principle we need to see is that even in our private lives, our private matters, we need to understand that Jesus is not talking about saying that self-defense, lawful self-defense, is somehow wrong. Because **even the law acknowledged necessary defense**. . .

Now most of the **passions** that are seething and raging and our soul trying to get whatever we can, most of our passions are sinful passions. They're corrupted by sin that's always wanting, always greedy, always grabbing after something and is angry whenever we don't get what we want, especially justice like what Jesus is talking about in this passage. . .

So to summarize this, when we suffer physically or spiritually, the law requires that we not respond from our passions, from that anger that rises up to say, I want to get even. Our actions and even our attitudes must be guided not by the raging passions inside of us, but by our deliberate conscious, shaped according to the Word of the Lord, affections. **Affections where God trains us to respond to others as He responds to us**. . .

We will never rid ourselves of this corruption in this life. We are certainly waiting for the life to come when we will be perfectly glorified and rid of this corruption. But God does promise real forgiveness now. More than this, God promises real growth, real cleansing, real sanctification. To transform us into people who are increasingly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, who did not revile in return, did not threaten, but instead continue to trust himself to the one who judges justly. That's the image of our Savior, and that's what God commands for us. There's no hope outside this gospel. There's no hope outside the fact that Jesus came to suffer for sinners. Look to him and be saved.

<https://harvestpca.org/sermons/an-eye-for-an-eye-matthew-538-42/>

TEXT: Matthew 5:43-48

TITLE: LOVE FOR ENEMIES WITHOUT PARTIALITY

BIG IDEA:

THE TRANSCENDENT TEACHING OF JESUS REGARDING THE GREATER RIGHTEOUSNESS OF KINGDOM CITIZENS CLIMAXES WITH THIS COMMAND TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES WITHOUT PARTIALITY

INTRODUCTION:

E. Michael Green: The last example Jesus chooses of the ‘greater righteousness’ of members of the kingdom is the most challenging of all. It makes explicit what has been implicit throughout the whole chapter hitherto: love (5:43–48). The Great Lover has poured his love upon us unworthy rebels. He has purified us, has adopted us into his kingdom, and wants us to be his ambassadors in the human kingdoms. How is it to be done, and how is our allegiance to be shown? Supremely, by love. Love is the mark which, above all else, should distinguish those who know themselves to have been found by a loving God.

Leon Morris: This section is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the Christian ideal of love. We all love our friends, but love of our enemies is quite another matter. But the followers of Jesus are not to take their standards from the communities in which they live. The God they serve is a loving God, and therefore they are to be loving people.

William Barclay: There is no other passage of the New Testament which contains such a concentrated expression of the **Christian ethic** of personal relations. To the ordinary person, this passage describes **essential Christianity in action**, and even the person who never darkens the door of the church knows that Jesus said this, and very often condemns the professing Christian for falling so far short of its demands.

David Doriani: Few teachings in Scripture are more memorable and more challenging than this: “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Matt. 5:44). It is alien to our thought, our practice, and our nature. We are pleased with ourselves if we love our family and friends, though even that is a struggle at times.

I. (:43) TRADITIONAL TEACHING OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’”

E. Michael Green: And of course *neighbour* was to be taken in the broadest possible sense of ‘other person’, like the neighbour in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But that was too tough for many of the scribes. It was unrealistic to understand ‘*neighbour*’ so broadly. So they added yet another of their **escape clauses**: ‘*and hate your enemy*’. That command appears nowhere in the Old Testament. It is a concession to human frailty invented by the scribes. And it was emphatically underlined by the Essenes of Qumran, who enthusiastically awaited the final battle in which their enemies would be crushed. But Jesus will have none of it. It is not limited love, but unlimited love, love to the just and the unjust, to evil and good alike, that is the mark of the Great Lover. And it must not be sporadic, but a settled mark of our characters, just as the regular

following of day by night is a mark of the settled character of God himself. That is the meaning of *perfect, teleioi* (48). Be like God in indiscriminating and undifferentiating love towards all and sundry. That is the mark of the Master. That is the mark of the disciple.

The word ‘love’ is significant. The ancient world knew about *philia*, friendship; it knew about *erōs*, sexual love; it knew about *storgē*, the love that binds families together; but *agapē* was something very different. That is why the word is practically unknown before Christ—the commodity itself was in such short supply. For *agapē* means a love that gives itself for the good of the recipient. It means love that springs from the nature of the donor rather than from the real or fancied worthiness of the recipient. Of course we cannot like our enemies. But we can love them, in this sense of *agapē* love. **We can desire and work for their highest good.** We can regard them as those for whom Christ came and died and who are therefore intensely valuable to him. At least, we can begin to move in that direction if we ourselves have been magnetized by the love of the God who treats us like that. And it is nothing less than that for which Jesus looks in his disciples. Like Father, like son and daughter.

Donald Hagner: Clearly, neither Jesus’ listeners nor Matthew’s readers would have been surprised by the added words, since the traditional interpretation had become regularly associated with the text. The “neighbor” meant fellow Jew; the “enemy” meant Gentile.

John Nolland: Two things are at once obvious.

- First, unless Matthew intends a rather limited understanding of ‘enemy’, this gloss is not true to **Lv. 19:18**, where the context speaks against hating, taking vengeance, and bearing a grudge — matters which arise when one perceives that another has behaved like an ‘enemy’.
- Second, the wording of **Lv. 19:18** nonetheless opens itself to some kind of restricting gloss since it addresses the command to love (only) to one’s relationship with one’s neighbour.

J. Ligon Duncan: He teaches us that we must not illegitimately limit the extent of our neighbor love. That is, we must not come up with rationalizations that restrict God’s command to us to love our neighbor. The Pharisees were doing that. The Pharisees took a good law, *you shall love your neighbor*, and they appended an unbiblical truth ‘and hate your enemy.’ You see that law of neighbor love, some of which we heard in **Leviticus 19**, is a law that demands **practical love** of neighbor, not just sentiment towards neighbor, but a practical helping of neighbor. Not slandering your neighbor’s name, but looking for your neighbor’s interests in his estates, in his person, in his vocation, in his good name and reputation. In all these practical ways, Leviticus and other commands of Moses demand that we love our neighbor. But nowhere do those passages command that we hate our enemy. And the Pharisees, you see, were saying “Well yes, we must love our neighbor, but you have to understand who your neighbor is.” Your neighbor is the person who has a claim on your love. Your neighbor well may be a relative. Your neighbor may be a fellow citizen of Israel, but there are some who do not deserve that kind of treatment or love, they were teaching.

The Pharisees, you see, **misunderstood the meaning of neighbor.** They misinterpreted the Law of God in its teaching on our neighbor. They had a worldly understanding of who our neighbor is. **They restricted the definition of neighbor.** Jesus addresses this, of course, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but He does it here as well. The Pharisees had defined “neighbor” as a

person who had a claim on your love, a person who deserved to be treated lovingly by you, and so they had redefined neighbor.

II. (:44-47) TRANSCENDENT TEACHING OF JESUS

“But I say to you,”

A. (:44-45) Love Your Enemies to Demonstrate You Are Genuinely Sons of God

1. (:44) The Radical Command

a. Love Your Enemies

“love your enemies,”

Grant Osborne: Two changes are important:

- (1) from the singular “enemy” to the plural “enemies,” stressing the universal nature of the command, and
- (2) the use of the present imperative, stressing the ongoing need of such an attitude.

This was revolutionary, and there is no evidence for such a command in Jewish literature.

Leviticus 19:33–34 commanded love for the resident alien, and **Prov 25:21** speaks of acts of kindness for one’s enemy (cf. also **Exod 23:4–5; Job 31:29–30; Prov 17:5, 24:17**), but nowhere is love commanded for one’s enemy.

David Doriani: When Jesus said “*Love your enemies*,” most Jews would have thought first of the Romans, who occupied and defiled their land. What good could ever come from loving the Romans? Would the Romans love the Jews back? No, but “Jesus does not promise that love will turn enemies into friends.” Our love of enemies is independent of the person loved, independent of their rank or attractiveness. None of that matters. Results are immaterial.

Kent Hughes: Jesus' call to love one's enemies is supremely radical! "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine." That is true! To love an enemy is divine, and to pray for an enemy - a persecutor - is supremely divine! The fact that the text mentions "*enemies*" (plural) suggests that Jesus means personal enemies who are presently doing us harm. This is amazing teaching. To the man on the street, the mere idea of loving his enemies is absurd and offensive and beyond his capability. It offends his natural sense of right and wrong. To those under the Old Testament Law, the idea of loving one's enemies was completely contrary to their perception of God's Law, which they thought required rejection and hatred of enemies - a limited love. Jesus commanded a **love without limits**, that loves everyone regardless of what they say or do to us. This is **revolutionary**, whatever one's culture. In fact, if practiced by you and me, it would change our entire community.

b. Pray for Those Who Persecute You

“and pray for those who persecute you”

Leon Morris: He proceeds to an **example** of what he means with the injunction to pray for (or “on behalf of”) the persecutors. The verb “*to persecute*” (see on v. 10) can indicate persecution in any form, but here it is persecution specifically directed at Jesus’ followers (*you*). It may be possible to regard in a detached way persecution of others; it is not so easy when one is the object of the persecution. “Persecutors are the most difficult enemies to love” (**Nixon**). But it is precisely in a situation of persecution that Jesus’ followers are to show their love by praying for those who are harming them.

David Doriani: One cannot genuinely pray for someone without hoping for their good. When we pray for an enemy, animosity dwindles and compassion increases. Love is an act of a whole person reaching out to whole persons. God's love is the source and the model for love of enemies. Augustine said that God's love is incomprehensible and unchangeable in that he began to love us before we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son. Our sin made us his enemies. Yet because our iniquity had not entirely consumed his handiwork, "He knew . . . how . . . to hate what we had done, and to love what he had done [in creating us]." Therefore, to love our enemies is to live like a child of God.

2. (:45) The Reason

a. Prove Your Family Identity

"in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;"

Donald Hagner: To participate in the kingdom relates the disciple to the Father in a unique way, and that unique relationship involves doing his will. This is also the point of **v 48**. The children of the kingdom are called to reflect the character of their heavenly Father (cf. **Eph 5:1**), who has brought to them the kingdom. The early Church picks up the emphasis of this teaching in such passages as **Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 3:9**. One important foundation for the unheard-of command to love one's enemies is the very fact that God gives his good gifts of sunshine and rain both to good and to bad. The different words for "good" (*ἀγαθούς*, "good," and *δικαίους*, "just") and "bad" (*πονηρούς*, "evil," and *ἀδίκους*, "unjust") represent stylistic variation, as does the chiasmic order of the nouns. The "bad" are, from the context, analogous to the "enemies" of God. To love one's enemies is, then, to treat them as God treats those who have rebelled against him. Thus the children, the disciples, should imitate their heavenly Father.

Leon Morris: We will see that to be God's children means to love. Love and membership in God's family go together. Sons here are members of the heavenly family. There is a sense in which those members are infinitely diverse and another sense in that they are all characterized by dependence on and likeness to the Father; in this sense sons are "those who are bound to a personality by close, non-material ties; it is this personality that has promoted the relationship and given it its character" (BAGD, 1.c.γ). The conduct Jesus has enjoined in the previous verse is the conduct that characterizes those in close relationship with the heavenly Father. God loves like that, and his sons come to love in some measure like that, too.

b. Pattern Your Conduct after the Goodness of God

*"for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good,
and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

Grant Osborne: The sunshine and rain are both natural blessings that form the basis of plant growth and therefore of life as a whole. God does not curse the wicked with all bad things and bless the good with all good things. Even those who reject God are made in his image and loved by him, so his people must reflect his goodness even toward their persecutors.

B. (:46-47) Love Your Enemies to Demonstrate that Your Heart Has Been Transformed by God's Grace

1. (:46) Your Righteousness Must Exceed that of the Despised Tax-Gatherers

*"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?
Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same?"*

Leon Morris: Tax collectors have never been popular in any culture, but in first-century Palestine they were especially unpopular. Partly this was because they gathered taxes for the Romans, and anything that helped the conquerors was anathema to the subject Jews. Partly also it was because they tended to be extortionate. In the eyes of Jesus' audience there were no more wicked people than tax collectors as a class. If even they would respond to love with love, then anyone would. They are the last people one would expect to show love, but they do — to their own kind. This example shows that there is nothing wonderful about this kind of love.

J. Ligon Duncan: You see my friends, if you want to measure whether you've gone beyond niceness to real Christian love, look at your hearts and ask yourselves: "How do I love those who have hurt me? How do I love those who hate me? How do I love those who have no claim on my love?" Then, you will see how far you have to go in love. Thank God, the Lord Jesus does not leave us to our own devices, for this love cannot be created by human effort. We must run back to Him. We must get more love to Christ if we are to grow in this kind of love to one another. You see, there is no humanly generated love that can enable you to love people in this sort of a self-sacrificial way. Only a living and loving relationship with the heavenly Father, an assurance that He has given you everything that you need in Christ, an assurance that all blessing awaits in glory, can enable you to love those will take advantage of you. And that's precisely what Christ is calling you to.

2. (:47) Your Righteousness Must Exceed that of Unsaved Gentiles

*"And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?
Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"*

E. Michael Green: There's a sting in the tail of this marvellous passage. For it is hard to miss the scorn in the designations *tax collectors* and *pagans* (46–47). Commentators often suggest that Matthew has failed to love the outsider with God's all-embracing love, and reverts here to prejudiced descriptions inherited from his past. That is to assume Matthew made the sentences up. But if they came from the lips of Jesus, a very different scenario emerges. He hoists the hearers with their own petard. For almost all of them would despise the hated tax collectors and the Gentile pagans. And with gentle irony Jesus shows them that their loveless attitude is identical with that of the very people they despise. Love is a tender plant, and those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

David Doriani: Many churches seem cold and unwelcoming to visitors, but almost every church thinks it is friendly. Why? Because the members are friendly with their friends. They greet everyone who greets them. This is not noteworthy. Genuine love keeps an eye open for the quiet, the awkward, and the friendless, and seeks them out.

C. S. Lewis: The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less. ... The difference between a Christian and a worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or 'likings' and the Christian has only 'charity.' The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he 'likes' them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.

(:48) SUMMARY OF KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS = LIVE LIKE YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER INTENDS FOR YOU TO LIVE

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

D. A. Carson: Some interpret this verse as the conclusion of the last antithesis (vv.43–47; e.g., Allen, Hendriksen). In that case the perfection advocated is perfection in love. But “perfection” has far broader associations, and it is better to understand v.48 as the **conclusion to the antitheses**.

Donald Hagner: There is a sense, however, in which this verse also serves as the logical conclusion to all the preceding antitheses. The righteousness of the kingdom, which altogether exceeds that of the Pharisees, involves a call to be like the Father.

R. T. France: The disciple’s life-style is to be different from other people’s because it draws its inspiration not from the norms of society but from the character of God. Even the God-given law had been accommodated to a practical ethical code with which Jewish society had come to feel comfortable, but Jesus is demanding a different approach, not via laws read as simply rules of conduct but rather by looking behind those laws to the mind and character of God himself. Whereas any definable set of rules could, in principle, be fully kept, the demand of the kingdom of heaven has no such limit—or rather its limit is perfection, the perfection of God himself.

Leon Morris: That their standard is to be the highest possible (“no limit to your goodness,” REB) is shown by the words that follow: *even as your heavenly Father is perfect*. When Matthew uses the adjective heavenly it always refers to God (he has the word 7 times out of its 9 New Testament occurrences). In this he contrasts with Luke, who uses it of the heavenly host (**Luke 2:13**) and of the heavenly vision (**Acts 26:19**). Matthew thus employs the term to stress the difference between God and others, just as Father brings out his nearness and his love. To set this kind of perfection before his followers means that Jesus saw them as always having something for which to strive. No matter how far along the path of Christian service we are, there is still something to aim for. There is a wholeheartedness about being Christian; all that we have and all that we are must be taken up into the service of the Father.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus is not frustrating his hearers with an unachievable ideal but challenging them to grow in obedience to God’s will—to become more like him. **J. Walvoord** rightly observes, “While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable.” But such godliness cannot be comprehensively formulated in a set of rules; the ethics of the sermon are suggestive, not exhaustive.

William Barclay: The Greek word for perfect is *teleios*. This word is often used in Greek in a very special way. It has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, metaphysical perfection. A victim which is fit for a sacrifice to God, that is a victim which is without blemish, is *teleios*. A man who has reached his full-grown stature is *teleios* as distinct from a half-grown youth. A student who has reached a mature knowledge of a subject is *teleios* as opposed to a learner who is just beginning, and who as yet has no grasp of things.

To put it in another way, the Greek idea of perfection is **functional**. A thing is perfect **if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned**, designed and made. In point of fact, that meaning is involved in the derivation of the word. *Teleios* is the adjective formed from the noun

telos. *Telos* means an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal. A thing is *teleios* if it achieves the purpose for which it is planned; human beings are perfect **if they achieve the purpose for which they were created** and sent into the world.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What prompted the Pharisees to define “*neighbor*” in such a way that they could excuse hating the Gentiles (and the Romans in particular)?
- 2) What examples do we see in Scriptures of people praying for those persecuting them?
- 3) How do you demonstrate this type of love as practical action towards your enemies?
- 4) How do our churches respond to the marginalized in society?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: The final, climactic antithesis turns to the great love commandment of the OT. Jesus, interpreting the law in the light of the dawning kingdom, extends the application of that commandment so as to include even one’s enemies. The love he describes, of course, is not an emotion (pace **Carson**) but **volitional acts** for the benefit and well-being of others, even those we may dislike. In this love that knows no boundaries, the disciples are to reflect the generosity of God, who sends blessing upon both the righteous and the unrighteous and who has brought the kingdom to the unworthy. Through the coming of the kingdom, the disciples are thus called to be “*perfect*” as their Father is perfect. The righteousness of the kingdom can be satisfied by nothing less. And as the disciples live out this righteousness, they confirm their identity as “*children of the heavenly Father*.” This is an ethic that will startle those who experience it; it is an ethic that will inevitably shine like light in a dark place and cause the Father to be glorified (v 16). It should be added that the perfection in view here is a goal toward which disciples are called to strive, but not one they will fully achieve in this life. The Christian will thus always have occasion to pray for the forgiveness of sins, as Jesus taught his disciples to pray (6:12). The call to perfection is quite like the Pauline call for Christians to be what they are in Christ. Here it is a matter of being children of the Father.

William Barclay: There is *agapē* with its accompanying verb *agapan*. These words indicate unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodwill. (*Agapē* is the word which is used here.) If we regard people with *agape*, it means that no matter what they do to us, no matter how they treat us, no matter if they insult us or injure us or grieve us, we will never allow any bitterness against them to invade our hearts, but will regard them with that unconquerable benevolence and goodwill which will seek nothing but their highest good. From this, certain things emerge.

- (1) Jesus never asked us to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and dearest. The very word is different; to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and dearest would be neither possible nor right. This is a different kind of love.

(2) Wherein does the main difference lie? In the case of our nearest and dearest, we cannot help loving them; we speak of falling in love; it is something which comes to us quite unsought; it is something which is born of the emotions of the heart. But in the case of our enemies, love is not only something of the heart; it is also something of the will. It is not something which we cannot help; it is something which we have to will ourselves into doing. It is in fact a victory over that which comes instinctively to us by our very nature.

Agape does not mean a feeling of the heart, which we cannot help, and which comes unbidden and unsought; it means a determination of the mind, whereby we achieve this unconquerable goodwill even to those who hurt and injure us. Agape, someone has said, is the power to love those whom we do not like and who may not like us. In point of fact, we can only have agape when Jesus Christ enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and to bitterness, and to achieve this invincible goodwill to all people.

Charles Swindoll: To love only members of one's own family or tribe is natural —any wicked unbeliever does that (5:46-47). Jesus called His audience to a greater love, a love that was **supernatural**. Such a love requires a work of the Spirit in our hearts to transcend our normal human tendency to love only our own. Because of the **transcendent nature** of this *agapē*, Jesus said that those who love in such a way are like children of their heavenly Father (5:45) and are to be, in fact, "*perfect*," as He is (5:48). This doesn't refer to sinless perfection. One commentator explains the real significance of the word translated "*perfect*" this way: "The Greek word is *teleios*, a word which carries the meaning of culmination, of maturity, of achievement in function. . . . It is an active word, and, in context, means that our love must be **all-inclusive** as God's is all-inclusive."

David Doriani: The settled enemies of God must fall and shall fall. When their rebellion is implacable and irreversible, they are ripe for God's judgment, which is just and true (Rev. 16:5–7; 19:2). On judgment day, God's patience ends.

This is how we must understand the psalms and prophecies that approve of God's judgment. Believers hate violence and wickedness. Some people give themselves over to such sins, so they are properly called "*the violent*" or "*the wicked*." The Bible never commands us to hate individual enemies, but there is a place for righteous wrath toward God's settled enemies. On judgment day, we will rejoice at their downfall, for their end is inseparable from the victory of God and his saints. Thus, when we view the wicked as a class, from an eternal perspective, our love for them ceases.

In daily life, however, we have no right to adopt the eternal perspective. We cannot classify people. The man standing before us may be wicked, but we do not know whether he will repent or not. Remember the conversion of Paul. Once the archenemy of the church, he became its great apostle. Paul's salvation demonstrates God's "*unlimited patience*" (1 Tim. 1:16). Therefore, we should be patient with sinners too.

John Piper: Two Main Reasons Why We Should Love Our Enemies.

- One is that it reveals something of the way God is. **God is merciful.** "*He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matthew 5:45). "*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities*" (Psalm 103:10). "*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one*

another, as God in Christ forgave you” (**Ephesians 4:32**). So when Christians live this way, we show something of what God is like.

- The second reason is that the hearts of Christians are satisfied with God and are not driven by the craving for revenge or self-exaltation or money or earthly security. **God has become our all-satisfying treasure** and so we don’t treat our adversaries out of our own sense of need and insecurity, but out of our own fullness with the satisfying glory of God. **Hebrews 10:34**: “*You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property [that is, without retaliation], since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*” What takes away the compulsion of revenge is our deep confidence that this world is not our home, and that God is our utterly sure and all-satisfying reward.

So in both these reasons for loving our enemy we see the main thing: **God is shown to be who he really is as a merciful God and as gloriously all-satisfying**. The ultimate reason for being merciful is to glorify God—to make him look great in the eyes of man.

David Thompson: Jesus teaches the reasons for loving and praying for enemies. **5:45-48**

Reason #1 - One demonstrates he is a true child of the Heavenly God. **5:45a**

Now Jesus explains this point – God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. In our dispensation, loving another person does not make us a child of God, but it does give evidence that we are a child of God. God loved us while we were yet sinners.

Reason #2 - There is no reward for loving those who love you. **5:46**

What will earn one rewards would be for one to do what is the ultimate good for one who didn’t love him.

Reason #3 - Even Gentiles greet their brothers. **5:47**

Apparently the Jews were teaching that as long as they gave each other greetings, it was a demonstration they were right with God.

Reason #4 - This demonstrates that we are becoming completely godly in character. **5:48**

Loving enemies and praying for enemies is very “godlike.” It shows we are maturing, we are growing, and we are blossoming. It shows we are righteous.

Matthew McCraw: **Loving the Enemy**

As a side-note, this should be a warning to us that we do not take a command of God and change it into something that we want it to be rather than what God really meant. We must be very careful so as not to distort the Word of God. That’s probably a sermon for another time.

So, the people had not only missed the full meaning of God’s command, they had actually distorted it.

Jesus sought to bring clarity to what God meant and show the fuller meaning and heart of the commandment. . .

Loving our enemies makes us more like God and more like God wants us to be.

<https://fbcbartow.org/sermons/loving-enemy-matthew-543-48/>

Gregory Brown: Radical Love: The Ethic of Kingdom Citizens

1. Love must be demonstrated in acts of kindness.

2. Love must be demonstrated through prayer.

Are you demonstrating your repentance by your deeds? Are you examining yourself to see if Christ is in you? Are you making your calling and election sure? The primary way we do this is by our love. Radical love is a proof that Christ—the one who died for his enemies and prayed for them on the cross—is in us. This doesn't mean we won't fail at this. We will. But when we do, we should repent and come to Christ for grace to try again. If we are content to simply live a life of bitterness and unforgiveness towards those who have failed us, maybe we have never truly received the mercy of God (cf. **Matt 5:7**).

Does the way you respond to those who harm you confirm your citizenship? Remember Christ is teaching that if our righteousness doesn't surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Matt 5:20**). The Pharisees and teachers of the law were jealous, vengeful, and unforgiving. Though religious, they cursed, lied about, and murdered our Lord. If our love is no different than theirs, we have never truly been saved, and therefore, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What are characteristics of this radical love?

1. Radical Love Should Be Demonstrated to All People
2. Radical Love Should Be Demonstrated Specifically to Enemies
3. Radical Love Proves the Salvation of Disciples
4. Radical Love Will Be Rewarded by God
5. Radical Love Distinguishes Believers from the World

Scott Harris: Loving Your Neighbor

Jesus restores the meaning of the law in **Matthew 5:44**. *Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you.* The context is the same as we examined last week. This is dealing with **personal situations**. This cannot be used to argue for pacifism. It is not talking about what occurs on a battlefield or between countries or when the law itself is broken. The enemies here are your personal enemies. This command brings the nature of righteousness to its second highest operating principle (the first being to love God) and demands a response that is **humanly impossible**. Men without Christ may go so far as to tolerate their enemies, but they cannot love them. . .

The characteristic demonstrated here is God's **gracious impartiality**. God gives what is good to both those that love Him and those that hate Him. He causes the sun to rise on everyone both good and evil. He causes the rain to fall on everyone both good and evil. One of the errors of the health, wealth, prosperity preachers is they fail to recognize this fact about God. He is impartially good to all and gives prosperity even to the wicked. This fact perplexed the writer of **Psalms 73** until he considered the final end of the wicked and then he understood God's justice. Judgement will come, but God is gracious up to that point. We are to demonstrate this same attribute to our enemies. We are to love without partiality and to pray without partiality. We are to be good to both those who are our friends and those who are our enemies.

https://www.gracebible.org/loving_your_neighbor_matthew_5_43_48

TEXT: Matthew 6:1-4

TITLE: PRACTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS THE RIGHT WAY FROM THE RIGHT MOTIVATION
– EXAMPLE OF GIVING ALMS

BIG IDEA:

PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR PUBLIC ACCLAIM FORFEITS HEAVENLY REWARD – TRUE VS HYPOCRITICAL PIETY -- EXAMPLE OF GIVING ALMS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: In one sense, this section, like the previous one, exemplifies the authoritative teaching of Jesus on matters of OT law, for the three things mentioned in these verses are three basic aspects of Jewish piety and summarize one's relationship with God. **France** suggests that **5:20–48** centers on a positive righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees while this section centers on the wrong kind of righteous conduct done to impress others rather than God. As with the antitheses, Jesus shows how the people of his day all too often understood these aspects, but he also tells how the people of the kingdom will perform them more deeply.

This is a very Jewish section and as such shows a situation in Jesus' day, not just Matthew's time. It demonstrates that our piety is part of our relationship with God and should never be done to impress others. Our motivation must always be God-oriented, never earth-centered (see also **6:19–21; Col 3:1–2**). The section is composed of three admonitions (**6:2–4, 5–6, 16–18**), into which the Lord's Prayer is inserted. The parallelism between the three is striking: a "*when you*" clause followed by "*not like the hypocrites*" and a report of their actions, concluding with an amēn statement about "*fully receiving their reward.*" Then comes a positive command to give/pray/fast "*in secret*" and a promise of true reward. . .

When the believer gives, it must never be out in the open to be seen (and admired) by others but always secretly as an act of worship to God. Giving is a private affair done entirely to please the Father. Both have their reward, but the former yields an earthly reward (applause) and only the latter has an eternal reward.

D. A. Carson: In each act the logical structure is the same:

- (1) a warning not to do the act to be praised by men,
- (2) a guarantee that those who ignore this warning will get what they want but no more,
- (3) instruction on how to perform the act of piety secretly, and
- (4) the assurance that the Father who sees in secret will reward openly

J. C. Ryle: Observe that our Lord takes it for granted that all who call themselves His disciples will give to the poor. He assumes as a matter of course that they will think it a solemn duty to give according to their means to relieve the needs of others. The only point He handles is the manner in which the duty should be done. This is a weighty lesson. It condemns the selfish stinginess of many in the matter of giving money. How many are rich towards themselves but poor towards God! How many never give a farthing to do good to the bodies and souls of men! And have such people any right to be called Christians in their present state of mind? It may be well doubted. A giving Savior should have giving disciples.

Charles Swindoll: Few things were more of a turnoff to Jesus than religion on parade. He reserved His severest criticism for religious hypocrites who liked to be seen showing off their piety in order to impress others. Jesus was a master at exposing what lay beneath the veneer of all that nonsense. And frequently He urged His followers to practice total **honesty, authenticity, and simplicity**.

Daniel Doriani: When we do something good, Jesus says, we can seek one of three goals: the praise of society, the praise we give ourselves, or the praise of the Father. Hypocrites seek glory from men. They love “*praise from men more than praise from God*” (**John 12:43**). But we can also do good so that we will feel good about ourselves, and not really for the sake of others.

E. Michael Green: Next, Jesus takes the three main areas of traditional religious devotion: **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. He warns his hearers against the **ostentatious devotion** sometimes to be found in the religion of his day, as of ours; and equally against the **mechanical formalism** to be found in some pagan circles. No, sincere obedience to God’s word is the key to an authentic devotional life. Not playing to the gallery, but humbly living in the light of the Father’s will. Such is the attitude he can reward.

That **simplicity**, that lack of ostentation, applies to our giving (**6:1–4**). It goes without saying that disciples will be generous givers. But they will not make their donations in a way that will draw attention to themselves. They will not do it publicly or to gain respect. It will be quiet. It will meet real need. It will be offered in love and gratitude to the heavenly Father who has given us all we have.

David Thompson: The great theologian **Augustine** said the greatest enemy of true spiritual piety is the love of honor. All other vices produce evil works, but the love of honor does good works out of evil motives. **G. Campbell Morgan** once said, “Probably the vast majority of people are more influenced by what men will say, than by what God Almighty thinks.” It is clear from this passage that not only does God see everything we do under the auspices of good works, but He monitors the motives behind the good works. In this section, Jesus addresses all kinds of good things which may be done from evil motives.

WE WILL LOSE REWARDS IF WE PLAY ACT OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR SHOW IN FRONT OF MEN.

It is possible to do the very things mentioned in this section with bad motives. Our rewards will not just be determined by righteous acts, but by the motives for the righteous acts.

(:1) OPENING THESIS STATEMENT

A. Warning: Don’t Seek Public Acclaim

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;”

Grant Osborne: This introduces the **theme of 6:1–18**, true “righteousness” (cf. **5:20**), and Jesus is establishing a strong antithesis between the earthly and the heavenly in achieving this righteousness. There is a geometric progression: the more you have an earthly perspective, the fewer your rewards in heaven. We have stated throughout that “*righteousness*” (δικαιοσύνη) must be understood as action, that is, **right conduct in doing the will of God** (cf. **3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:33**), so “*righteous deeds*” is the proper way to understand it here. The righteous deeds here

are **almsgiving, prayer, and fasting**. The will of God is not to perform these pious acts in order to get attention.

Richard Gardner: This verse is expressed in the **plural**, as compared with the singular focus of the following examples. It is thus a **general exhortation**, which introduces **6:2–18** in much the same way as **5:20** introduced **5:21–48**, and in each case the key term is *dikaiosynē*, “*righteousness*.” Here it is concerned not with personal or social ethics but with matters of **religious observance**, but it remains something to be “done.” The three examples of almsgiving, prayer and fasting are thus categorized as activities which God requires of his people. Jesus’ quarrel is not with the doing of them -- indeed he assumes that the disciple will do them— but with the **manner** and the **motive**. The manner to which he objects is “*in front of other people*,” i.e. publicly; the motive is “*so that they will notice you*,” i.e. aiming for human approval. Cf. **23:5–7** for a similar criticism of the scribes and Pharisees, using the same verb *theaomai* in 23:5.

B. Result: Forfeiture of Heavenly Reward

“otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

Craig Blomberg: The principle uniting all three illustrations appears first. **Verse 1** does not contradict **5:16** because the motives in the two passages are entirely different. That which is done solely or primarily for personal honor or gain may accomplish its objective (**v. 2b**), but God will grant no further reward.

I. (:2) FALSE PIETY IN GIVING ALMS

A. Warning against Seeking Public Acclaim in Giving Alms

“When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men.”

David Thompson: In other words, don’t toot your own horn and broadcast the fact that you did something to help someone else.

So the question arises how do we **keep our giving in secret**? Let me suggest four ways:

- 1) We keep giving secret by not being proud of what we were able to give.
- 2) We keep giving secret by not broadcasting what we did give.
- 3) We keep giving secret by thanking God for what we are able to give.
- 4) We keep giving secret by not thinking that our rewards are determined solely by an invoice of our giving.

Grant Osborne: By the time of Jesus righteousness and almsgiving were virtually synonymous, and almsgiving was an important part of temple and synagogue services. Synagogues functioned as social agencies in the first century, providing relief for the poor who depended on contributions from people in the community. Therefore, it was natural that ostentation became connected with giving; it was a perfect way to be seen as particularly pious. . . it is probably best just to take the trumpet as a metaphor for drawing attention to one’s pious act of giving.

John Nolland: **Luz** denies rather strongly that a trumpet was actually blown at the giving of a major gift, taking the words as a metaphor of irony (so too, **Gnilka; Gundry; Guelich, Sermon;**

France; Davies-Allison are somewhat less confident in their denial). It is still possible—despite the lack of solid evidence—that a trumpet was blown to draw attention to very large gifts (thus Schlatter; Bonnard; Hill), in order perhaps to encourage others to do similarly; on the other hand, perhaps the association was made because trumpets were blown at fasts (see Büchler), at a time when large gifts were given to avert disaster (see G. Friedrich, TDNT 7:87–88). Or perhaps the sound is that of coins being thrown into the six trumpet-shaped money chests placed in the temple specifically for the collection of alms (the “Shofar-chests” of m. Šeqal. 2:1; see Danby’s note [The Mishnah] on that text) in order to attract the attention of others (so McEleney). The point, in any case, is clear: **the hypocrites did all they could to draw attention to their generosity.**

Richard Gardner: *Hypokritēs* (the word originally meant a theatrical “actor”) is used by Matthew not only here in vv. 2, 5, 16 but also for a critic who does not criticize himself (7:5) and as a general term for those subject to ultimate judgment (24:51; in the LXX *hypocritēs* is used for the godless). Its main use, however, is for those with whom Jesus will be engaged in controversy in 15:7; 22:18, and six times in ch. 23. In several of these uses it probably carries the sense of insincerity, of consciously acting a part, which is close to what “hypocrite” means today. But in general, notably in 7:5; 15:7; 23:15, 23, 25, the focus is not so much on a conscious attempt to deceive as on a **false perspective or sense of values** which prevents the “hypocrites” from seeing things as God sees them; they are not so much deceivers as disastrously self-deceived (like the enthusiastic but misguided followers of 7:21–23). In this passage there is no necessary allegation of deceit as such—they presumably did give alms, pray and fast; the problem was that they wanted everyone to know it. Rather these **religious show-offs** are “actors” in that they aim to impress others, but at the same time their behavior demonstrates how far they are out of touch with God’s understanding of “*righteousness*.”

J. Ligon Duncan: Christ is here criticizing the two-faced spirituality. The fake spirituality of the Pharisees. He is saying that the religion of the Pharisees is not genuine, but it is theatrical religion. Their religious activities were done for the sake of impressing men, not done for the sake of glorifying God.

Christ is making it clear here that the only thing that matters in our religious performances, and the things that we do is **what God thinks**, it does not matter what others think. It only matters what God thinks. And that is important for us to remember. We need to ask ourselves in our giving, why are we giving? Are we giving to be recognized, or we giving because we think that it somehow puts God into our debt. Or, are we giving because of the love of God which has been implanted in our heart. Does our giving bear the marks of genuine Christianity? Does our giving bear the marks of true Christianity? Generosity. Is our giving generous? Or is it stingy? Is our giving grudging, or is it cheerful? Is our giving motivated by our love to God, and the love of God shed abroad in our heart, or is it motivated out of a desire to manipulate God? So that He is beholding to us. We need to ask those questions, and remember Jesus’ warning against hypocrisy.

B. Forfeiture of Heavenly Reward

“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

William Barclay: What Jesus is saying is this: “If you make charitable gifts to demonstrate your own generosity, you will get the admiration of the world – but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full.”

II. (:3-4) TRUE PIETY IN GIVING ALMS

A. (:3) Instruction on Giving Alms Secretly

*“But when you give alms,
do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”*

Charles Swindoll: Ideally, our giving is not only to be joyful and generous, but it’s also to be done with a right motive and attitude. The result will be giving in secret —not in ways that draw attention to ourselves, but in ways that keep our own attention on God. This is the direction Jesus moved when He described how we’re to give. When you give to those in need, you should not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (**Matt. 6:3**). This idiom probably refers to a kind of “sleight of hand” move, similar to what a magician might do to make a coin or handkerchief disappear. Metaphorically, it means simply to give in secret, without drawing attention to yourself in any way. In fact, **go out of your way to avoid attention.**

Daniel Doriani: We must clarify Jesus’ teaching. He does not mean we must always hide our good deeds. He does not say that it is wrong to be seen praying. Rather, it is wrong to pray in order to be seen. He does not say it is wrong to be seen giving a gift to the needy. But it is wrong to give in order to be seen giving.

J. Ligon Duncan: You see, the Lord Jesus knows that there are many types of hypocrisy. And He addresses two of those types in this passage. The first kind is the person who gives because they want to be praised by other people. But the other kind is the one that your servant struggles with more frequently. And that is the tendency to self-praise, when we do what the Lord calls us to do. To sort of pat ourselves on the back and feel good about the fact that we have done some duty, and almost feel as if the Lord owes us something for having been faithful in our giving. It is possible to gain all ones reward by self-praise, just like it is to gain all of ones rewards by the praise of others. And the Lord Jesus is saying, seek the favor of God. Seek the reward of God. Seek the pleasure of God, not your own pleasure and not the opinions of others as you give.

B. (:4) Assurance of Heavenly Reward

*“that your alms may be in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”*

John Nolland: Only deeds done for God’s glory will receive an eschatological reward. This stress is in keeping with the emphasis on the inner obedience to God’s commandments, which we encountered in **chap. 5**. God is concerned with the heart, with the motivation behind a person’s deeds, as much as with the external deeds themselves. The application of the passage is clear and timeless in its bearing upon Christians.

John MacArthur: Let me tell you something, folks. You do it and forget it, and God will remember it and reward it. You do it and remember it and God will forget it and there will be no reward. Take your choice. You want it here and now or you want it forever. You want the blessing of God or the applause of men? Don’t keep mental books on your giving.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of Christian fund raising and giving violate the principle advocated in this passage?
- 2) To what extent is our Christian service motivated by the desire for self praise – wanting to feel good about ourselves and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done?
- 3) How can we examine the manner and motives of our Christian giving?
- 4) To what extent is the prospect of eschatological reward a legitimate motivation for Christian piety and service?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Giving is to be an act of worship and compassionate concern, not a statement of worth. The concept of reward is an important theme in the Sermon on the Mount (see also **19:29**). The principle is that God will reward us on the basis of our spiritual priorities and deeds. If we live entirely for him and surrender earthly attachments and rewards, our reward will be heavenly and eternal.

D. A. Carson: There are different kinds of hypocrisy.

- In one the hypocrite feigns goodness but is actually evil and knows he is being deceptive (e.g., **22:15–18**).
- In another the hypocrite is carried away by his own acting and deceives himself. Such pious hypocrites (as in **7:1–5**), though unaware of their own deceit, do not fool most onlookers, and this may be the meaning here.
- A third kind of hypocrite deceives himself into thinking he is acting for the best interests of God and man and also deceives onlookers. The needy are unlikely to complain when they receive large gifts, and their gratitude may flatter and thus bolster the giver's self-delusion (cf. **D. A. Spieler**, "Hypocrisy: An Exploration of a Third Type," AUSS 13 [1975]: 273–79).

Perhaps it is best to identify the hypocrisy in **v.2** with this third type.

Warren Wiersbe: Our sinful nature is so subtle that it can defile even a good thing like sharing with the poor. If our motive is to get the praise of men, then like the Pharisees, we will call attention to what we are doing. But if our motive is to serve God in love and please Him, then we will give our gifts without calling attention to them. As a result, we will grow spiritually; God will be glorified; and others will be helped. But if we give with the wrong motive, we rob ourselves of blessing and reward and rob God of glory, even though the money we share might help a needy person.

Does this mean that it is wrong to give openly? Must all giving be anonymous? Not necessarily, for everyone in the early church knew that Barnabas had given the income from the sale of his

land (**Acts 4:34–37**). When the church members laid their money at the apostles' feet, it was not done in secret. The difference, of course, was in the **motive** and **manner** in which it was done. A contrast is Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1–11**), who tried to use their gift to make people think they were more spiritual than they really were.

William Barclay: When we study the opening verses of **Matthew 6**, we are immediately confronted with one most important question -- **what is the place of the reward motive in the Christian life?** Three times in this section, Jesus speaks of God rewarding those who have given to him the kind of service which he desires (**Matthew 6:4, 6, 18**). This question is so important that we will do well to pause to examine it before we go on to study the chapter in detail.

It is very often stated that the reward motive has no place whatsoever in the Christian life. It is held that we must be good for the sake of being good, that virtue is its own reward, and that the whole conception of reward must be banished from the Christian life. . .

Nor is this an isolated instance of the idea of reward in the teaching of Jesus. He says of those who loyally bear persecution, who suffer insult without bitterness, that their reward will be great in heaven (**Matthew 5:12**). He says that those who give to one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will not lose their reward (**Matthew 10:42**). At least part of the teaching of the parable of the talents is that faithful service will receive its reward (**Matthew 25:14–30**). In the parable of the last judgment, the plain teaching is that there is reward and punishment in accordance with our reaction to the needs of others (**Matthew 25:31–46**). It is abundantly clear that **Jesus did not hesitate to speak in terms of rewards and punishments**. And it may well be that we ought to be careful that we do not try to be more spiritual than Jesus was in our thinking about this matter of reward.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now, I mentioned the **doctrine of Christian rewards**. What are Christian rewards? Well, I wish I could tell you, because I'm interested in knowing what rewards are. But unfortunately, because we are sinful beings and because we live in time, because all of us are the children of Adam, even though redeemed, we are unable to understand the true nature of Christian rewards, just as we cannot understand the true character of heaven. We know there is a heaven. We know there is a reward, and there are rewards, but we do not know the precise nature of them. We do not know our inheritance, for example, and in all the references to our inheritances in Scripture, we know, of course, that they are not material things such as things down here upon the earth. We know certain things about them only in the sense that they are not like things down here on the earth.

For example, we are told with reference to our inheritance that it is *incorruptible, undefiled, and it does not fade away*. Now, that does not tell us what it is. It tells us what these things are not. They are not things like things down here upon the earth. So we can conclude, I think, that Christian rewards exist, but the precise character of them remains hidden from us, because we do not have the capacity at the present time to understand what they would be.

Why are they necessary? Well, if there is no goal in life that provides a gain, then the action that we do is in futility and meaningless. If what we do is not good for something, it's good for nothing. And for that reason, there must be Christian reward. Absence of rewards and absence of punishment permits injustice to have the last word. What's the good of being good, someone has said, if there's no such thing as eternal punishment? And so the natural product of the life that pleases God in its consummation is Christian reward, just as the natural product of two people

who come to know each other then come to love each, the natural product is—as I mentioned several Sundays ago—Christian marriage.

And so, Christian rewards are the activity in its consummation, and they are the natural thing which Christians should expect. **We do labor with the incentive of Christian reward.**

Daniel Doriani: Some object that Jesus is contradicting himself, for he also said, “*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*” (**Matt. 5:16**). How then can he prohibit the display of righteousness in our passage? **John Stott** replies that Jesus is speaking about different things:

It is our human cowardice which made him say “Let your light shine before men,” and our human vanity which made him tell us to beware of practicing our piety before men. A. B. Bruce sums it up well when he writes that we are to “show when tempted to hide” and “hide when tempted to show.” Our good works must be public so that our light shines; our religious devotions must be secret lest we boast about them.

The goal both times is the same, that the glory go to God. Our good works are public, so that God may be praised for transforming his people. Our religious acts must be private, so that the glory goes to God and not to ourselves.

TEXT: Matthew 6:5-6

TITLE: PRACTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS THE RIGHT WAY FROM THE RIGHT
MOTIVATION – EXAMPLE OF PRAYING

BIG IDEA:

**PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR PUBLIC ACCLAIM FORFEITS HEAVENLY
REWARD – TRUE VS HYPOCRITICAL PIETY -- EXAMPLE OF PRAYING**

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: The same point is being made about praying as was made about almsgiving. Prayer (even if offered in the context of public worship or a prayer gathering) is to be directed to God in secret and not to be made a public spectacle to display the “righteousness” of the one who prays. A true reward for prayer will come only when prayer is God oriented, genuine, and not for display—only when prayer is directed to God and not to others.

Charles Swindoll: They are not to pray “*like the hypocrites*” (6:5), who loved to perform their prayers in public places where they couldn’t be missed. They wanted more than to be observed; they wanted to be applauded. And they didn’t want simply to inform onlookers; they wanted to impress them. Hypocrites don’t love God or love to pray; they love to be seen. In getting what they’re seeking —**public approval**—they get their reward. Today, we see people praying in the end zone after scoring a touchdown, on a busy street corner for pedestrians to see, or loudly at a restaurant so all the “heathen” customers around them can see that they’re religious. **Our prayers should not be on display.**

John Nolland: The challenge is to take the **purity of motivation** which by definition must characterize totally private engagement with God out into the complexities of normal life where others see what we do.

Walter Wilson: Wherever a potential audience is at hand, it seems, the hypocrites will ensure that their prayers are seen and heard, thereby exhibiting the sort of **false piety** about which Jesus laments in **15:8–9**: “*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me*” (cf. **Isa 29:13**).

J. Ligon Duncan: I want you to note here that Christ is not condemning all public prayer. The Lord Jesus Himself prayed in public. He prayed in semi-private settings, as well as public settings. And we are given records in the Scriptures of the prayers of the saints of both the Old and the New Testaments. The Lord Jesus is not saying to His disciples, be at pains, never to pray in public. He is not saying, never ever pray over your meal when you are in a public place. He is not saying, don’t stand up and pray at Prayer Meeting, and He is certainly not saying, never have a prayer in your worship services. That is not His point. His point is that **all prayer ought to be with a view to God as its audience, not as man.** And we ought to look for God’s answer and His approval, not the approval of men. All of our prayer must be done in humility and with a view to God alone.

I. (:5) FALSE PIETY IN PRAYING

A. Warning against Seeking Public Acclaim in Praying

“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men.”

Robert Gundry: Along with the synagogues, the intersections of wide streets provide a maximum number of admiring human auditors.

R. T. France: Devout Jews prayed three times a day (**Dan 6:10**), not necessarily at fixed times (m. Ber. 1:1–2; 4:1), though the ninth hour (3 p.m.) seems to have been normal (**Acts 3:1; 10:30**). Standing was the normal Jewish attitude for prayer (cf. **Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13**), though sometimes people knelt (**2 Chron 6:13; Dan 6:10; Luke 22:41**) or even, in special circumstances, prostrated themselves (**Num 16:22; Matt 26:39**).

William Hendriksen: The reference here is to **prayer in general**, including thanksgiving, praise, adoration, confession of sin, personal petition, intercession for the needs of others, etc.

B. Forfeiture of Heavenly Reward

“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

II. (:6) TRUE PIETY IN PRAYING

A. Instruction on Praying in Secret

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret,”

Robert Gundry: Private prayer ought to be secret so as to avoid being corrupted by the desire for public admiration.

Donald Hagner: refers to an inner room of a house (cf. **Matt 24:26**, the only other Matthean occurrence), sometimes secret or hidden (cf. **Luke 12:3**, “*private room*,” RSV “*behind closed doors*,” NRSV and often used as a storeroom (cf. **Luke 12:24**). It would be a room that allowed privacy; the reference to shutting the door adds emphasis to this aspect.

Grant Osborne: This of course does not disparage corporate prayer, but even that should be private in the sense of a time between God and his community. The major point is the complete absence of any desire to impress others. As in **6:4, 18** the reward then will come from God and be both earthly blessing and heavenly, eternal joy.

William Hendriksen: The idea is not that there must be a separate prayer room. . . . The main emphasis, however, is not even on the **place** of prayer but on the **attitude of mind and heart**. Not the **secrecy** is the real underlying thought but the **sincerity**. The reason for mentioning the secret place is that the sincere and humble worshiper, one who is not interested in making a public display for the sake of enhancing his prestige, will find the secluded nook or den to be most appropriate for his devotions. It is there that he can shut out the world and be alone with his God.

B. Assurance of Heavenly Reward

“and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

Richard Gardner: The point of this vivid metaphor is not that we should confine our praying to dark, private places, but that we should pray with the **sole intent of communion with God**, whose presence is hardly a public phenomenon. Only then can we receive the true reward of prayer.

Daniel Doriani: It is better to “*go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen,*” for prayer is essentially private (6:6). Public prayer has all the **distractions** of a public situation: limits on time, the effects of an audience, and more. In private prayer, we can ask questions, groan, or pause and admit our confusion. A secluded place is best for that. Hypocrites pray with at most one eye on God and at least one eye on their reputation. But if we attend to God in prayer, he gives us his ear: “*Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*” (6:6).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How self-conscious are you when praying in public?
- 2) How does this passage speak to organizations and groups that normally give no place to God or to spiritual things, but then make a big deal about some special day of prayer?
- 3) What are some ways that you might pray differently in public than in private?
- 4) What type of repayment or reward do you think is referenced here for sincere prayer that is focused on bringing glory to God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: No nation ever had a higher ideal of prayer than the Jews had; and no religion ever ranked prayer higher in the scale of priorities than the Jews did. ‘Great is prayer,’ said the Rabbis, ‘greater than all good works.’ One of the loveliest things that was ever said about family worship is the Rabbinic saying: ‘He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron.’ The only regret of the Rabbis was that it was not possible to pray all day long.

But certain faults had crept into the Jewish habits of prayer. It is to be noted that these faults are by no means peculiar to Jewish ideas of prayer; they can and do occur anywhere. And it is to be noted that they could only occur in a community where prayer was taken with the greatest seriousness. They are not the faults of neglect; they are the faults of misguided devotion.

- (1) Prayer tended to become **formalized**. There were two things the daily use of which was prescribed for every Jew.

The first was the **Shema**, which consists of three short passages of Scripture – **Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41**. Shema is the imperative of the Hebrew word for *to hear*, and the Shema takes its name from the verse which was the essence and centre of the whole matter: *‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.’*

The full Shema had to be recited by every Jew **every morning and every evening**. It had to be said as early as possible. It had to be said as soon as the light was strong enough to distinguish between blue and white, or, as Rabbi Eliezer said, between blue and green. In any event, it had to be said before the third hour, that is, 9 am; and in the evening it had to be said before 9 pm. If the last possible moment for the saying of the Shema had come, no matter where a man found himself, at home, in the street, at work or in the synagogue, he must stop and say it. . .

The second thing which every Jew had to repeat daily was called the **Shemoneh ‘esreh**, which means the Eighteen. It consisted of eighteen prayers, and was, and still is, an essential part of the synagogue service. In time the prayers became nineteen, but the old name remains. Most of these prayers are quite short, and nearly all of them are very lovely. . .

(2) Further, the Jewish liturgy supplied **stated prayers for all occasions**. There was hardly an event or a sign in life which had not its stated formula of prayer. . .

(3) Still further, devout Jews **prayed at regular times**, always in the morning and the evening, and sometimes also at noon. Wherever they found themselves, they were bound to pray. Clearly, they might be genuinely remembering God, or they might be carrying out a habitual formality. . .

(4) There was a **tendency to connect prayer with certain places**, and especially with the synagogue. . .

(5) There was among the Jews an undoubted tendency towards **long prayers**. . .

(6) There were certain other **forms of repetition**, which the Jews, like all people of the middle east, were apt to use and to overuse. People had a habit of hypnotizing themselves by the endless repetition of one phrase or even of one word. . .

(7) The final fault which Jesus found with certain of the Jews was that they **prayed in order to be seen**. The Jewish system of prayer made **ostentation** very easy. Jews prayed standing, with hands stretched out, palms upwards, and with heads bowed.

Grant Osborne: Exegetical Outline

I. Problem of Ostentatious Prayer (6:5–6)

- A. Prohibition—don’t desire to be seen by men (no reward) (v. 5)
- B. Positive command—pray privately to the Father (reward) (v. 6)

II. Problem of Long-Winded Praying (6:7–8)

- A. Don’t babble—only think they’ll be heard (v. 7)
- B. Don’t pray like this—your Father knows your needs (v. 8)

III. The Model Prayer (6:9–13)

- A. Introduction—worship (v. 9a)

- B. The thou-petitions (vv. 9b–10)
- C. The we-petitions (vv. 11–13)

IV. Addendum (6:14–15)

- A. Forgive and be forgiven (v. 14)
- B. Don't forgive and be condemned (v. 15)

Bob Deffinbaugh: Jesus develops two basic kinds of prayer. The first is “**showcase prayer**” by which the person praying actually draws attention to himself. He wants to be known as spiritual and holy. His religion gives him status, and by public prayer, he maintains and feeds it. The **second** kind of prayer is “**relational prayer**.” This is prayer that seeks time with the Father. Jesus, for teaching purposes, draws a distinct line between the two, but we must acknowledge that most people will fall somewhere between the two extremes. It is also important to understand that no one can read the mind and intentions of another heart. What might seem to be the height of arrogance may only reflect upbringing. Or gentle, quiet prayers may come from one who has no private prayer life at all. Jesus’ instructions are for us to know and personally apply His words and to let the Holy Spirit guide and train our hearts in these matters.

There are, however, some warning signs to which we might want to pay attention.

- Do I have an “I am speaking to God” voice? This may be a matter of upbringing. Nevertheless, none is needed, and such a change in voice can draw attention to the one praying—unless one is in an environment that expects it, in which case not changing the voice can draw attention.
- Elegant words and lots of them. This may be a matter of gifting and natural oratory, but again none are needed.
- Personal agenda. It’s hard to excuse this one. You pray according to what you want done and what others need to do to help it along.
- Gossip. “Please God. Help Jane resist the temptation to keep seeing that guy.” Such public prayers are only fruitful if Jane is there and has asked for intercession on that subject.
- Public prayer of any kind without a private prayer life. It is a given that if you are not speaking to the Father when you are alone, there is no good speaking to Him publicly.

So Jesus advises us to go into our rooms and shut the door. This is the “normal” opposite of standing on a street corner. If He had used a phrase like “pray in private” or “pray alone,” all kinds of extreme ideas may have developed. How private do you need to be? Must we become hermits or monks to have a prayer life? Jesus simply meant that there are places and ways to pray that are between the Father and us. By entering such places, we demonstrate that we “*believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him*” (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Scott Harris: The Proper Purpose of Prayer

The hypocritical Jewish religious leaders feigned or pretended to be something they were not. That is what a hypocrite is – someone who acts out a part that is not true in reality. They gave the appearance that they were close to God, but in reality they did not really care what God thought of them. What was important to them was what the people thought.

In a warning to His disciples about the Scribes' hypocritical piety, Jesus said this of them in **Luke 20:46-47**, "*Beware of the Scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.*"

The Scribes and Pharisees wanted the people to think they were pious and close to God, so they made it their practice to pray in such a way as to be seen by men. They went into the synagogues and made a show out of their prayers. They would stand before all the people, lifting up their hands and speaking loudly. In the streets, they would stop on the corners and do the same thing, calling attention to themselves and their supposed piety. Jesus says here that their prayers went only as far as the sound of their voice. They did not reach God because they were not meant for God.

John MacArthur: But the worst fault – and the final one to mention and then to look at the text – is that **they prayed to be seen by men**, not heard by God. That's the – that's the major fault. Believe me, if there is pride in the human heart their system of prayer would really feed it. That kind of a system would feed spiritual pride so readily. Look at **verse 5**. It says in **verse 5**, they *loved to pray*. Now at first glance that sounds so wonderful, "*for they loved to pray.*"

But the question is **why did they love to pray?** Did they love to pray because they loved God? Did they love to pray because it ushered them into the communion of His blessed presence? Why do they love to pray? They didn't love to pray for any good reason. They loved to pray to be seen by men. And we talked about the word "*see*," didn't we, back in the last message we gave you? And we said it's the verb *theaomai* from which we get theatrical or **theater**. They wanted to be on the show. They wanted to be on the stage. *Hypokritēs* originally meant an actor. They were an actor in a theater. They were putting on something for everybody to see how holy they were.

Now listen. That was the **wrong motive**. And, beloved, that's what Jesus wants to deal with here, the motive of our prayers. We may never unscramble all the mystery of prayer, but we can certainly deal with the issue of the motive as the Lord does here. Our prayers are not to be offered to men, but to God. Do you ever pray a prayer and while you're praying in some group, you're saying in your mind, "Boy, I bet they thought that was a good phrase?"

TEXT: Matthew 6:7-15

TITLE: THE MODEL PRAYER AS TAUGHT BY JESUS

BIG IDEA:

OUR PRAYERS SHOULD NOT TRY TO MANIPULATE GOD BUT SHOULD EXPRESS OUR COMPLETE DEPENDENCE IN WORSHIP AND PETITION FOR NEEDS AFTER THE PATTERN INSTRUCTED BY JESUS

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: The “**digression**” on prayer which breaks into the tripartite unit of teaching on religious secrecy begins with a similar contrast between the wrong and the right ways of praying, in which “*the Gentiles*” take the place of the “*hypocrites*” in v. 5. The focus this time is not on prayer performed with a view to human approbation but on an attitude and practice in prayer which betrays a misunderstanding of how God expects to be approached by his people.

J. Ligon Duncan: This prayer before us is designed to be a **pattern for our prayer**. It is not ultimately meant to be a prayer which we simply repeat by rote. That would actually violate one of the principles which the Lord Himself has set down in this passage. It is a perfectly appropriate, of course, to repeat it back to God, and to serve as a rubric for our prayer and for our worship.

But each petition that Christ gives us in this prayer is ultimately suggestive of a whole range of appropriate matters for prayer. Jesus’ prayer focuses on the worship of the Father, and the kingdom of the Father, and the provision of the Father, and the grace of the Father, and the protection of the Father. And all of those categories provide you hundreds of ideas for how you can pray to the living God. Have you put to work these principles, the principles of this passage in your life of secret prayer.

Bethany Bible Church (Portland OR): In the midst of these words of warning concerning prayer - that we find this **digression** from Jesus' main topic of the **dangers of hypocrisy**. It seems that, for the moment, He sets aside the concern of hypocrisy before others in order to teach us some deeper truths about prayer. He shows us what our manner should be when we pray to His Father and, as it were, coaches us in **the right way to approach Him** and speak to Him. It's as if He says, "I want you to learn to be real and sincere in your prayers. I don't want you to pray before men in such a way as to deliberately be seen and thought well of by them. And by the way; while we're on the subject of the right way to pray, let me pass on a few more words of instruction to you." Perhaps He goes on to say more about the subject of prayer because prayer to the Father is such an important aspect of our lives as His followers.

I have found it helpful to divide what the Lord says into three principles that He wishes to pass on to us. The first of these three principles is that we are to pray with . . .

- I. SINCERITY OF EXPRESSION (vv. 7-8).
- II. REVERENCE OF CONTENT (vv. 9-13).
- III. HOLINESS OF HEART (vv. 14-15).

William Hendriksen: In harmony with the fact that, according to both old and New Testament, the glory of God is important above everything else, the first three petitions have reference to the Father's name, kingdom, and will. Human needs – bread, pardon for sin, and victory over the evil one – take the second place.

Van Parunak: Structure of the Body of the Prayer:

This structure reminds us of two practical lessons about prayer.

1. Prayer is not just asking for things. In the outer frame, we acknowledge to God who he is. This exercise is the heart of worship. When we come to the Lord, we should focus our minds on who he is. The prayer gives a particularly good example of two focal points of such meditation. It starts with his mercy and accessibility, and ends with his power and majesty.

2. Prayer is not random. While there is nothing wrong with spontaneous prayer, there is also a place for prayer that is planned and ordered. When we speak with an important person, we prepare our thoughts in advance. There's nothing wrong with doing the same with God.

I. (:7-8) DON'T PRAY LIKE UNBELIEVERS

A. (:7a) Using Meaningless Repetition – Incantations vs Intelligent Speech

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do,”

No prayer has been abused more in terms of meaningless repetition than this Model Prayer

R. T. France: The term for “*Gentiles*” is the same as that used in **5:47** (on which see below on **18:17**) to denote the world outside the disciple community. The emphasis here is not so much on their not being Jewish as on their being **religious outsiders**, people who do not understand what it means to know God as a heavenly Father. So instead of trusting a Father to fulfill their needs, they think they must badger a reluctant Deity into taking notice of them (cf. the expressive modern term “*God-botherer*”). Their approach to prayer is characterized by two colorful terms, first “*babbling*,” a noisy flow of sound without meaning, and *polylogia*, “*much speaking*,” “*many words*.” It is an approach to prayer which values quantity (and perhaps volume?) rather than quality. It is not necessarily purely mechanical, but rather obtrusive and unnecessary. It assumes that the purpose of prayer is first to demand God's attention and then to inform him of needs he may have overlooked.

Van Parunak: An excellent illustration of the difference between the prayer of a believer and that of the heathen is in the encounter of Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in **1 Kings 18**. The pagan prophets prayed repeatedly the same thing, “*O Baal, hear us*,” and when he didn't hear, they **prolonged their prayer** and their urgency. . . . By contrast, Elijah's prayer was direct and to the point.

B. (:7b) Heaping Words Upon Words – Quantity vs Quality

“for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.”

Grant Osborne: These are not prayers of worship or intercession but self-centered prayers that try to control the gods.

D. A. Carson: Nor is he forbidding all long prayers or all repetition. He himself prayed at length (**Lk 6:12**), repeated himself in prayer (**Mt 26:44**; unlike Sir 7:14!), and told a parable to show his disciples that “*they should always pray and not give up*” (**Lk 18:1**). His point is that his disciples should **avoid meaningless, repetitive prayers offered under the misconception that mere length will make prayers efficacious**. Such thoughtless babble can occur in liturgical and extemporaneous prayers alike. Essentially it is thoroughly pagan, for pagan gods allegedly thrive on incantation and repetition. But the personal Father God to whom believers pray does not require information about our needs (**v.8**). “As a father knows the needs of his family, yet teaches them to ask in confidence and trust, so does God treat his children” (**Hill**).

C. (:8) Ignoring Any Intimate Family Relationship – Where Father Knows Best

*“Therefore do not be like them;
for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.”*

R. T. France: The reason why “*you*” (plural, the disciple community united in prayer) are not to be like them lies in a theology which attributes to God both the **benevolent concern of a Father** and an **omniscience** which makes the prayer apparently unnecessary (cf. **Isa 65:24**: “*Before they call, I will answer*”). But if God does not need to be informed of our needs, why does he expect us to tell him about them? Christian spirituality has traditionally found the answer in a concept of prayer not as the communication of information, still less as a technique for getting things from God (the more words you put in the more results you get out), but as **the expression of the relationship of trust which follows from knowing God as “Father.”** The pattern prayer which follows illustrates how such a relationship works.

II. (:9-13) PRAY AS INSTRUCTED BY JESUS – ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PRAYER = WORSHIP AND PETITION

“Pray, then, in this way:”

Grant Osborne: The Heart of Prayer is Worship

When we say, “**Our Father who is in heaven,**” we are not uttering a formal address but **celebrating a relationship**. We are reminding ourselves of the deep intimacy and incomprehensible love of the One to whom we pray. Moreover, by uttering “*our,*” we also celebrate the fact that we are “*co-heirs with Christ*” (**Rom 8:17**) and share his relationship with the Father. It is Christ’s incredibly deep relationship with his Father that we share. We are part of **the family of God** and so corporately celebrate this new oneness with him and Christ in an “*our*” setting. That is the heart of worship—sharing this **new intimacy** first with Christ and then with “*our*” brothers and sisters.

R. T. France: Not all aspects of prayer are included in this pattern prayer. There is no explicit confession of sin, no direct thanksgiving for blessings already received, no intercession for the needs of the world or for those to whom disciples are sent (or for their persecutors, 5:44). All of these may be developed through meditation around the clauses of the prayer individually. But the fundamental starting point is **worship** and **petition**.

A. (:9a) Invocation (Opening Address) -- Directed to God as Father

1. Tone of Intimacy -- Relationship of a Child to a Father

“Our Father”

Sense of family and community – larger than just individual orientation – Not “*My Father*”
Not directed towards other men who may be listening it; not saying words to impress them or to put on a show or for their benefit.

Open and Transparent; nothing to hide;

Great expectations in coming before your heavenly Father.

Michael Wilkins: The term for “*Father*” is *’abba*, a term used by children for their earthly fathers to express the warmth and intimacy a child experiences when in the security of a loving father’s care.

Daniel Doriani: The words “*Our Father in heaven*” reveal the first element of Christian prayer. It is **family speech**, for we address God as “*our Father*.” In Jesus’ day, this was radical. Jewish prayers stressed God’s sovereignty, lordship, glory, grace, and covenant. On rare occasions, the Old Testament refers to God as “*Father*” (**Deut. 32:6; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; Mal. 2:10**), but no prophet taught the people to pray to God as “*our Father*.”

When Jesus called God “*his own Father*,” some Jews were offended (**John 5:18**). Pious Jews held God in such awe that they used circumlocutions to avoid saying his name, for fear of misusing it. Therefore, we must pause to consider something remarkable—Jesus teaches us to address the holy, almighty Lord as “*our Father*.”

When we meet a great person or someone holding high office, we find it difficult to call him by his first name. Whether we like our president or not, we do not call him “Bill” or “George,” but “Mr. President.” But if titles are proper for such people, then the Creator and King of heaven certainly deserves titles of respect. But **God is personal**. Therefore, he requests a personal title: *Father*. Nothing shapes our prayers more than this word. It explains why prayer is simple and why sinners can approach God with confidence. . .

When God says, “*You are the children of the LORD your God*” (**Deut. 14:1**), he is saying two things: “I love you” and “However strong you are compared to others, you are weak enough to need my help. Like children, you should have enough sense to say, ‘Help me.’” Why deny our need of God’s strength? We are children, humble and weak enough to need God’s help. We are also believers, wise and confident enough to ask God, our Father, to help us.

2. Tone of Majesty -- Respect for the Transcendence of God

“who art in heaven,”

Not a distant father who has abandoned His family

One in a position of power and knowledge and sovereignty

Jacob Gerber: Tension between 2 types of approach in prayer:

When we pray to **our father**, Jesus is teaching us to pray **with all of the confidence of children**. My children do not care in the least what I am busy with when they have a need. They barge directly into my presence to tell me their needs. Doesn't matter if I'm sleeping. Even this morning, it's one of them. One of my children, I love you, Caleb, every night he comes into my room to tell me, to wake me up, to get my attention, to tell me what he needs. It was a foot cramp this morning. We worked out the foot cramp and sent him back to bed. Children don't care. They come into the presence of their father and Jesus says, pray like that. You are praying as children to your father. Come right into his presence.

Then Jesus says, this is our father **who is in heaven**. This is not just your dad. He is in heaven. He is transcended. **He transcends above us**. He is higher than us. Separated from us wholly. In fact, what the Bible says is that He is holy, holy, holy, unimaginably, indescribably, holy, so far distant from us, that there would be no way for us to climb up to him unless he came down and offered himself to us. Our Father in heaven. . .

Well to apply all of this. How then should we pray? In this text, what we see is that prayer is a paradox of two things that are both true. That we pray as unworthy servants, number one of Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Then number two that we pray, and the deepest sense of intimacy and the familiarity to our Father as his beloved children. Then we need to sit in this paradox. We need to not just say these things and move on, but we need to think about how these truths genuinely seem contradictory. It seems like either we are slaves or we are sons. Either we are debtors or we are free. We cannot be both. And yet Jesus teaches us to pray from both perspectives.

Daniel Doriani: We pray to the sovereign king, the Father who dwells on high. The address “*our Father in heaven*” means that God is both **near to us**, for he is our Father, and **beyond us**, for he is in heaven. So then, true prayer is private, confident, simple, familial, corporate, and transcendent; we pray to the Father, to our Father, and to our Father in heaven. Through it all, biblical prayer is God-centered.

B. (:9b-10) Three Expressions of Submission and Worship

1. (:9b) Devoted to His Holy Character

“Hallowed be Thy name.”

Fundamental attribute that defines who God is = His Holiness.

Grant Osborne: The first God-oriented petition is that the sacredness of God’s name be magnified in every area of life. In the ancient world a person’s name bespoke the very essence of the person (see on **1:21**), so God’s name tells who he is at the core of his being. Since holiness is at the heart of the divine character, that must be made evident in everything the disciple does.

R. T. France: God’s “*name*” is a recurrent OT term for God himself as he is perceived and honored by people. It is frequently described as “*holy*” (**Ps 30:4; 97:12; 103:1; 111:9** etc.) since holiness is a prime characteristic of God himself. The present clause is not then a request that it be made holy, as the traditional translation “*hallowed*” properly means—it is holy already. Rather it is that people may recognize and acknowledge its holiness, by **giving God the reverence which is his due**; cf. **Isa 29:23** where to “*keep God’s name holy*” is further explained by “*stand in awe of the God of Israel.*” Compare the concern of the prophets that God’s name should not be profaned as a result of his people’s sinful behavior and its punishment (**Ezek 20:8–9; 36:20–23**; cf. **Isa 48:11; 52:5–6**). This clause then is not merely a petition that people in general may come to acknowledge God, but is itself **an expression of that reverence which his holiness requires**.

E. Michael Green: Having brought us within the Father’s presence, the prayer makes three petitions about God and his glory, followed by three about ourselves and our needs. **The order is significant**. We are not to be so taken up with ourselves that we rush into God’s presence and give him a shopping list of our needs. His name is to be *hallowed*: that is to say, we long for his

name, or character, to have top place in the world and in people's hearts. 'Lord, may we make you our Number One.' What a marvellous note of **adoration** with which to begin a time of prayer!

William Barclay: Therefore, when we pray '*Hallowed be your name,*' it means: 'Enable us to give to you the unique place which your nature and character deserve and demand.'

2. (:10a) Dedicated to the Father's Agenda – Submissive and Obedient and Visionary
"Thy kingdom come."

Daniel Doriani: This petition overlaps with the first, for God's name is honored whenever his rule is more evident. "*Your kingdom come*" means that Christ is king and that we want his rule to become more evident every day.

"*Your kingdom come*" is also an evangelistic prayer. We pray that the blessings of salvation will flow, that the church will grow in size and influence, that Christians will grow in maturity, and that we would obey Jesus in every sphere of life.

We also pray that Christ will return. If we seek God in prayer, we long to see him face-to-face. To pray "*Your kingdom come*" is to pray for the restoration of all things, that his kingdom will come in its perfect form. Finally, to pray "*Your kingdom come*" is to ask the Lord to reign now, in our lives.

D. A. Carson: That kingdom is breaking in under Christ's ministry, but it is not consummated until the end of the age (**28:20**). To pray "*your kingdom come*" is therefore simultaneously to ask that God's saving, royal rule be extended now as people bow in submission to him and already taste the eschatological blessing of salvation and to cry for the **consummation of the kingdom** (cf. **1Co 16:22; Rev 11:17; 22:20**). Godly Jews were waiting for the kingdom (**Mk 15:43**), "*the consolation of Israel*" (**Lk 2:25**). They recited "Kaddish" ("Sanctification"), an ancient Aramaic prayer, at the close of each synagogue service. In its oldest extant form, it runs, "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will. May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon. And to this, say, Amen" (Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus*, 98, emphasis his). But **the Jew looked forward to the kingdom**, whereas the reader of Matthew's gospel, while looking forward to its consummation, perceives that the kingdom has already broken in and **prays for its extension as well as its unqualified manifestation**.

John MacArthur: And then we discussed the **priority of God**, "*Hallowed be thy name,*" and we said that that means that God's name is all that He is. And to hallow His name means to set it apart, to exalt it, to glorify it, to honor it, and we gave you four ways that we do that. We hallow His name when we believe that He is, when we believe that He is who He is, when we completely are committed to His presence, and when we obey His Word. And He is to be hallowed, not in general in the universe, but in general in the universe, and most importantly, **through us**.

Van Parunak: We must understand this petition, like the others, in the light of the OT. As we saw in our studies in Isaiah, the concept of the coming kingdom was revealed in a time when the kingdom of Israel was on the verge of being obliterated. God promised that he would raise up a

righteous king to replace the apostate kings, and restore Zion, the place which he had long chosen to set his name (**Deut 12:11; Psa 78:68**).

Isa 2:2 *And it shall come to pass in the last days, that **the mountain of the LORD'S house** shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for **out of Zion** shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Isa 60:1 *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And **the Gentiles shall come to thy light**, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. 14 The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, **The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.***

This clause in the prayer teaches us that our Lord's earthly ministry does not mark the full arrival of the kingdom. Both he and John proclaimed that "*the kingdom of God is at hand,*" but his people are still to pray for its full realization. Luke in particular records the disciples' misunderstanding in this regard, and our Lord's correction. As the group made their way to Jerusalem, we read,

Luk 19:11 *And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. 12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. ...*

After the resurrection, our Lord continued to emphasize that the kingdom was not theirs to implement and execute, but awaited a future divine intervention:

Act 1:6 *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

John on Patmos longed for this day, and prayed, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (**Rev 22:20**). In doing so, he echoed this clause of the Lord's Prayer, and when we pray it, we are continuing that request.

3. (:10b) Dedicated to the Father's Will – Submissive and Obedient and Visionary
"Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

R. T. France: To pray such a prayer is, of course, to be committed oneself to honor God's name, accept his kingship and do his will.

William Barclay: Let us assume that the second petition explains and amplifies and defines the first. We then have the perfect definition of the kingdom of God – **The kingdom of God is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven.** Here we have the

explanation of how the kingdom can be past, present and future all at the one time. Anyone who at any time in history perfectly did God's will was within the kingdom; anyone who perfectly does God's will is within the kingdom; but since the world is very far from being a place where God's will is perfectly and universally done, the consummation of the kingdom is still in the future and is still something for which we must pray.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now when we think about the will of God, we must distinguish two of his wills. There is, of course, his decretive will. That decretive will is the will of God that **determines everything that is going to come to pass**. Daniel speaks of this in the 4th chapter, in the 35th verse of his great prophecy when he says, "*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand and say unto him, 'What doest Thou?'*" And so he does according to his determinate will. The Lord Jesus went to the cross at Calvary according to the decretive will of God. It was his determining will, established in the councils of eternity, that the Son of God should suffer for our sins at the cross at Calvary.

There is also the preceptive will of God. The preceptive will of God is what we see in holy Scripture as **that which pleases him**. Now his preceptive will does not always come to pass. His preceptive will is what pleases him, but we often do things that displease him. But we cannot do contrary to his decretive will. His decretive will determines all things that are going to come to pass.

Now what does the Lord mean when he says, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*"? This is, then, a petition that we are to pray, by which we are to pray that on earth, the things that are done upon earth shall be pleasing to the God who dwells in heaven and dwells in the midst of a sphere in which things are done with respect to his will. So this is a prayer, then, that the matters which concern his preceptive will will be pleasing to him. And we know from the teaching of holy Scripture that **during the Millennial Age**, when the Lord Jesus rules and reigns upon the earth, his will will be done in the earth as it is in heaven. So this, then, is a **petition for willing submission to the preceptive will of God**.

C. (:11-13a) Three Petitions for Dependence on God for Basic Needs

William Barclay: The second part of the prayer, the part which deals with our needs and our necessities, is a marvellously created unity. It deals with the three essential human needs and the three spheres of time within which we all move.

- First, it asks for bread, for that which is necessary for the maintenance of life, and thereby brings the needs of the present to the throne of God.
- Second, it asks for forgiveness and thereby brings the past into the presence of God.
- Third, it asks for help in temptation and thereby commits all the future into the hands of God.

In these three brief petitions, we are taught to lay the present, the past and the future before the footstool of the grace of God.

1. (:11) Dependent on His Daily Provision of Basis Physical Needs -- Food "Give us this day our daily bread."

Daniel Doriani: We miss the **urgency** of this prayer today. Americans live in a land of plenty. Indeed, we have so much food we worry more about obesity than hunger. We buy large quantities of food in well-stocked stores and stuff it into capacious refrigerators and freezers. We plan ahead, so that our food seems to come from our work and our kitchen. In Jesus' day, it was more obvious to a laborer that he should pray daily for his daily bread. A common laborer lived on a payment for that day's work. If he could find no work or if his employer withheld his wages, he might go hungry. Western culture has changed enough (monthly paychecks are an example) that we do not feel the urgency to pray for food daily. But our food still comes from God, and we honor him when we acknowledge it.

Michael Wilkins: the wording seems to recall Israel's daily reliance on God for manna in the desert (**Ex. 16**). In the same way as manna was only given one day at a time, disciples are to rely on daily provision for life from God, helping them to develop a continuing, conscious dependence on him (cf. **Matt. 6:34; Phil. 4:6**).

John MacArthur: But bread is all of that physical area. **Martin Luther** had it right when he said: "Everything necessary for the preservation of this life is bread, including food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government, peace." End quote. He saw all of the physical elements of life, the necessities, but not the luxuries of life. I don't think that we can ask God for the luxuries of life based on this verse, but for the **necessities**. What He chooses to give us by way of luxury is at His gracious hand. But He promises to give us the necessities. You remember back in Proverbs chapter 30? Psalm, Proverbs 30 written by Agur? And, in verses 8 and 9 he says, "*Lord, don't give me so much that I forget You, and don't give me so little that I steal and dishonor Your name. Just give me food that is convenient for me.*" I think that's the heart of this. It isn't self-seeking, give me more and more and more and more. It's just saying, Lord give me what I need.

2. (:12) Dependent on His Daily Provision of Basic Spiritual Needs -- Forgiveness
"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Daniel Doriani: Jesus' point is that God forgives the penitent. That is, if we understand how precious it is to be forgiven, if we know how much it cost God to forgive, then we will forgive others. The forgiven have motives to forgive. We thank God for his gift, we admire the beauty of his way, and we hope to do the same for others.

R. T. France: The petition for forgiveness is the only clause of the prayer which is singled out for comment at the end (**vv. 14–15**). The point of that comment, as indeed of the balancing structure of the clause itself, is that **forgiveness is a reciprocal principle**, a point which will be more fully underlined in the parable of **18:23–35**. That parable, like the present petition, will be about debt, though the introductory question and answer in **18:21–22** makes it clear that **debt is a metaphor for offenses which need to be forgiven**. Here too any purely monetary understanding of debt is ruled out by the fact that it is debts to God for which forgiveness is asked. The substitution in **vv. 14–15** of "*offenses*" (and cf. the "*sins*" of **Luke 11:4a**), gives a more prosaic but undoubtedly correct interpretation of the graphic metaphor of debt. Matthew's version, unlike Luke's, by keeping the same metaphor in both halves of the clause ensures that a close parallel is maintained between God's forgiveness and ours. We should note that it is the debtors rather than the debts which we have forgiven; our concern, like God's, is to be with **personal relationships**. . .

To ask to be forgiven while oneself refusing to forgive is hypocritical.

John MacArthur: Surely, if you'll think about it, you will agree with me that the most essential and the most blessed and the most difficult thing that God ever did was provide man with the **forgiveness of sin**. It is most essential because it keeps us from eternal hell, and gives us joy even in this life. It is most blessed because it introduces us into a fellowship with God that goes on forever and it is most difficult because it cost the Son of God His life, on a cross. But the most essential, the most blessed, and the most difficult thing is the forgiveness of sin. It is the greatest need of the human heart. Sin has a two-fold effect, generally, and that is that it damns men forever. That's its future effect. Its present effect is that it robs men of the fullness of life by bringing to bear upon his conscience an unrelieved and unrelenting guilt. And so as we face the problem of sin we face the fact that sin brings immediate consequences, guilt and the loss of meaningfulness, peace and joy and life and the future consequence that sin brings eternal damnation.

S. Lewis Johnson: What he means is simply this: that those who have been truly forgiven by God necessarily manifest a forgiving spirit. And that forgiving spirit is the evidence that we have truly been born again. So when we read, in **verse 14**, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; and if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,*" that is the **manifestation of the evidence of the new birth**.

3. (:13a) Desirous of Favorable Outcomes

- a. With respect to Trials which Lead to Temptations
 "*And do not lead us into temptation,*"

E. Michael Green: The third of the 'we' petitions is for God's guidance and strength against the enemy.

Craig Blomberg: "*Lead us not into temptation*" does not imply "don't bring us to the place of temptation" or "don't allow us to be tempted." God's Spirit has already done both of these with Jesus (**4:1**). Nor does the clause imply "don't tempt us" because God has promised never to do that anyway (**Jas 1:13**). Rather, in light of the probable Aramaic underlying Jesus' prayer, these words seem best taken as "*don't let us succumb to temptation*" (cf. **Mark 14:38**) or "*don't abandon us to temptation.*"

[Ed: Or if that explanation requires too much linguistic gymnastics, maybe simply an expression of desire not to be led into places of severe testing where temptation by the evil one could present significant difficulty.]

D. A. Carson: The NT tells us that this age will be characterized by wars and rumors of wars but does not find it incongruous to urge us to pray for those in authority so "*that we may live peaceful and quiet lives*" (**1Ti 2:2**). While Jesus told his disciples to rejoice when persecuted (**Mt 5:10-12**), he nevertheless exhorted them to flee from it (**10:23**) and even to pray that their flight should not be too severe (**24:20**). Similarly, a prayer requesting to be **spared testings** may not be incongruous when placed beside exhortations to consider such testings, when they come, as pure joy.

John MacArthur: When the prayer says, "*Lead us not into trial,*" I believe the implication of the prayer is, "Lord, don't ever lead us into a trial which will present to us such a temptation that we will not be able to resist it." Did you get that? "Don't ever lead us into something we can't

handle. Don't give us a trial that is going to become an irresistible temptation, but rather deliver us from any trial that would bring evil on us as a natural consequence. Don't put us into something we can't handle." And, you know, that's just a claim of a promise, as we shall see in a little while. The term implies *testing*. It implies a process. And by the way, any time you see a word like *peirasmos*, with an *asmós* ending on it, that is a Greek noun, that the *asmos* ending implies a **process**. Don't put us into any process, any procedure, any series of circumstances, any situation that is going to draw us into irresistible sin.

- b. With respect to Domination by the Tempter
"but deliver us from evil [or the evil one]."

Grant Osborne: The personalized form is better than the traditional "*from evil*" because the articular "*the evil one*" (τοῦ πονηροῦ) favors the more personal concept, though of course "*evil*" and "*the evil one*" are virtually synonymous. In Matthew the "*evil one*" causes us to twist our words into lies (**5:37**), takes kingdom truths out of our heart (**13:19**), and sows evil in our lives (**13:19**). "*Deliver*" means "save us from" and connotes the idea of both protection and removal from his power. So the final petition asks God for **strength and deliverance from the temptations wrought by Satan**.

D. (:13b) Doxology

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

Grant Osborne: The traditional doxology ("*for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*") appears in only a few late manuscripts (L W Θ 0233 et al.), and several of the best manuscripts end here (B D Z et al.), with a variety of endings in others. This makes it almost certain that it is **not original**. It is possible that churches added their own doxology when praying this prayer, and this one emerged as the best summary of the contents of the prayer. However, it (and the other endings) is based on **1 Chr 29:11–13** and is meaningful, so it is not wrong to utter the ending as a personal prayer.

(:14-15) APPLICATION – IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

A. (:14) What Happens When You Forgive Others?

*"For if you forgive men for their transgressions,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you."*

John MacArthur: Talking here about Parental Forgiveness, not Judicial Forgiveness ... I used the illustration of my family. If a child of my family sins against me and against the standards that I establish, they're not thrown out of the family. They don't have to do something to get back in the family, but they need to come and make some things right so the **intimacy of a family fellowship** can be maintained and restored, you see. That's what we're talking about. . .

Another illustration that's very clear. Jesus said this: give and it, what? Shall be given to you. In whatever measure you mete it out that's exactly how God will mete it out to you. Hmm. Luke 6, how about this one? Sow sparingly, reap what? Sparingly. Sow bountifully, what? Reap bountifully. God deals with us the way we deal with Him. Whatever we invest in His kingdom, we receive a return on. If we harbor sins and grudges and so forth, we cut ourselves off from the blessedness that can accrue to us because of those things. We have taught you so many times that as you give, you invest with God, you receive a return on it. The

same thing is true on your confession of sin and seeking forgiveness. **God deals with you the way you deal with others**, and maybe the short circuit in your spiritual life is just that you have some people that you're holding bitter resentment or a grudge against, and it's constant.

B. (:15) What Happens When You Don't Forgive Others?

*“But if you do not forgive men,
then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”*

Warren Wiersbe: In this “appendix” to the prayer, Jesus expanded the last phrase of **Matthew 6:12**, “*as we forgive our debtors.*” He later repeated this lesson to His disciples (**Mark 11:19–26**). He was not teaching that believers earned God’s forgiveness by forgiving others, for this would be contrary to God’s free grace and mercy. However, if we have truly experienced God’s forgiveness, then we will have a readiness to forgive others (**Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13**). Our Lord illustrated this principle in the parable of the unmerciful servant (**Matt. 18:21–35**).

R. T. France: The stark simplicity of this pronouncement raises uncomfortable questions. First, how does this conditional forgiveness relate to the gospel of free and unmerited grace which Paul proclaims? Does our act of forgiving earn our forgiveness from God? . . .

A second problem relates to the **breadth of the forgiveness required**. Its object is literally “*people*” without any further specification. So is there no limit to what and whom we must forgive? Should disciples forgive war criminals, serial murderers and abusers of children? What does “forgive” mean in such circumstances? . . . The phrase “*against me*” in that passage perhaps gives us a guide to the intention of this passage as well. While the reference to the offenses of “*people*” could hardly be more general, the clause of the prayer which these verses are explaining uses the metaphor of debt specifically of those who are indebted to us (**v. 12**). It is where there is personal offense that the concept of “*forgiveness*” properly applies. Those who commit evil by which we ourselves are not affected should be the object of our prayerful concern and (as far as possible) sympathetic understanding, but it is properly speaking not for us to “*forgive*” them: that is God’s prerogative. The concern of these verses, as of **18:21–35**, is with the disciples’ response to those whose offense is against them. It is our own enemies whom we are to love (**5:44**).

William Hendriksen: Though in the teaching not only of Paul (**Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:5**) but certainly also of Christ (**Matt. 5:1-6; 18:27; Luke 18:13**) salvation rests not on human accomplishments but solely on the grace and mercy of God, this does not mean that there is nothing to do for those who receive it. They must believe. Included in this faith is the eagerness to forgive. Unless the listeners forgive men their trespasses, they themselves will remain unpardoned.

Van Parunak: Before returning to the background theme of the privacy of our duties to God, the Lord returns to one of the themes raised in the prayer, that our requests for forgiveness must be accompanied with forgiveness on our part toward others.

He changes the term for sin, from “*debts*” (emphasizing sins of **omission**) to “*trespasses*” (emphasizing sins of **commission**, presumably easier to avoid). This would be strange if he were simply amplifying the fifth petition. The caution here has a **broader application**. In **chapter 18**, the Lord instructs his disciples on the need for forgiveness. This instruction begins with a

detailed protocol for dealing with offenses between believers. Note the use of the word “trespass.”

Mat 18:15 *Moreover if thy brother shall **trespass** against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

As a result of this instruction, Peter asks him,

Mat 18:21 *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

The Lord responds by telling a parable about a great lord who forgives his servants their debts, only to have one of those servants enforce a much lesser debt on one of his debtors. When he hears of the servant’s ingratitude, he condemns him to a worse punishment than the one to which he was originally liable. He concludes, again using the word “trespass,”

Mat 18:35 *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their **trespasses**.*

So far, we can see a clear link between the amplification in **ch. 6** and the lessons about forgiveness in **ch. 18**. But there is one more detail. In **Ch. 18**, between the Lord’s protocol for reconciliation and Peter’s question, he promises the disciples the **power of corporate prayer**:

Mat 18:18 *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

We need to forgive one another, not just because the Lord tells us to, but because it is a **critical condition for gathering together in prayer**. We cannot “agree on earth” about our petitions to heaven if we are not agreed on earth about other things, specifically our relation with one another. The exhortation to forgiveness is not just about obtaining forgiveness from God. It is about **ensuring our access to him in corporate prayer**, ensuring that we as a church remain in close communication with our heavenly Father. **Bitterness among believers blocks our communion with God.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Is it helpful or not to repeat this prayer verbatim every week in church service?

- 2) How would you characterize your prayers in terms of how much weight you give to various subjects compared to how Christ teaches us to pray here?
- 3) What is our expectation of the **coming kingdom** which we are petitioning God to usher in?
- 4) Why does Matthew place such importance on possessing the **spirit of forgiveness** as a prerequisite to approaching God in genuine worship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: This prayer is known familiarly as “The Lord’s Prayer,” but “**The Disciples’ Prayer**” would be a more accurate title. Jesus did not give this prayer to us to be memorized and recited a given number of times. In fact, He gave this prayer to keep us from using **vain repetitions**. Jesus did not say, “Pray in these words.” He said, “**Pray after this manner**”; that is, “Use this prayer as a pattern, not as a substitute.”

The purpose of prayer is to glorify God’s name and to ask for help to accomplish His will on earth. This prayer begins with **God’s interests**, not ours: God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will. **Robert Law** has said, “Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man’s will done in heaven, but for getting God’s will done on earth.” We have no right to ask God for anything that will dishonor His name, delay His kingdom, or disturb His will on earth.

It is worth noting that there are **no singular pronouns** in this prayer; they are all plural. It begins with “*Our Father*.” When we pray, we must remember that we are part of God’s worldwide family of believers. We have no right to ask for ourselves anything that would harm another member of the family. If we are praying in the will of God, the answer will be a blessing to all of God’s people in one way or another.

If we put God’s concerns first, then we can bring our own needs. God is concerned about our needs and knows them even before we mention them (**Matt. 6:8**). If this is the case, then why pray? Because prayer is the God-appointed way to have these needs met (see **James 4:1–3**). Prayer prepares us for the proper use of the answer. If we know our need, and if we voice it to God, trusting Him for His provision, then we will make better use of the answer than if God forced it on us without our asking.

John MacArthur: “*thy kingdom come*” – **God’s Program** -- The very word Messiah means “*anointed one*,” one with a **right to rule and reign**. You see, and this is so important for you to understand, God’s program centers on a person. It is not a plan without a person, it is not a program without a person; history focuses on a person – one who will come again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Such was the hope of Israel, such is the hope of the church – such is the hope of the world. Jesus Christ the King will consummate history. Someone has well said, “History is His story.” History is the redemptive unfolding of God’s plan in the person of Jesus Christ. We are moving to the place where Christ dominates. In Daniel, as we shall see tonight – and I can’t help but mingle the two sermons – in Daniel, as we see the image smashed by a flying stone coming through the air, that stone is representative of Christ, and then the stone fills the whole earth. You see, **Christ is inseparable from His Kingdom**. There is no plan apart from the person; the person is the plan. And to pray, “Thy kingdom come,” is nothing

more or less, nor could it be more or less, than “Christ reign, here and now.” That is what that is saying, and we’ll see it as we move through it this morning. . .

The **universal kingdom** in heaven is established; the prayer is let it come to this earth. This one little infinitesimal speck of sand in an infinite universe, that rebels against holy God, let it be brought into harmony, see, with the rest. The universal kingdom is total, and uninterrupted, and eternal, and we are simply able to acknowledge that. But what we’re praying here is, “Oh, God, stop the rebellion. Turn it around, and may You be reigning here as You’re reigning there.” It’s a great concept. Although His name is hallowed in heaven, it isn’t always hallowed on earth; although His will is done in heaven, it isn’t always done on earth; and although His kingdom is come in heaven, it isn’t come in all cases on earth, because there’s rebellion. The purpose, then, of the prayer is to **bring His kingdom to earth**, that He might put down sin, that He might put down rebellion, that He might put down evil, that He might bring in God’s hallowed name, God’s kingdom, God’s will. And you know, it’s wonderful to think about. That’s going to happen, by the way, and when it does happen there won’t be any more distinguishing between His universal and His earthly kingdom; they’ll blend into His eternal reign. They’ll blend into His eternal reign. . .

The kingdom comes in **conversion, commitment**, and finally, we’ll just call it coming again, or **consummation**. I believe, people, that one day the heavens will split wide open, and Jesus Christ will descend and plant His feet on the Mount of Olives, and in this world He will establish His kingdom. I believe that Revelation tells us it’ll be a **thousand-year millennial kingdom**, in which He will set things right and rule with a rod of iron, and the world will finally hear the answer to the prayer, “may the universal kingdom become the earthly kingdom.” And for a thousand years He will reign with a rod of iron, in righteousness, justice, truth and peace, at the end of which time **that kingdom will phase into the universal kingdom**, and never again will there be a distinction. But I believe this world will see a real reigning of Jesus Christ here, when the curse is reversed, and it’s like God meant it to be before the fall. There is a coming again.

Phil Newton: It is not the size of our prayers or the vocabulary of our prayers or the wordiness of our prayers that gets us a hearing with the Father. It is because we come to him in dependence upon the righteousness of Christ, casting ourselves upon his resources, and looking to him as our Father that grants our hearing. He “*knows what you need before you ask Him,*” so your prayer does not need to be an attempt at manipulating the Father to give you what you want. For you cannot. It is rather a time to quiet your heart before him, to pour out your needs, and to cling to him in faithful dependence.

Ray Pritchard: We do not pray to inform God of anything. Because God knows all things from the beginning to the end, he knows the future as well as he knows the past. It is not as if God “needs” our prayers in order to gather accurate information. God doesn’t need our prayers, but we need to pray. We pray in order to express our complete dependence on our Heavenly Father. We pray to build our faith. We pray because he is God and we are not. We pray because God has ordained that our prayers are part of his unfolding plan for the universe.

Alexander Maclaren: The words of Christ, like the works of God, are **inexhaustible**. Their **depth** is concealed beneath an **apparent simplicity** which the child and the savage can understand. But as we gaze upon them and try to fathom all their meaning, they open as the skies above us do when we look steadily into their blue chambers, or as the sea at our feet does when we bend over to pierce its clear obscure. The poorest and weakest learns from them the lesson of divine love

and a mighty helper; the reverent, loving contemplation of the profoundest souls, and the experience of all the ages discern ever new depths in them and feel that much remains unlearned. *'They did all eat and were filled, men, women, and children—and they took up of fragments that were left five baskets full.'*

This is especially true about the Lord's Prayer. We teach it to our children, and its divine simplicity becomes their lisping tongues and little folded hands. But the more we ponder it, and try to make it the model of our prayers, the more wonderful does its fulness of meaning appear, the more hard does it become to pray *'after this manner.'* There is everything in it: the loftiest revelation of God in His relations to us and in His purposes with the world; the setting forth of all our relations to Him, to His purposes, and to one another; the grandest vision of the future for mankind; the care for the smallest wants of each day.

As a theology, it smites into fragments all false, unworthy human thoughts of God. As an exposition of religion, the man who has drunk in its spirit has ceased from self-will and sin. As a foundation of social morals it lays deep the only basis for true human brotherhood, and he who lives in its atmosphere will live in charity and helpfulness with all mankind. As a guide for personal life, it gives us authoritatively the order and relative worth of all human desires, and with these the order and subordination of our pursuits and life's aims. As a prayer it is all comprehensive and intended to be so, holding within the perfect seven of its petitions, all for which we should come to God, and resting them all on His divine name, and closing them all with a chorus of thanksgiving. As a prophecy it opens the loftiest vision, beyond which none is possible, of the final transformation of this world into the kingdom in which God's will shall be perfectly done, and of the final deliverance from, all evil of the struggling, sinning, sorrowing souls of His children...

...*'After this manner pray ye.'* The question which is usually made prominent in thinking of these words is really a very subordinate one. Did Christ intend to establish a form, or only to give an example? Churchmen say, a form; Dissenters generally say, an example. But it would be better for both Churchmen and Dissenters to try to realise for themselves what *'this manner'* is.

TEXT: Matthew 6:16-18

TITLE: PRACTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS THE RIGHT WAY FROM THE RIGHT
MOTIVATION – EXAMPLE OF FASTING

BIG IDEA:

**PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR PUBLIC ACCLAIM FORFEITS HEAVENLY
REWARD – TRUE VS HYPOCRITICAL PIETY -- EXAMPLE OF FASTING**

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: In the first century, fasting apparently provided an exceptional opportunity for impressing others with the extent of one's piety. Here, as in the previous two species of piety, the activity was carefully designed so as to inflate personal pride (cf. **Luke 18:12**). Jesus tolerates no such conduct. Our righteousness is a matter of service to God and is to be directed to him. True righteousness is, in the last analysis, seen in secret. Only this kind of righteousness will be truly rewarded in any lasting way.

Warren Wiersbe: It is not wrong to fast, if we do it in the right way and with the right motive. Jesus fasted (**Matt. 4:2**), so did the members of the early church (**Acts 13:2**). Fasting helps to discipline the appetites of the body (**Luke 21:34**) and keep our spiritual priorities straight. But fasting must never become an opportunity for temptation (**1 Cor. 7:5**). Simply to deprive ourselves of a natural benefit (such as food or sleep) is not of itself fasting. We must devote ourselves to God and worship Him. Unless there is the devotion of the heart (see **Zech. 7**), there is no lasting spiritual benefit.

John MacArthur: Along with alms giving and certain prescribed prayers, **twice-weekly fasting** was one of the three major expressions of orthodox Judaism during Jesus' day. The scribes and Pharisees looked on these practices with great seriousness and were careful not only to follow them faithfully but to do so as publicly and ostentatiously as possible-ostensibly as a testimony to true godliness but in reality as a testimony to their own self-styled piety. When they gave alms, they blew trumpets "*in the synagogues and in the streets*" in order to "*be honored by men*" (**Matt. 6:2**). When they prayed "*in the synagogues and on the street corners*," they did so "*to be seen by men*" (**Mt 6:5**). And when they fasted, they "*put on a gloomy face*" and neglected their "*appearance in order to be seen fasting by men*" (**Mt 6:16**). They did not see religion as a matter of humility, repentance, or forgiveness, but as a matter of **ceremony** and **proud display**. And therefore the external rituals which they paraded as badges of godly righteousness actually marked them as **ungodly hypocrites**, as Jesus declared in each of the three verses just cited (cf. **Mt 5:20**).

Religious ritual and routine have always been dangers to true godliness. Many ceremonies, such as praying to saints and lighting a candle for a deceased relative are actually heretical. But even if it is not wrong in itself, when a form of praying, worshiping, or serving becomes the focus of attention, it becomes a barrier to true righteousness. It can keep an unbeliever from trusting in God and a believer from faithfully obeying Him. Even going to church, reading the Bible, saying grace at meals, and singing hymns can become lifeless routines in which true worship of God has no part...

Daniel Doriani: **But why should we fast?** According to **John Piper**, we fast to nourish our hunger for God and to reduce our hunger for the world. We ought to fast because our physical appetites are so intense that they threaten to overwhelm our hunger for God. **Piper** writes: “The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but mindless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.” . . .

We fast because fasting says, “I do not live for my appetites. I set aside physical desires, so that I may seek God in prayer, that I may desire God and his blessing.” When we fast, we battle the relentless stream of appetites. We demonstrate that we do not live by bread alone. When we fast, the body grows weak, and that reminds us that we do not live by our strength, our provision, and our planning.

Charles Spurgeon: The church of God would be far stronger to wrestle with this ungodly age if she were more given to prayer and fasting. There is a mighty efficacy in these two gospel ordinances. The first links us to heaven, the second separates us from earth. Prayer takes us into the banqueting-house of God; fasting overturns the surfeiting tables of earth. Prayer gives us to feed on the bread of heaven, and fasting delivers the soul from being encumbered with the fulness of bread which perishes. When Christians shall bring themselves up to the uttermost possibilities of spiritual vigor, then they will be able, by God’s Spirit working in them, to cast out devils which to-day, without the prayer and fasting, laugh them to scorn.

Grant Osborne: The purpose of fasting is to remind oneself that God is uppermost in life, even over basic human drives. So it is a God-directed activity, and it is completely wrong to want others to see your piety and be impressed. Rather, only God should know that one is fasting. . .

Fasting is an intensely personal activity centering entirely on one’s relationship with God, and it is an important Christian discipline for kingdom children in this interim age between the advents (**Matt 9:15**). Its purpose is to remind us that God is the most important aspect of our lives, far more important than major human drives like food or sex (**1 Cor 7:5**), and fasting places God first. To turn this into an attention-getting device and to prefer human admiration over the worship of God is blasphemous. **One’s entire devotion must be fixed on the Father.**

Fasting is **closely connected to prayer** and therefore connotes an intense relationship and communion with God. But too many use it almost as magic to get God to answer their prayers, i.e., to so convince God of their sincerity that he will say “yes” to their request. It is good to fast during times of crisis but to center more on God—and not in the mistaken belief that this practice will be more efficacious even than prayer.

I. (:16) FALSE PIETY IN FASTING

A. Warning against Seeking Public Acclaim in Fasting

“And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men.”

William Barclay: The great danger was that some people might fast as a sign of superior piety, that their fasting might be a deliberate demonstration, not to God, but to others, of how devoted and disciplined they were. That is precisely what Jesus was condemning. He was condemning fasting when it was used as an **ostentatious parade of piety**. The Jewish days of fasting were

Monday and Thursday. These were market days, and into the towns and villages, and especially into Jerusalem, there crowded the people from the country. The result was that those who were ostentatiously fasting would on those days have a bigger audience to see and admire their piety. There were many who took deliberate steps to see that others could not miss the fact that they were fasting. They walked through the streets with hair deliberately unkempt and dishevelled, with clothes deliberately soiled and disarrayed. They even went to the lengths of deliberately whitening their faces to accentuate their paleness. This was no act of humility; it was a deliberate act of spiritual pride and ostentation.

Walter Wilson: The crux of their pretense is nicely captured in the **wordplay** created by the juxtaposition of verbs with the *φαν-* stem: when they fast, the hypocrites make their faces “*unrecognizable*” (ἀφανίζουσιν) so that they will be “*recognized*” (φανῶσιν) by the people. Their sullenness, then, is not a true reflection of their disposition but part of an effort to appear pious to others.

John Piper: Few things feel more gratifying to the heart of fallen man than **being made much of** for our accomplishments, especially our moral and religious accomplishments... All of this we are prone to do because of our seemingly **insatiable appetite for the praise of men**. We want to be made much of. We want people to like us and admire us and speak well of us. It is a deadly drive. Jesus warned us, “*Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*”

B. Forfeiture of Heavenly Rewards

“Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Warren Wiersbe: But hypocrisy not only robs us of **character**, it also robs us of **spiritual rewards**. Instead of the eternal approval of God, we receive the shallow praise of men. We pray, but there are no answers. We fast, but the inner man shows no improvement. The spiritual life becomes hollow and lifeless. We miss the blessing of God here and now, and also lose the reward of God when Christ returns.

II. (:17-18) TRUE PIETY IN FASTING

A. (:17-18a) Instruction on Fasting Secretly

“But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret;”

J. C. Ryle: Let us learn from our Lord’s instruction about fasting the great importance of **cheerfulness** in our religion. Those words, anoint your head and wash your face, are full of deep meaning. They should teach us to aim at letting men see that we find Christianity makes us happy. Never let us forget that there is no religion in looking sad and gloomy. Are we dissatisfied with Christ’s wages and Christ’s service? Surely not! Then let us not look as if we were.

B. (:18b) Assurance of Heavenly Reward

“and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

John Nolland: Once again the embedded challenge is to take the purity of motivation which by definition must characterise totally private engagement with God out into the complexities of

normal life where others necessarily see what we do.

Phil Newton: In our day it seems the most common thing is for people to announce that they are fasting or to tell about their fast. I received a booklet from a Baptist pastor several years ago telling about his 40-day fast, and how that became the key to his spiritual growth and his church's growth. Then he outlined in true-Baptist program fashion how to institute such a fast in one's own life. But Jesus tells us... Let this be between you and the Lord. The Lord sees in secret and rewards accordingly.

F. B. Meyer: How fondly Jesus repeats these words (**Matthew 6:4, 6, 18**). Though compelled to live so much in the public gaze of men, his heart was always sighing for the secret place of fellowship with his Father, who waited for Him there.

Of course, the main object of those paragraphs was to withdraw his disciples from the **excessive outwardness** of the age in which He spoke, and which necessarily detracted from the **singleness, directness, and simplicity** of the religious life. It is impossible to perform our religious duties before men, without insensibly considering what impression we are producing, and how far their estimation of us is being enhanced. And in so far as we seek these things, the stream is contaminated with mud and silt, and becomes turbid. We have just as much religious life as we show to God in secret — just that, no less, no more. Whatever is not wrought between thee and God, with no record but his eye, is chaff which the wind driveth away.

Here is a test for our alms, our prayers, and our fasting from sin and self-indulgence. If we do any of these to maintain or increase the consideration that men have of us, they count for nothing in the eye of God. But **whatever is done for Him alone** will secure his inevitable notice and reward. Dwell on that very definite assurance: "*Shall recompense thee.*" There is no doubt about it. For every petition breathed into his ear; for every sigh and tear; for every abstinence from sin and self there will be a certain recompense, after the Divine measure. Such seeds shall have a prolific harvest. Seek then the **secret place**, where prying eyes cannot follow, and curious ears cannot overhear.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is fasting such an uncommon practice among Christians today?
- 2) What made fasting an attractive religious practice for the Pharisees?
- 3) What is the connection between fasting and prayer?
- 4) What are some practical suggestions for observing a special day of fasting?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

D. A. Carson: Under Mosaic legislation, fasting was commanded only on the Day of Atonement (**Lev 16:29–31; 23:27–32; Nu 29:7**); during the exile regular fasts of remembrance were

instituted (**Zec 7:3–5; 8:19**). In addition to these national fasts, both OT and NT describe personal or group fasts with a variety of purposes, especially to indicate and foster self-humiliation before God, often in connection with the confession of sins (e.g., **Ne 9:1–2; Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 5; Da 9:2–20; 10:2–3; Jnh 3:5; Ac 9:9**) or to lay some special petition before the Lord, sometimes out of anguish, danger, or desperation (**Ex 24:18; Jdg 20:26; 2Sa 1:12; 2Ch 20:3; Ezr 8:21–23; Est 4:16; Mt 4:1–2; Ac 13:1–3; 14:23**). It may belong to the realm of normal Christian self-discipline (**1Co 9:24–27**; cf. **Php 3:19; 1Pe 4:3**), but already in the OT, it is bitterly excoriated when it is purely formal and largely hypocritical (**Isa 58:3–7; Jer 14:12; Zec 7:5–6**)—when, for instance, men fasted but did not share their food with the hungry (**Isa 58:1–7**).

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees fasted twice a week (**Lk 18:12**; cf. Str-B, 2:242ff.), probably Monday and Thursday (m. Ta'an. 1:4–7). Some devout people (e.g., Anna) fasted often (**Lk 2:37**). But such voluntary fasts provided marvelous opportunities for religious showmanship to gain a reputation for piety. One could adopt an air that was “somber” (or “downcast,” **Lk 24:17**, the only other place in the NT where the word *skythrōpos* is used) and disfigure oneself, perhaps by not washing and shaving, by sprinkling ashes on one's head to signify deep contrition or self-abnegation, or by omitting normal use of oil to signify deep distress (cf. **2Sa 14:2; Da 10:3**). The point is not that there was no genuine contrition but that these hypocrites were **purposely drawing attention to themselves**. They wanted the plaudits of men and got them. And that's all they got. . .

Yet Jesus, far from banning fasting, **assumes his disciples will fast**, even as he assumes they will give alms and pray (**vv.3, 6**). His disciples may not fast at the moment, for the messianic bridegroom is with them and it is the time for joy (**9:14–17**). But the time will come when they will fast (**9:15**). (Observe in passing that here Jesus assumes the continued existence of his disciples after his departure.) What he condemns is **ostentation in fasting**. Moreover, he forbids any sign at all that a fast has been undertaken, because the human heart is so mixed in its motives that the desire to seek God will be diluted by the desire for human praise, thus vitiating the fast.

Washing and anointing with oil (**v.17**) were merely normal steps in hygiene. Oil does not here symbolize extravagant joy but normal body care (cf. **Ru 3:3; 2Sa 12:20; Pss 23:5; 104:15; 133:2; Ecc 9:8; Lk 7:46**; cf. NIDNTT, 1:120). The point of **v.18** is not to draw attention to oneself, whether by somber mien or extravagant joy. Jesus desires reticence, not deception. And the Father, who sees in secret, will provide the reward.

R. T. France: The sort of fasting envisaged here is presumably that of **choice** rather than of **routine**, since there would be little point in putting on a show to impress people with one's fasting if it was already known and expected. In **9:14–17** we shall find the voluntary fasting of the Pharisees used as a stick with which to beat the Jesus movement, which is thus alleged not to take its religious obligations sufficiently seriously; the argument of course assumes that other people knew the Pharisees were fasting. . . the disciples' washing and anointing are part of the everyday bodily care which were sometimes forgone as part of the self-affliction involved in fasting (m. Ta'an. 1:6). Anointing, like the washing of the face, represents normal cosmetics (**Luke 7:46**; cf. **Ruth 3:3; 2 Sam 14:2; 2 Chr 28:15; Dan 10:3**), not an artificial show of gaiety; everything is to be **outwardly normal**. Fasting, like alms-giving and prayer, is to be between the disciple and God. No-one else should know.

William Barclay: In Jewish fasting, there were really three main ideas in people's minds.

(1) Fasting was a deliberate attempt to draw the attention of God to the person who fasted. This was a very primitive idea. The fasting was designed to attract God's attention, and to make him notice those who thus denied themselves.

(2) Fasting was a deliberate attempt to prove that penitence was real. Fasting was a guarantee of the sincerity of words and prayers. It is easy to see that there was a danger here, for that which was meant to be a proof of repentance could very easily come to be regarded as a substitute for repentance.

(3) A great deal of fasting was vicarious, done on behalf of others. It was not designed to save an individual's own soul so much as to move God to liberate the nation from its distresses. It was as if specially devoted people said: "Ordinary people cannot do this. They are too involved in work and in the world. We will do this extra thing to counterbalance the necessary deficiency of piety in others."

Such then was the Jewish theory and practice of fasting. . .

There are very few ordinary people in whose lives fasting plays any part at all. And yet there are many reasons why a wise fasting is an excellent thing.

(1) **Fasting is good for health.** Many of us live a life in which it is easy to get soft and flabby. It is even possible for people to reach the stage when they live to eat instead of eating to live. It would do a great many people a great deal of physical good to practise fasting far more than they do.

(2) **Fasting is good for self-discipline.** It is easy to become almost completely self-indulgent. It is easy to come to a stage when we deny ourselves nothing which it is in our power to have or to pay for. It would do most of us a great deal of good if for some time each week we set aside our wishes and our desires, and exercised a stringent and an antiseptic self-discipline.

(3) **Fasting preserves us from becoming the slaves of a habit.** There are not a few of us who indulge in certain habits because we find it impossible to stop them. They have become so essential that we cannot break them; we develop such a craving for certain things that what ought to be a pleasure has become a necessity; and to be cut off from the thing which we have learned to desire so much can be a purgatory. If we practised a wise fasting, no pleasure would become a chain, and no habit would come to rule our lives. We would have control over our pleasures, and not our pleasures over us.

(4) **Fasting preserves the ability to do without things.** One of the great tests in life is the number of things which we have come to regard as essential. Clearly, the fewer things we regard as essentials, the more independent we will be. When all kinds of things become essentials, we are at the mercy of the luxuries of life. It is no bad thing to walk down a street of shop windows, and to look in at them and remind ourselves of all the things that we can do without. Some kind of fasting preserves the ability to do without the things which should never be allowed to become essentials.

(5) **Fasting makes us appreciate things all the more.** It may be that there was a time in life when some pleasure came so seldom that we really enjoyed it when it did come. It may be that nowadays the appetite is blunted; the palate is dulled; the edge has gone off it. What was once a sharp pleasure has become simply a drug which we cannot do without. Fasting keeps the thrill in pleasure by keeping pleasure always fresh and new.

Fasting has gone almost completely out of the lives of ordinary people. Jesus condemned the wrong kind of fasting, but he never meant that fasting should be completely eliminated from life and living. We would do well to practise it in our own way and according to our own need.

Charles Swindoll: SEVEN BENEFITS OF FASTING

1. Fasting helps us concentrate attention on issues that require prayer.
2. Fasting enables us to rearrange our priorities in order to focus on things that really matter.
3. Fasting encourages us to examine our lives and inspect our motives.
4. Fasting assists us when we're seeking the Lord's will.
5. Fasting strengthens our self-control and discipline.
6. Fasting brings us back to basics and simplifies our lives.
7. Fasting equips us to recover from grief and endure sorrow.

Daniel Doriani: HOW TO FAST: PRACTICAL MATTERS

1. Fast regularly. Jesus assumes his disciples will fast. He says "*when you fast,*" not "*if you fast*" (**Matt. 6:16**). Jesus fasted, and he predicted that his disciples would fast after he left them (**Matt. 4:2; 9:15**). Fasting has its ups and downs as a discipline. The Puritans loved corporate fasts, but in recent decades, fasting fell into neglect. **Richard Foster** found that not one book was published on fasting from 1861 to 1954. **John Wesley** wisely observed, "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it."

2. Fast prayerfully. Almost every culture has some concept of fasting. Many fast to show sorrow. Others fast to deprive themselves, thinking self-deprivation pleases their gods. Today some fast for their health, to purge and recalibrate their bodies. Such fasting may be beneficial. But Christians fast to **dedicate themselves to God and to prayer**. We need not pray all day; we need not forsake all regular activities. But we do pray more as we fast.

3. Fast secretly. Praise from men can be addictive. It is gratifying to be noticed for our accomplishments. Jesus says, "*When you fast, do not look somber. . . . Wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting*" (**6:16–18**). If you aim to be noticed and praised by men, you will probably succeed. People of faith will notice and admire your discipline. But the Bible calls it **pride** and **hypocrisy**. Someone may ask, "How is it hypocrisy for people to know what you are doing? What is wrong with letting your deeds show? That is simple honesty." But the public display of our works poisons the well. When we fast or give away money and seek credit for it, we do it to impress others and not to seek God. We pretend to act for God, when really we act for ourselves and our audience. We are posers, feigning love for God.

4. However, we may fast corporately, so that believers can join together to pray for a great matter. The people of Israel did this, the apostles did this (**Acts 13–14**), and in times past the church often did this. As long as the essential motive is to seek God, there is no harm if others discover that we are fasting, especially if they are seeking God the same way beside us.

5. Fast humbly. There is a proud religion—legalism—that makes its rules and imposes them on others for the glory of exercising authority. It says, “*Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!*” There is also a self-made religion that features “*self-abasement and severe treatment of the body*.” These, Paul says, “*are of no value against fleshly indulgence*” (Col. 2:21, 23 NASB). The fleshly indulgence that Paul has in mind here is actually the sin of pride, not gluttony. C. S. Lewis said: “Fasting asserts the will against the appetite—the reward being self-mastery and the danger pride. . . . Ascetic practices which, in themselves, strengthen the will, are only useful insofar as they enable the will to put its own house in order, as a preparation for offering the whole man to God.”

Fasting is a means to an end—saying good-bye to the power of our possessions, so that we may give ourselves to the reign of God (Luke 14:33). Apart from that end, fasting can be rebellion, a desire to master the animal self and to secure the triumph of the will.

6. Fast creatively. If a diabetic cannot fast for physical reasons, she can lay aside television to devote herself to God. Some people eat a slice of plain bread when they fast. It cuts their hunger, so they think about food less and remember their goal. The issue is broader than food. Fasting includes “abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some spiritual purpose.” We could “fast” from any physical blessing that threatens to become our first love. One person could fast from televised news for a week and devote that time to God. Another could fast from shopping for anything but food.

Gregory Brown: How to Fast Properly

In Matthew 6, Christ deals with three commonly abused religious practices in Israel—giving, praying, and fasting. The religious leaders had made things that were good in and of themselves into bad things. The rituals of giving, praying, and fasting had become a form of self-worship. They did those acts to be seen and praised by men instead of to honor God and receive his approval.

It is appropriate that right after teaching about proper prayer, Christ focuses on fasting. One can pray without fasting, but one cannot fast biblically without prayer. They go together. Therefore, in one sense, Christ is continuing his teaching on prayer. . .

Application Question: How should we practice proper fasting?

1. When fasting, we must practice secrecy. Of course, when we choose to not eat, others may notice. But we should practice, as much as possible, not sharing this discipline with others. Why? It’s not because telling others is bad; it’s because our hearts are bad. They are too prone to spiritual pride and loving the praise of others. We practice secrecy to protect our sin-filled hearts. Certainly, there may be times to share that we are fasting—such as with a corporate fast or for accountability sake—but as a general principle, we must practice secrecy.

2. When fasting, we should act normal. When Christ said that the disciples should put oil on their heads and wash their faces, he was not describing extravagant practices. These were normal acts of body care and grooming in ancient times. Oil was often scented and used, at least partially, as perfume.

3. When fasting, we must focus on God alone and not others. He is the purpose of our fast—to seek his face in a special way. As we do this, God will reward our faithfulness.

4. When fasting, we must fervently pray. As mentioned, one can pray without fasting, but not fast without praying. In every biblical account, the two are linked together. If we have no extra prayer and time in God's Word, we are just not eating—which, by itself, brings no spiritual benefit.

5. When fasting, we must practice obedient living. In **Zechariah 7:4-5** and **8-10**, God rebukes Israel for fasting without the accompanying righteousness.

Reasons to Fast

- 1. Fasting is appropriate when mourning over some great pain or loss.**
- 2. Fasting is appropriate when mourning over sin.**
- 3. Fasting is an appropriate means of seeking to conquer sin and temptation.**
- 4. Fasting is appropriate when seeking God's favor in a desperate situation.**
- 5. Fasting is appropriate when seeking wisdom and revelation from God.**
- 6. Fasting is appropriate when preparing for some great ministry or task.**
- 7. Fasting is appropriate for developing self-control.**
- 8. Fasting is appropriate in helping us extend mercy to others.**

<https://bible.org/seriespage/27-how-fast-properly-matthew-616-18>

G. Campbell Morgan: These are three great subjects, and they mark the revelation of man to God – **alms**, and **prayer**, and **fasting**. Deny the Divine existence, wholly or in part, and wholly or in part all these will cease. As a man loses his hold upon God, or as a man comes to deny God altogether, these things cease in the inverted order. First, fasting ceases. Then prayer ceases, for a man cannot pray unless he fasts – that inner fasting of the life; if that cease, prayer will cease. And then alms will cease. A man gives less now than when he had less to give, because he has been so very busy getting, that he forgot to pray. He forgot that not in making, but in fasting, is the real strength of life, and there is always degradation and deterioration, when that is forgotten.

These words and these deeds and these activities must be undertaken in actual relationship with Him. Alms must be given in the consciousness of His observation. Prayer must be offered in the place of loneliness with Him. Fasting must be solely a means of helping communion with Him.

TEXT: Matthew 6:19-24

TITLE: KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS WEALTH – WHAT DO YOU TREASURE?

BIG IDEA:

UNDIVIDED ALLEGIANCE AS CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM MUST BE REFLECTED IN OUR VALUE SYSTEM, VISION AND VOLITION (LOYALTIES)

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The final of the three central sections of the Sermon on the Mount concerns the community citizen's social responsibilities toward possessions (6:19–34) and others (7:1–12). In the former section, 6:19–21 establishes the theme (earthly vs. heavenly treasures), and 6:22–24 carries it further, centering on the choice between two masters. Then 6:25–34 contrasts worry with trusting God for one's needs. Thus 6:19–34 flows naturally out of 6:1–18 in the sense that it continues the emphasis on the **centrality of God over earthly concerns**. In 6:1–18 Jesus centered on the vertical aspect of piety; here he centers on the horizontal aspect of human needs, but the message is the same: center on God and his place in our lives, not on self and worldly concerns. . .

Jesus now turns from piety to possessions. Social values begin with choices regarding priorities. **What is most important in one's life?** Jesus narrows this down to the most critical tension—God or this world. Everyone seeks treasure and stores up savings for the future. The question is which will be the master of one's life: God or earthly concerns. Every person will be a slave to something, and the choice centers on what one treasures most. The ultimate choice is between the things of God and the things of earth. What you see is what you will get. If it is the earthly that is in control, the result will be anxiety. If God is in control, the result will be trust.

John Nolland: There is an easy transition from the call in 6:1-18 to behaviour that God will secretly reward to the challenge here to store up treasure in heaven. Indeed, we have here a fitting conclusion generalising from vv. 1-18. However, vv. 19-21 is a **transitional piece**, and v. 19 also looks forward to v. 24 in which devotion to 'mammon' is somewhat equivalent to 'stor[ing] up ... treasures on the earth'. Vv. 19-24 function as a unit in which the importance of the challenges in vv. 19-21, 24 to single-mindedness are underlined by a centrally positioned call in vv. 22-23 to have **clear vision**.

R. T. France: There is a clear **continuity** of thought between the idea of a secret, heavenly reward in vv. 1–6, 16–18 and the subject of treasure in heaven which opens this section of the discourse with its focus on the disciple's attitude to material security.

Daniel Doriani: Chapter 6 describes three of the forces, the false gods, that keep people from seeking the kingdom. The first is reputation or human honor (6:1–18). The second is wealth (6:19–24). The third is security (6:25–34), which Jesus tackles in terms of worry.

Michael Wilson: Depictions of people praying for the actualization of God's reign "on earth" (6:10) lead naturally to depictions showing how God's people ought to **align their values** with those of the impending kingdom. Specifically, the image of treasures "on earth" (6:19) communicates how the desire for material wealth often competes with spiritual priorities over the

direction of a person's core commitments, or "heart." Since it is not possible to live in service to both God and money, Jesus demands of his followers undivided allegiance to the kingdom, a requirement dramatized through language that prompts the reader to imagine a human body that is full of either light or darkness, or a slave who tries to serve two masters. . .

The pursuit of earthly goods, meanwhile, results not only in loss but also in failure to acquire imperishable goods. The text assumes that the work of gathering a treasure of some kind represents a **basic human drive**, and that this drive (signified in **6:21** by the "heart") can be guided in only one direction. Since Jesus's followers must "*love the Lord your God with all your heart*" (**22:37**), it is not possible for them to love both God and mammon (**6:24**). **The use of material possessions, then, serves as a critical barometer of one's commitment.** A similar appropriation of the *topos* informs the claim in **Job 36.3**: "*My heart is not fixed on earthly concerns, since the earth and those who dwell in it are unstable; rather my heart is fixed on heavenly concerns, for there is no upset in heaven.*"

Those whose hearts are oriented toward God when they give alms have not only treasure in heaven (cf. **6:20–21**; cf. **6:3–4**) but also selves that are full of light (**6:22**; cf. **5:14–16**). Conversely, those whose hearts are not oriented toward God when they give alms not only fail to have treasure in heaven (**6:19**; cf. **6:2**) but also have selves consumed by darkness (**6:23**; cf. **15:14**).

Richard Gardner: In **verses 19-24** we find a cluster of three sayings, which Matthew uses to develop the theme of **a life with one focus**.

John MacArthur: Now in **chapter 6:19** and following He says you must also have the right view toward wealth, luxury, **verses 19 to 24**; and watch this, then from **25 to 34**, you must have the right view of necessities. So He's talking about things here: First luxuries and then necessities.

And so we have to **make a choice**.

- We make a choice, first of all, **verses 19** and **20** whether we lay up our treasure on earth or in heaven.
- We make a choice, secondly, in **verses 22** and **23** of whether we are going to exist in light or whether we're going to exist in darkness.
- We make another choice in **verse 24** whether our Master will be God or our master will be money, because it can't be both.

So the Lord really gives us three choices, which really come together to be one choice, and that is to **choose properly how we handle our wealth**.

E. Michael Green: The worldliness that we are called to avoid can take a religious or a secular form. And so we differ from those who are not Christians both in our devotional life, which Jesus has dealt with in the first half of the chapter, and also in our **ambitions**. These are disclosed principally in two ways: '**What do we really value?**' and '**What do we worry about?**' It is to these twin areas of money and worry that Jesus now turns, as he seeks to show with embarrassing directness what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom.

I. (:19-21) THE TWO TREASURES -- SEEK HEAVENLY TREASURES RATHER THAN EARTHLY -- WHERE IS OUR TREASURE?

William Barclay: So Jesus warns people against three kinds of pleasures and possessions.

(1) He warns them against **the pleasures which will wear out like an old suit of clothes**. The finest garment in the world, moths or no moths, will in the end disintegrate. All purely physical pleasures have a way of wearing out. At each successive enjoyment of them, the thrill becomes less thrilling. It requires more of them to produce the same effect. They are like a drug which loses its initial potency and which becomes increasingly less effective. It is foolish to look for pleasure in things which are bound to offer diminishing returns.

(2) He warns against **the pleasures which can be eroded away**. The grain store is the inevitable prey of the marauding rats and mice which nibble and gnaw away the grain. There are certain pleasures which inevitably lose their attraction as we grow older. It may be that we become physically less able to enjoy them; it may be that as our minds mature they cease in any sense to satisfy us. In life, we should never give our hearts to the joys the years can take away; we should find our delight in the things whose thrill time is powerless to erode.

(3) He warns against **the pleasures which can be stolen away**. All material things are like that; not one of them is secure; and if people build their happiness on them, they are building on a most insecure basis. Suppose a person's life is so arranged that happiness depends on the possession of money; suppose a recession and economic crash comes and that person wakes up to find the money gone; then, with the wealth, happiness has also gone.

If we are wise, we will build our happiness on things which we cannot lose, things which are independent of the chances and the changes of this life.

A. (:19) Futility of Seeking Earthly Treasures

1. Command – Expressed Negatively

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth,”

Grant Osborne: The present tense directed at stopping future actions (*“don't at any time store up”*).

Charles Swindoll: An important point needs to be made here: Jesus wasn't prohibiting possessions per se. Nowhere does the Bible forbid ownership of property or having possessions. Riches and honor come from God, who ought to be thanked for material blessings when He graciously gives them (**1 Chr. 29:12-13**). Nor was Jesus warning against planning for the future. Those who would use this passage to teach that buying insurance or investing for retirement constitutes a lack of faith are reading this in a way the Lord didn't intend. Scripture exhorts us to plan wisely and especially to provide for our families (**1 Tim. 5:8; Jas. 4:13-15**). The Lord also was not dissuading us from enjoying the gifts He gives us (see **1 Tim. 6:17**).

Rather, Jesus was denouncing a life focused on the accumulation of more and more, warning against selfishness and an extravagant lifestyle. He used the term translated *“treasures”* purposefully. The Greek term *thēsauros* [2344] is used to refer to the gold, frankincense, and myrrh given to Jesus by the magi (**Matt. 2:11**) and to *“the treasures of Egypt”* that Moses forsook (**Heb. 11:26**). What is being condemned is a this-worldly hoarding of wealth and riches, setting one's heart and mind on these things. The Bible is clear that *“those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches”* are wicked (**Ps. 49:5-6**).

Craig Blomberg: To avoid those dangers, rich Christians must be characterized by generosity in giving and meticulous stewardship in using money for the Lord's work.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Biblical Examples of Laying up Treasures on Earth:

a) Example of Achan (Joshua 6:17-18, 7:1-26).

b) Example of Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-22)

2. Reason – Leads to Futility

*“where moth and rust destroy,
and where thieves break in and steal.”*

Daniel Doriani: But Jesus does ban the godless, selfish accumulation of goods—heaping up possessions and savings beyond the ability to enjoy or spend them. James warns those who live in luxury and self-indulgence, *“You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter”*—that is, judgment day (**James 5:5**). The same godlessness that leads to hoarding also leads to a hard heart—to neglect of the needy and exploitation of the poor (**James 5:4–6**).

Jesus also forbids the dream that life consists in the abundance of our possessions (**Luke 12:15**). He warns us not to tether our hearts to this world. When Jesus says, *“Don’t lay up treasures,”* he does not forbid joyful living or financial planning. He does forbid greed and love of money and selfish luxury.

B. (:20) Security of Seeking Heavenly Treasures

1. Command – Expressed Positively

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,”

Daniel Doriani: We lay up treasures in heaven by investing in God’s causes and God’s people. The effects of such investments last forever. We store treasures in heaven by worshiping God, growing in knowledge and grace, and growing in love for God and neighbor. Financially, we store treasures in heaven by using money for kingdom causes, by giving money to the church, to missions, to Christian schools, to the poor. When we store treasures in heaven by investing our money in God’s people, our investment will bear dividends for eternity. The Greek roots of the word “philanthropy”—meaning “love” and “mankind”—are apt. By giving, we demonstrate our love for mankind.

2. Reason – Leads to Security

*“where neither moth nor rust destroys,
and where thieves do not break in or steal;”*

John Nolland: Heavenly treasure is vulnerable neither to nature nor to one’s fellow humans. What might be involved in storing up treasures in heaven has already been made clear by the principles established in vv. 1-18.

C. (:21) Conclusion: Your Heart Will Align with Your Treasure

“for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Grant Osborne: Jesus concludes that what people “treasure” becomes the guiding principle for their whole life. “Heart” (καρδία) is the whole being, referring to “the inner person, the seat of

understanding, knowledge, and will” (EDNT, 2:250). So it means we give **total loyalty** to that which is of **ultimate significance**. Jesus is asking whether worldly wealth or the things of God will rule our lives. As **Plummer** puts it, “We must store our wealth above, in order that our hearts may be drawn upwards. The two act and react upon one another.”

Charles Swindoll: Those words should prompt us to do some soul-searching. Ask yourself some questions:

- Am I living unselfishly?
- Do I demonstrate generosity and care for others? Or am I tightfisted and reluctant to help those in need?
- Do I know when I have acquired enough? Or am I stuck in an endless race grasping for more and more?
- Do I allow things to lure me into a materialistic lifestyle?
- Am I just plain greedy? Or am I content with what God has given me and satisfied with His provision for my simple needs?

II. (:22-23) THE TWO VISIONS – CLARITY OF FOCUS VS DISTORTION – CHOOSE LIGHT OVER DARKNESS – WHERE IS OUR FOCUS?

D. A. Carson: Jesus is therefore saying either

- (1) that the man who “divides his interest and tries to focus on both God and possessions ... has no clear vision, and will live without clear orientation or direction” (**Filson**)—an interpretation nicely compatible with v.24; or
- (2) that the man who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he is going; he is morally and spiritually blind—an interpretation compatible with vv.19–21.

A. Role of the Eye as Essential to the Illumination of the Body

“The lamp of the body is the eye;”

R. T. France: Perhaps we can be no more definite than to say that the imagery depends on light being necessary for the proper functioning of the body (person) and that this light is in some way dependent on the condition of the eye.

William Barclay: The Distorted Vision

The idea behind this passage is one of childlike simplicity. The eye is regarded as the window by which the light gets into the whole body. The color and state of a window decide what light gets into a room. If the window is clear, clean, and undistorted, the light will come flooding into the room, and will illuminate every corner of it. If the glass of the window is colored or frosted, distorted, dirty, or obscure, the light will be hindered, and the room will not be lit up... So then, says Jesus, the light which gets into any man’s heart and soul and being depends on the spiritual state of the eye through which it has to pass, for the eye is the window of the whole body.

B. Contrast in Spiritual Illumination Based on Your Approach to Wealth

1. Clarity of Vision (Related to Generosity)

“if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.”

2. Distortion (Related to Stinginess)

“But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus poses a diagnostic question: if your eye is perpetually set on riches, ask yourself, “Why am I fixated on material things?” The answer is, “Because you have given your heart to material things.” It is right, therefore, to repent and ask God to redirect your heart toward him.

R. T. France: The meaning “generous” is suggested by the use of the derivative noun *haplotēs* for “generosity” in e.g. **Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13**, and the adverb *haplōs* in **Jas 1:5** for God’s giving “generously” (cf. LXX **1 Chron 29:17; Prov 11:25**). If generosity is to be understood as the outworking of the “simplicity,” “openness” denoted by *haplous*, this would form a direct counterpart to the phrase *ophthalmos ponēros*, “bad eye,” which is used for a **jealous stinginess in 20:15**. In view of the recognized meaning of the “bad eye” to denote selfish greed or meanness, it seems likely that this saying is meant to indicate that one indication of a person’s spiritual health is their generosity or lack of it in the use of their material possessions. So this rather obscure little saying seems to be using a word-play which the English translator cannot reproduce without extensive paraphrase in order to commend either single-mindedness (in pursuing the values of the kingdom of heaven) or generosity, or more likely both, as a key to the effective life of a disciple.

Charles Swindoll: In this section, Jesus was essentially talking about the need for a **singularity of mind-set**. We know how sight works—light reflected from objects enters our eyes and the images then enter our minds. The goal of the righteous is that the light that enters their eyes is “clear.” The word translated “clear” is *haplous* [573], which means “motivated by singleness of purpose so as to be open and aboveboard, single, without guile, sincere, straightforward.”

In other words, we need to have **clarity of focus**, not double-sightedness or double-mindedness. One commentator puts it well: “Jesus, using this language metaphorically, affirms that if a man’s spiritual sense is healthy and his affections directed towards heavenly treasure, his whole personality will be without blemish; but if that spiritual sense is diseased by a false sense of values, or by covetousness, or by a grudging ungenerous spirit, he will rapidly become disingenuous.”

Seen in this light, the need for a single-minded focus on the things of heaven instead of a blurred double vision held captive by the things of earth leads directly to Jesus’ clear conclusion in **6:24**: “*You cannot serve God and wealth.*” Many Christians believe they can balance the passionate pursuit of Christ with the passionate pursuit of riches, or give equal time to both of these. But in the Christian life that has enthroned Jesus alone as Lord, there is no room for competing loyalties. Our possessions and pursuits must be submitted to Christ’s plans and priorities, not the other way around.

Donald Hagner: These difficult verses can only be understood correctly by noting the **context** in which they stand, i.e., the pericopes on either side, both of which refer to **concern with wealth**. The *ἀπλοῦς* eye and the *πονηρός* eye are not to be understood physically as a healthy and a diseased eye (contra **Guelich**, Sermon). The eye is referred to metaphorically in this passage. The *πονηρός* eye is the “evil eye” of Near Eastern cultures—an eye that enviously covets what belongs to another, a greedy or avaricious eye (see **G. Harder**, TDNT 6:555–56). For the Jewish use of the expression in this sense, see m. ’Abot 2:12, 15; 5:16, 22 (= **Danby**, 2:9, 11; 5:13, 19). Other references to an evil eye in this sense are found in **Matt 20:15** and **Mark 7:22** (cf. Sir 14:8–10; Tob 4:7). The *ἀπλοῦς* eye, given the symmetrical structure of the passage, is probably

the opposite of the evil eye, namely, a generous eye, as in the cognate adverb ἀπλωῶς, “generously,” in **Jas 1:5** (cf. **Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13**)—an eye that is not attached to wealth but is ready to part with it. It is easier to understand ἀπλωῶς as a synonym for the expected ἀγαθός, “good,” in the ethical sense argued above, than to understand πονηρός in the physiological sense of “unusual” (as does **Guelich**, Sermon, following **Sjöberg**). On the other hand, ἀπλωῶς can also mean “single” (BAGD, 86a) in the sense of devotion to one purpose, a meaning consonant with the point made by the following verse (v 24). Cf. too “singleness [ἀπλότης] of heart” in **Eph 6:5**.

Bob Deffinbaugh: Here are two prime examples of men who had **good eternal vision**: they saw clearly, they saw eternity, and they saw the reward versus the temporary things that were passing on by. Because of this faith, God used them in mighty ways.

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, in whom it was said, IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (**Hebrews 11:17-18**).*

C. Conclusion: Need for Spiritual Illumination or You Will Live in Darkness

“If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Richard Gardner: A more likely interpretation, however, is that Jesus is dealing with need for a **clear vision of God’s will** and telling a parable to make his point. When we have good (healthy) eyes, our world is one of light, and we see and walk clearly. But when our eyesight is poor (unhealthy), life is a dark and blurry affair. So it is, Jesus suggests, with the spiritual realm. If we have only a shadowy awareness of God’s will, how dark life will be! If on the other hand our vision is focused on God and illumined by God (cf. **Iss. 4:1-6**), our lives will be full of light.

Van Parunak: Now the organ of revelation is not a city or a lamp, but the individual’s eye, which can be either “single” or “evil.” The Jews are condemned for their distorted perception. If their eyes were working properly, they would recognize the Lord, but there is a defect that keeps them from perceiving.

What kind of defect is in view? The basic meaning of ἀπλωῶς is “single, without guile, sincere, straightforward” (BDAG). The “single eye” perceives things as they are, without distortion. Correspondingly, the “evil eye” insists on distorting the truth and explaining it away. The Jewish attitude toward the Lord illustrates the distortion of the “evil eye.” They are so committed to their own tradition that they could not recognize the obvious evidence from the Scriptures and from the Lord’s works that identify him as the Messiah. “Single” is a good translation, if we understand it of “clear” vision, contrasted with “double” or “blurred” vision.

This understanding fits well with the context in Matthew 6. Here, we are confronted with a clear conflict in claims to our loyalty. We can serve either God or mammon. We can seek treasure either on earth or in heaven. The “single eye” sees this clearly. It recognizes the folly of claiming to serve the Lord while actually following after material things. But the “evil eye” is distorted and blurred. It thinks it can have it both ways, and rationalizes away the clear claims of God on the devotion of his people.

III. (:24) THE TWO MASTERS -- SERVE GOD ALONE RATHER THAN BEING DOUBLEMINDED – WHO (OR WHAT) ARE YOU SERVING?

A. Thesis Statement – Impossibility of Divided Loyalty

“No one can serve two masters;”

Grant Osborne: With two masters it would be impossible to give either total allegiance. In the case of **God** and **wealth** this is especially true because the two demand opposite things of the slave: possessions demand self-centered living, while God demands that we serve others. Moreover, God’s demands are absolute; there is no room for serving wealth.

B. Any Attempt at Divided Loyalty Will Fail

*“for either he will hate the one and love the other,
or he will hold to one and despise the other.”*

D. A. Carson: Either God is served with a single-eyed devotion, or he is not served at all. Attempts at divided loyalty betray not partial commitment to discipleship but deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

C. Conclusion: Restatement of Thesis Statement with Specific Application

“You cannot serve God and mammon.”

As **Jim Elliot** wrote, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Daniel Doriani: This is suggested by the name Jesus chooses for money. The term “*mammon*,” means “*trusted thing*” or “that which one trusts.” The name is apt, for **we are prone to trust money**. Remember the prayer, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches. . . . Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’*” (**Prov. 30:8–9**; cf. **Hos. 13:6**). Jeremiah commands, “*Let not . . . the rich man boast of his riches*” (**Jer. 9:23**). Ezekiel says, “*Because of your wealth your heart has grown proud*” (**Ezek. 28:5**). Job says a man can speak to gold and say, “*You are my security*” (**Job 31:24**). It is all too easy to set the heart on riches (**Ps. 62:10**).

Craig Blomberg: Jesus proclaims that unless we are willing to serve him wholeheartedly in every area of life, but particularly with our material resources, we cannot claim to be serving him at all.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the elements of a biblical perspective towards wealth?
- 2) What are some of the indicators that the orientation of your life is laying up treasures in heaven instead of on earth?
- 3) What are some pathways that lead to unhealthy vision?

4) How did Jesus challenge His disciples to be all in?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: The issue in view in these passages is not wealth primarily, but an **absolute and unqualified discipleship**. Wealth, it happens, is only the most conspicuous example of that which can distract from true discipleship. Only the rarest of individuals can possess much of this world's wealth without becoming enslaved to it and without letting it cut the nerve of true discipleship. For this reason, the NT contains a very strong polemic against wealth (e.g., **1 Tim 6:6–10; Heb 13:5**). Most important is **where one's heart lies**, i.e., what controls one's interests, energy, and commitment. There is no absolute requirement here for poverty. But the individual disciple must be sensitive to that point at which wealth and possessions are not compatible with authentic discipleship. Jesus asks for **uncompromising commitment to God's will and purposes**. This is what it means to store up treasures in heaven. The person who stores up treasures on earth "*is not rich toward God*" (**Luke 12:21**) and is in the end "*a fool*." The person who is distracted from unqualified discipleship because of a covetous eye exists in a deep darkness and is to be pitied. The nature of discipleship is such that it allows no such divided loyalties. If one chooses to follow Jesus, the commitment and service entailed are absolute. It is impossible to be a partially committed or part-time disciple; it is impossible to serve two masters, whether one of them be wealth or anything else, when the other master is meant to be God. This view of the rigorously single-minded nature of discipleship is in keeping with the view of discipleship elsewhere in the Gospel (e.g., **10:34–39; 16:24–26**).

Bob Deffinbaugh: Where Is Your Treasure?

In Matthew 6, Jesus brings up two big temptations we all face as believers that distract us and pull us away from the importance and the satisfaction that we can have in our relationship with God the Father.

- The first temptation evident in chapter 6 is the religious man doing his works before man to receive the praise of man instead of doing them in secret, where only God the Father knows. Jesus says that if we seek the praise of men, we have our reward, but if we seek to glorify God, the Father will reward us openly. The examples given are charitable deeds, prayer, and fasting. The temptation is to seek to be noticed, to be put on a high pedestal as one who is religious, and to gain the praise of men.
- The second temptation we face as believers is the temptation of being like the world in seeking treasures on this earth. So often, we look at the things of this earth and say to ourselves, "If only I had that, then I would be all set." We seek to find security and satisfaction in temporary things instead of what we already have in our relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. Both of these temptations want our attention, and both distract us from what truly matters – our relationship with God the Father.

The big question from the Sermon on the Mount is the question of where my heart is. . .

Therefore, we must guard our hearts and watch over them so that our heart follows hard after the things of God and is not distracted by the things of this world. In this message, I ask three questions.

- The first question we must ask ourselves as we begin this passage of Scripture is: "**Where is our treasure?**" In asking this, we will answer the question "Where is our

heart?" because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- The second question to ask ourselves is: "**Where is our focus?**" What are our eyes focused on? Are they focused on the seen or the unseen?
- The final question to be addressed is: "**Who, or what, are you serving?**" Here Jesus is surrounded by religious people, Sadducees and Pharisees, men who look very religious on the outside, but who in their hearts are serving money and themselves rather than God. Jesus is also surrounded by people who have never heard this kind of radical teaching. Jesus is asking us to repent, to change our minds about these things, to live a life of faith, and to serve the one true God.

John MacArthur: Now, He's been talking about your heart and He wants us to have our heart fixed single mindedly and totally devoted on the kingdom of God, so that our treasure is there, our heart is there, our love is there, our passion is there, our burden is there, our investment is there, our all is there, and we're to have that single minded heart. And then He illustrates that with the eye, **the eye then becomes the illustration of the heart.** And the eye is like the lamp of the body. When we can see with our eyes, sighted people their body is filled with the light that comes in from the world by which they perceive, and understand what's in their vision. But if your eye is dark it is black, there's no light that comes in you perceive nothing. And that's the way it is with the heart, if your heart is toward God it lights your entire spiritual being, if your heart is toward the material things, toward the treasure of the world the blinds come down of your spiritual perception and you do not see, spiritually as you ought. Tremendous principle. He takes a physical illustration and He says that the eye is like a window, if that window is clean and clear the light floods the body, if the window is blacked out no light enters. This is a spiritual metaphor. But there's a richness in here that I don't want you to miss. Look at the word *healthy* or *single*; I don't know what your version says in **verse 22**. It says, "*The lamp of the body is the eye; and if, therefore, thine eye be (single or) healthy,*" I want you to see something that I think is fascinating about that word. The word is literally from the root of *haplous* which means *generous*, okay, it means generous. It is used that way many, many times, just give you three illustrations, **James 1:5**, "*God who gives liberally.*" Or **generously**. **Romans 12:8** Paul urges us to "*give liberally.*" Or **generously**. **Second Corinthians 9** he talks about the liberality or the **generosity** of the Macedonians. It is a word that means generous or liberal. He is saying then, if your eye or your heart, because the eye is illustrating the heart, if your heart is generous your whole spiritual life will be flooded with spiritual understanding. Isn't that a great truth?

You know there are people who come to church and leave church, don't seem to change and they never grow and never seem to love the Word and never seem to be a witness to others and never seem to be productive in their life and they just stay the same way all the time, and when I see somebody like that they never seem to understand what's going on, **they never perceive spiritual realities**, I wonder to myself so very often if it isn't because they are so focused on the earth and so earthbound and so oriented toward treasures here that the blinds are down and they have no spiritual perception at all. To put it another way, until you take care of the view of money in your life you will never be able to deal with spiritual realities. That's exactly **Luke 16:11**. If you don't know how to take care of money why would God commit to you the true riches, right? See, what I'm saying here and what our Lord is saying is that this issue is bigger than we think, it may be blinding us in spiritual perception. **Verse 23**, "*If your eye is evil, your whole body's full of darkness.*" And there you're introduced to the evil eye, you've heard that phrase, haven't you? Gave 'em an evil eye.

You know what the **evil eye** is? That's a Jewish colloquialism, to mean **grudgingly**. For example in **Deuteronomy 15:9** it talks about when you have a slave and it's coming to the Jubilee Year and he is to be freed, that you have an evil eye toward him. That is you are ungenerous, stingy and you grudge him that freedom. In **Proverbs 23:6** it says, "*Eat not the bread of him who has an evil eye.*"

In other words don't eat a bite of somebody's food if they grudge you every bite. How about **Proverbs 28:22**, this is a tremendous statement, it says, "*He that hastens to be rich has an evil eye, and considers not the poverty that shall come upon him.*" You hurry to be rich and you will be ungenerous, grudging and selfish, that's the contrast. All right He says, you have two treasuries in heaven or in earth. Wherever you put your treasure that's where your heart will be, and if your heart is in heaven where your treasure is you're going to have a generous spirit and that generous spirit is like a seeing eye that floods your spiritual life with perception. If your treasure is in earth you're going to see nothing because the blinds come down in the darkness of your greed and covetousness and you will see nothing, and if that's the case the end of **23** says, "*If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*" It's just an exclamation where our Lord is saying, how total or how great is the darkness of one who should see spiritually but pulls the blinds through his own covetousness. The call then is to exclusive heavenly mindedness, devotion to God, an undivided laying up of treasure in heaven. Let me simplify the whole thing, one statement, **how you handle your money is the key to your spiritual perception**. That's the message of **verses 22 and 23**. And so you have two visions potentially, two treasuries and you make a choice.

Matthew McCraw: Where Is Your Focus?

He says the things that we gather on this earth can be destroyed. They can be taken from us. Listeners of Jesus' day would have identified greatly with this, probably better than us today because they didn't have debit cards and savings accounts. They had actual stuff. Their precious metals could tarnish, their fabrics could be eaten by moths, their herds could be stolen, their fields could be burned or suffer insect attack. These things could be taken from them. . .

Jesus is pointing out that **all the things on this earth that we treasure are temporary, they are fragile, they don't last. . . (v. 19-21)**

The eye helps determine what happens in the heart. **We must focus our eye on the right thing** so that our heart will be focused on the right thing. **(v. 22-23)**

If there's anything that's keeping you from seeing clearly with your spiritual eye, clear it out. Illustration: It's like when you wake up in the morning and you can't see clearly because you have that gunk in your eyes. You rub your eyes, you blink a few times, you clear up your eyes so you can see. So, also, in our spiritual eyes, we must clear out the gunk so that we can see clearly and focus clearly on where we're going.

What's the spiritual gunk that is keeping you from seeing clearly? Perhaps it's some friends that you have. Perhaps it's some sort of intake in your life like television, music, or internet. Perhaps it's an improper devotion to something like possessions, or politics, or power. Perhaps it's your own pride, or arrogance, or apathy. Perhaps it's an addiction to drugs, or acceptance, or some sort of sexual sin. Whatever it is, get the gunk out! Get it out so you can see!

Jesus has changed your life, so focus on Him and His ways!

Jesus said you cannot be completely sold-out to money and be completely sold-out to God. You can't be a good husband to two wives, you can't be a diehard fan to two college football teams, you can't have two favorite movies, you can't be devout in two different religions, and **you can't be devoted to two masters. (v. 24)**

Jesus says that something's gotta give. You will love the one and hate the other or you will be devoted to one and despise the other.

We must be focused in our living. We must live for God! We must be devoted to God and His good gifts. We must store up treasure in heaven. We must have our eye set to the things of light.
<https://fbcbartow.org/sermons/focus-matthew-619-24/>

Brian Evans: The Treasure Test

Big Idea: Our treasure always reveals the location of our hearts.

He's saying make sure you treasure the right things because whatever you treasure there is where your heart is.

1. (:19-21) Your Heart Will Always Follow Your Treasure

- A. (:19) An earthly treasure is always destroyed
- B. (:20) A heavenly treasure is always secure
- C. (:21) Your heart always follows your treasure

2. (:22-23) Your Eyes Are Always Focused on Your Treasure

3. (:24) Your Worship is Always Focused on Your Treasure

<https://gccwaverly.net/2020/08/16/sermon-the-treasure-test-matthew-619-24/>

TEXT: Matthew 6:25-34

TITLE: KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS WORRY – CAN YOU TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE?

BIG IDEA:

SEEK GOD’S PRIORITIES AND TRUST HIS PROVISION RATHER THAN WORRYING

INTRODUCTION:

E. Michael Green: The worldliness that we are called to avoid can take a religious or a secular form. And so we differ from those who are not Christians both in our devotional life, which Jesus has dealt with in the first half of the chapter, and also in our **ambitions**. These are disclosed principally in two ways: ‘**What do we really value?**’ and ‘**What do we worry about?**’ It is to these twin areas of money and worry that Jesus now turns, as he seeks to show with embarrassing directness what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom.

Scott Harris: Anxiety, worry, fret, distress, agitation, tension, irritability. Words that describe a feeling of an inner turmoil that result in a feeling of outward uneasiness. The words describe a common feeling among humans as we consider what the future may bring to us personally and to the ones we love.

Jerry Shirley: Be honest: we all worry, don’t we?

- The ignorant worry because they don’t know enough.
- The knowledgeable worry because they know too much.

- The poor worry because they don’t have enough.
- The rich worry because they are afraid of losing what they have.

- The old worry because they are facing death.
- The young worry because they are facing life.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus’ teaching has substantial repetition. But, as he repeats key ideas, he develops them further, so they strengthen the main point: we have good reasons to trust God and stop worrying.

25a COMMAND 1 Do not worry about your life, your food, drink, and clothing.

25b Reason 1 Life is more than food and clothes.

26 Reason 2 God cares for the lower creation—the birds. You are more valuable than they.

27 Reason 3 Worry changes nothing.

28–30 Reason 4 God cares for the lower creation—even lilies and grass, short-lived as they are. We are more valuable, as even men of little faith should know.

31 COMMAND 2 Do not worry about what you will eat, drink, and wear.

32 Reason 5 The pagans (sensibly) chase these things, since they are godless. But your

Father knows your needs, so that you need not chase them.

33a COMMAND 3 Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

33b–34 Reason 6 All the things the Gentiles chase will be given to you.

34 COMMAND 4 Therefore do not worry.

I. (:25) ANXIETY REGARDING LIFE'S BASIC NECESSITIES REPRESENTS INCONSISTENT THINKING

A. Prohibition against Worry over Having Enough to Live

“For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on.”

Scott Harris: In light of what Jesus has already said about making sure that the master you serve is God, you are now to obey the following command and then take security in promises following. The command Jesus gives in **verse 25** is predicated upon the principle given in the verses prior. The command is built on the principle that. We are to serve Him and set our hearts upon heaven rather than on the things of earth **God is to be our master**. The promises given in the passage are predicated on obedience to the commands.

B. Rationale: God Who Gave Us Life Will Also Sustain Our Life – Argument from the Greater to the Lesser

“Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?”

William Barclay: He begins by pointing out (**verse 25**) that **God gave us life**, and if he gave us life, surely we **can trust him for the lesser things**. If God gave us life, surely we can trust him to give us food to sustain that life. If God gave us bodies, surely we can trust him for garments to clothe these bodies. If anyone gives us a gift which is beyond price, surely we can be certain that such a giver will not be mean, stingy, niggardly, careless and forgetful about much less costly gifts. So, the first argument is that if God gave us life, we can trust him for the things which are necessary to support life.

II. (:26-30) TWO EXAMPLES REGARDING GOD'S PROVISION OF BASIC NECESSITIES

A. (:26-27) Example of God Feeding the Birds

1. (:26) Worry Doesn't Make Sense Since You Are More Valuable to God than Birds

“Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”

Grant Osborne: Jesus contrasts birds with **human effort**—they don't raise crops (“sow/harvest”) or store them away for the future (in barns), yet they always have enough to live on. The point is that they instinctively trust God (his creation) for their needs, while we who have experienced so much more of him fail to do so. If God cares and provides for the “unimportant” birds, how much more will he care for us, his children?

Scott Harris: Remember that they are sitting on the side of a mountain overlooking the sea of Galilee. Jesus is the expert of pointing out something common around Him to explain a spiritual truth, and here Jesus points out the birds that are flying around and uses them to bring home this spiritual truth. . .

Jesus is not saying that we can quit working because God will provide. He is saying that we do not have to be anxious because God will provide. The birds of the field do not sow, reap or gather into barns, but they do work constantly at finding food and eating. They are not anxious about their work for God provides. This is what Jesus is saying to us. Work, but do not be anxious about what the outcome will be. God values you much more than the birds, and He will provide for you needs. Work and plan ahead, but do not fret.

2. (:27) Worry Is Not Productive

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?”

Matthew McCraw: No Need to Worry

Worry cannot add a single minute to your life. Worry cannot add a single dollar to your bank account. Worry cannot add a single point to your GPA. Worry cannot impress your boss. Worry cannot help your kids behave better. Worry cannot increase your church attendance or help your preaching. Worry cannot strengthen your marriage. Worry cannot help any of us.

However, did you know that worrying can have **negative effects** in your life? Worry can damage your health. Worry can damage your relationships. Worry can rob your joy. Worry can rob opportunities. Our worry can affect ourselves. Our worry can affect others. Our worry can affect our relationship with God.

Worry only has negative effects.

Scott Harris: Dr Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic, wrote, *“Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”* Worry is foolish because it brings no benefit.

B. (:28-30) Example of God Clothing the Lilies of the Field

1. (:28) Lilies Are Incapable of Clothing Themselves

*“And why **are** you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,”*

2. (:29) God’s Care Surpasses Whatever the Richest Man Could Provide

“yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these.”

Grant Osborne: Solomon’s incredible wealth is described in **1 Kgs 10:14–29; 2 Chr 9:13–28**. His splendid dress was proverbial in Jewish writings (e.g., **Josephus**, Ant. 8:35–41). Yet it paled into drabness compared to the beauty of any one of the spring flowers, let alone a field of them. In other words, the beauty God creates is incomparably better than what even the wealthiest people can produce, so why not let God take care of your clothing? Again, this does not mean we

do not work hard to provide for our family but rather that in doing so, we place our trust in and draw strength from God rather than trust in ourselves and our own profits (cf. **Jas 4:13–17**).

3. (:30) Worry Doesn't Make Sense Since You Are More Valuable to God than Lilies

*“But if God so arrays the grass of the field,
which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace,
will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?”*

James Oakley: The birds were an example of **survival**; God keeps them alive. The flowers are a good example for the opposite reason; they're so **transient**. Here today, gone tomorrow. And yet, God clothes each of those flowers with the most exquisite beauty. If he does that, how much more will he make sure his dear children are clothed.

https://www.oakleys.org.uk/sermons/matthew_06_25-34

Scott Harris: Your anxiety level is a good indicator of how much you really trust the Lord. It seems incredible, but we seem to have an easier time trusting that God will save our souls from Hell because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross than to trust that He will provide for our daily needs. Part of that is because dealing with what will happen to our souls after death is far removed from our daily lives. That is an intangible item far in the future, or at least we live as if it is far in the future. The truth is that death could come at anytime. When it comes to what we eat and what we wear, those are tangible items we deal with daily on a personal level. They are the real indicators of your trust in the Lord.

III. (:31-34) CONCLUSION – DON'T BE ANXIOUS BUT TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE

A. (:31) Don't Worry about Present Needs

*“Do not be anxious then, saying,
'What shall we eat?' or
'What shall we drink?' or
'With what shall we clothe ourselves?’”*

Yohan Perera: Worry and Anxiety Indicate Disbelief

(A) God is already aware of our needs because he is omniscient. He meets the needs of his people in due time.

(B) Pagans don't trust God for provision. Hence their obsessions lie with acquiring enough daily commodities.

(C) Therefore worry and anxiety indicate **disbelief**. Security is the fruit of faith anchored in God.

B. (:32) Trust Your Heavenly Father to Provide – Not Living Like the Unsaved

*“For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek;
for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”*

William Barclay: Jesus goes on to advance a very fundamental argument against worry. Worry, he says, is characteristic of pagans, and not of those who know what God is like (**verse 32**). Worry is essentially **distrust of God**. Such a distrust may be understandable in pagans who believe in a jealous, capricious, unpredictable god; but it is beyond comprehension in anyone who has learned to call God by the name of Father. Christians cannot worry because they believe in the love of God.

C. (:33) Seek First God's Priorities – All Will Be Provided

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness;
and all these things shall be added to you.”*

D. A. Carson: Such goals alone are worthy of one's wholehearted allegiance. For any other concern to dominate one's mind is to stoop to pagan fretting. “In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self-centered and the God-centered, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative” (Stott, *Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 172). Within such a framework of commitment, Jesus' disciples are assured that all the necessary things will be given to them by their heavenly Father, who demonstrates his faithfulness by his care even for the birds and his concern even for the grass.

Scott Harris: *Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness* means that the most important issue in every decision I make and in everything I do is **determining God's perspective**. I ask myself,

- What is most pleasing to God?
- What will best further His kingdom?
- What will best reflect His righteousness?

The answer to those questions then determines my actions.

D. (:34) Don't Worry about Future Needs

*“Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

D. A. Carson: Worry over tomorrow's misfortunes is nonsensical, because today has enough to occupy our attention and because tomorrow's feared misfortunes may never happen (cf. b. Sanh. 100b; b. Ber. 9a). It is almost as if Jesus, aware that his disciples are still unsettled and immature, ends his argument by setting the highest ideals and motives aside for a moment and, in a whimsical sally, appeals to common sense. At the same time, he is implicitly teaching that, even for his disciples, today's grace is sufficient only for today and should not be wasted on tomorrow. If tomorrow does bring new trouble, there will be new grace to meet it.

Grant Osborne: The basic message of the section is obvious—earthly concerns must always be superseded by heavenly priorities. That is the only solution for anxiety. There are four stages: realize you have a heavenly Father who loves you; “*cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7); refuse to worry about material needs but leave them with him; put his concerns first in your life and live kingdom priorities. These are all related yet separate issues—a loving Father, a solid trust in him, a deliberate refusal to worry, a life centered on him.

R. T. France: In speaking of “*tomorrow worrying*” and of “*troubles*” as the likely experience of each day **v. 34** strikes a more pessimistic (or at least realistic) note than the preceding verses. By including it along with **vv. 25–33** Matthew has perhaps deliberately put a sobering question-mark against an unthinkingly euphoric attitude which **vv. 25–33** might evoke in some hearers. God's care and provision are assured, but that does not mean that the disciple life is to be one long picnic. Each day will still have its “*troubles*,” the preceding verses simply provide the assurance that by the grace of God they can be survived.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of situations cause you to worry?
- 2) How does worry impact you negatively?
- 3) What are some practical steps you can take to prioritize God's agenda in your decision making process?
- 4) How is your level of anxiety a useful barometer of your level of faith and dependency upon God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: Let us explore how Jesus would have us seek the kingdom, drawing on his own instruction:

1. To seek the kingdom is to seek the King, to love him as Savior and Friend, to bow to him as Lord, to trust the God who has chosen us, redeemed us, and taught us to trust him.
2. To seek the kingdom is to pray for it: "*Your kingdom come.*" We pray for kingdom causes, not just for local and personal concerns.
3. To seek the kingdom is to evangelize, that is, to bring others into the kingdom, to introduce them to our King's beneficent reign over all of life.
4. To seek the kingdom is to desire that God be known and glorified as King throughout the earth. To seek the kingdom is to submit personally to God's reign by obeying him. We seek the kingdom when we obey God at some personal cost. A Christian retailer seeks the kingdom when he closes his stores on Sunday, even though it is a good day for retail sales, so that he can worship and rest, and model the same for his employees.
5. To seek the kingdom at work means pursuing wages and profits in ways that please God, knowing that that may lead to less money, at least in the short run.
6. To seek the kingdom means to have an eye on social reform, so that society may at least approximate the justice that God desires. For example, it means that public officials should do all they can to stop the spread of state-sponsored gambling, and, if possible, reverse it.
7. To seek the kingdom is to pursue righteousness in public places and distant lands, if we can. It also means restraining something as small and personal as our tongue—checking a sarcastic remark or refusing to repeat a morsel of gossip.

The context suggests that seeking the kingdom especially means **dethroning wealth and possessions as our first pursuits**. We must not hoard treasures or live for pleasure, but put our treasures in heaven by giving to kingdom causes (**Matt. 6:19–21**). We should watch the way we think about wealth. Wealth is a lesser good—a useful servant, but a miserable master. We should even watch the way we talk about wealth. When we make a decision, we should speak in terms of God's way. We should not speak as if money makes our decisions, as if "We can afford it" or

“We can’t afford it” is a sufficient guide to most purchases. Let God’s will be our guide, and let us speak that way.

To seek first the kingdom does not mean Christians lack ambition; rather, it means we have different ambitions. Everyone needs a purpose, a direction, an ambition in life. It is sad when twenty-year-olds drift in and out of college, shift from one job to another, or go from one relationship to another. It is sadder still when a mature adult drifts aimlessly.

Ambition has two sides. There is selfish ambition, the desire for success and control as an end in itself. Dictators embody ambition at its worst. For them, power is its own reward. Greedy businessmen can also acquire wealth far beyond all needs, simply to win the game of commerce. Such ambitions are evil. “*Selfish ambition*” is one of the works of the flesh (**Gal. 5:20**). It is vain, harmful to others, and disorderly (**Phil. 2:3; James 3:14–16**).

But there are other ambitions, including the aspiration to unfold what is strongest and best in oneself, to accomplish goals that may improve this world a little. The Bible commends such ambitions, including the ambition to preach Christ (**Rom. 15:20**), the ambition to lead a quiet, productive life (**1 Thess. 4:11**), and the ambition to please God (**2 Cor. 5:9**). **Ambition is good, if it seeks God’s kingdom and his righteousness.**

Gregory Brown: How to Overcome Worry

1. We Must Focus on Eternal Matters Instead of Temporary Ones
2. We Must Focus on Our Father’s Providential Care
3. We Must Recognize Our Great Value to God
4. We Must Recognize How Unproductive It Is
5. We Must Pursue God’s Promises
6. We Must Focus on God’s Grace for Today

<https://bible.org/seriespage/29-how-overcome-worry-matthew-625-34>

James Oakley: Question of Ambition

But behind this issue of worry is the bigger question of ambition. Our anxiety betrays our ambitions.

Ambition is about what you’re living for. None of us just lives life one day at a time with no purpose or direction. We all have things we’re aiming at, chasing after, hoping for. The question is: What?

And Jesus gets right to the heart of that in **verse 31**. Having said not to worry, he goes on like this: *Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things.* The Gentiles, those who do not know God, seek after these things. That’s what they live for. It’s what their lives are about.

If that is what your ambition is focused on – food, drink, clothing, that reduces us to little more than animals. That’s what animals live for. You can talk about pets, you can talk about livestock, you can talk about wildlife – they live for their stomach, their comfort and their reproduction. . .

Verse 25 asks the question: *Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* Is there not more to life than this? And **verse 33** then tells us what that more is. *Seek first the kingdom of*

God and his righteousness. We don't need to live just for food, drink and clothing. There is more to life than providing for our daily needs. That more is God's kingdom, and his righteousness.

We can seek after God's kingdom. Jesus is God's king, so when he arrived so did God's kingdom. But not everybody realizes this. Not everyone knows that Jesus is the best king the world has ever known. Plenty of people try to run their own lives, and do not enjoy the forgiveness he offers either. So we can seek after the growth of God's kingdom, using our lives to see more and more people acknowledge Jesus as God's king and committing to following him. That gives you something lasting to aim your life at.

And we can seek after God's *righteousness*. God is perfect and just and good, but we are not. My life is full of flaws; I make mistakes every day; I don't live as Jesus would want me to. And it's not just my life; the world is full of injustice, things that aren't right. People are taken advantage of; the poor don't have enough to eat; and so we could go on. If we want to make our lives chase after something worthwhile, that could be God's righteousness. Seeking to grow more and more like Jesus in the way I live, and doing all I can to make the world a more just, a more righteous place.

That's the choice. Live for food, drink and clothing. Live for God and his righteousness. It's about our **ambitions**.

Jerry Shirley: Don't Worry

A good first step is confessing it as the sin that it is—Worry is not simply a weakness...it is wickedness. What a poor testimony for a Christian to display to the lost world...to have the promises of God, to be on the winning side, and still to live in the fleshly realm of worry all the time.

HOW CAN WE STOP WORRYING?

I. THINK OF HIS GREATNESS.

- A. SEEN IN THE WONDER OF HIS PROVISIONS. **Vs 26, 28**
- B. SEEN IN THE WORTH OF HIS PEOPLE. **Vs 26b**

II. TRUST IN HIS GRACIOUSNESS.

- A. WORK OF HIS GRACE. **V30-31**
- B. WISDOM OF HIS GRACE. **V32**

III. THRUST INTO HIS GOODNESS. **V33-34**

- A. GOODNESS OF HIS WILL. **V33a**
- B. GOODNESS OF HIS WARRANTY. **V33b**

THE CURE FOR WORRY

- Remember the "Father Factor". [V. 32].
- Remember the "Focus Factor". When worried, you are out of focus.
- Remember the "Future Factor". Don't borrow tomorrow's troubles. Live a day at a time.

<https://www.gbcdccatur.org/sermons/DontWorryBeHappy.html>

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:1-6

TITLE: PROHIBITION AGAINST CENSORIOUS JUDGING BALANCED BY THE NEED TO EXERCISE DISCERNMENT

BIG IDEA:

DON'T BE OVERLY CRITICAL OF OTHERS BUT DON'T BE NAÏVE REGARDING VICIOUS OPPONENTS OF GOD'S TRUTH

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Jesus' rapid-fire delivery of powerful principles in **Matthew 7:1-12** builds up to a profound climax in what we know today as the **Golden Rule** —“*Treat people the same way you want them to treat you*” (**7:12**). These unforgettable and convicting words have the same impact on our lives as they did on the lives of the original audience on the mountain by the Sea of Galilee nearly two thousand years ago. And they come to us with the same authority of the same King.

R. T. France: **Vv. 1-5** address the very down-to-earth issue of unfairly critical attitudes to others, which combined with a naive lack of self-criticism threaten to disrupt a close-knit community such as that of Jesus' first disciples. A simple negative instruction (**v. 1**) is supported by an explanatory comment (**v. 2**) and by a parable which uses broad humor to show up the ludicrous inappropriateness of such behavior (**vv. 3-5**). Underlying the whole pericope is a **principle of reciprocity** such as we have noted above in **6:14-15**, which will be taken up again in the summary in **v. 12**. We must expect to be treated as we treat other people

William Barclay: There are three great reasons why no one should judge another person.

1. We never know the whole facts or the whole person.
2. It is almost impossible for any of us to be strictly impartial in our judgment. Again and again, we are swayed by instinctive and unreasoning reactions to people.
3. But it was Jesus who stated the supreme reason why we should not judge others. No one is good enough to judge another person. Jesus drew a vivid picture showing the difficulty in trying to extract a speck of dust from someone else's eye when all the time there is a plank in our own eye. The humour of the picture would raise a laugh which would drive the lesson home.

E. Michael Green: We are not, therefore, to judge our brothers and sisters (**7:1-5**) but to serve them. After all, they are accountable to God, not to us. We can never know the whole story about them; but God does. And all too often what we condemn in others are the weaknesses we dare not face up to in ourselves. So it ill befits us to point out the speck of sawdust in our brother's or sister's eye when we have a great plank sticking out of our own, but are too blind to see it. Who said Jesus had no sense of humour? No,

instead of the critical spirit, disciples should be known for their humility, recognizing their own shortcomings.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus gives several reasons why we should “*not judge*.”

- First, God is the judge of mankind. We have no right to usurp his role (7:1).
- Second, when we judge others, we invite judgment in return, both from God and from the people around us (7:2–3).
- Third, since we cannot evaluate ourselves very accurately, why should we try to critique the flaws of others (7:4–5)?

So then, instead of judging the sins of our neighbors, we should ask God for grace to remove our own sins (7:7–11).

I. (:1-2) AVOID ARROGANT CENSORIOUS JUDGMENT OF OTHERS

A. (:1) Warning of Boomerang Effect

“Do not judge lest you be judged.”

Keith Throop: Many people misuse this verse in order to avoid being criticized or confronted with sin. In fact, I have heard not only believers, but also unbelievers say things like, “Christians aren’t supposed to judge, are they?” This is usually thought to pretty much end the argument whenever any judgment is made about a person’s views or behavior. In fact, many seem to think that this verse advocates a universal acceptance of any viewpoint or lifestyle. But when Jesus gave this command He never intended us to suspend our critical faculties or to never make value judgments about the views or actions of others. And those who take it that way are just plain wrong. (There I go judging!)

Donald Hagner: The command $\mu\eta$ κρίνετε, lit. “*do not judge*,” should not be taken as a prohibition of all judging or discerning of right and wrong, since elsewhere in Matthew’s record of the teaching of Jesus—indeed, already in v 6—the making of such judgments by disciples is presupposed (see 7:15–20; 10:11–15; 16:6, 12; 18:17–18). Furthermore, v 2a assumes the making of fair or charitable judgments and does not entail the avoidance of judgments altogether. The meaning here, accordingly, is that **unfair or uncharitable judgments** should be avoided.

Grant Osborne: It cannot refer to discerning or evaluating right and wrong. All such are valid for believers (e.g., 1 Cor 5:5; Phil 3:2; Gal 6:1; Heb 3:13; 1 John 4:1). So what does this judgmental attitude connote? It means **looking down on a person with a superior attitude**, criticizing or condemning them without a loving concern (the opposite of the second we-petition on forgiveness, 6:12).

D. A. Carson: Those who “*judge*” like this will in turn be “*judged*,” not by men (which would be of little consequence), but by God (which fits the solemn tone of the discourse). The disciple who takes it on himself to be the judge of what another does **usurps the place of God** (“*Why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of*

God" - see note **Romans 14:10**) and therefore becomes answerable to Him. The *hina me* ("in order that...not"; NIV, "or") should therefore be given full telic (tending toward an end) force.

B. (:2) Warning of Principle of Reciprocity

*“For in the way you judge, you will be judged;
and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”*

Keith Throop: 2 Possible Interpretations:

1. Perhaps Jesus is warning us that we will be judged *by other people* in the same way that we judge them.

2. Perhaps Jesus is warning us that we will be judged *by God* according to the way we judge others. I think this is the correct interpretation for several reasons.
 - *First*, it better fits Jesus’ description of a future judgment that is certain. He says, “with what judgment you judge you *will be judged*” (italics mine). The only certain future judgment all of us will face is the judgment of God.

 - *Second*, it better fits Jesus’ apparent use of the Divine Passive in **verse 2**, when He says, “with what judgment you judge you *will be judged*” and “with the measure you use, it will *be measured* back to you” (italics mine).

 - *Third*, and finally, the interpretation that sees Jesus as referring to the judgment of God better fits the context, in which He has previously taught us to pray that we will be forgiven as we forgive others (**6:12**). He offered this explanation:
 - NKJ **Matthew 6:14-15** *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

 - In other words, Jesus has already said that God’s judgment of us will reflect how forgiving we are of others. Now Jesus is asserting essentially the same principle with regard to a *judgmental attitude* (which is also usually an *unforgiving attitude*). If we judge others without recognizing first our own sin and our own need for forgiveness, then we judge in arrogance and hypocrisy. And when we are so unforgiving and lacking in proper self-examination, we will be judged accordingly.

Grant Osborne: The absence of mercy and love in the way we treat others will result in unmerciful judgment from God at the final judgment (**Jas 2:13**, “*judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful*”).

R. T. France: For the warning that criticism can be turned back against the one who criticizes compare our proverb, "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones." It is this **reciprocal principle** which is the focus of the whole pericope, rather than a prohibition of any use of the critical faculty in itself.

Bethany Bible Church: I believe that the verse that follows these words teaches us what is being forbidden in the phrase "*Judge not*". Look at **verse 2**; "*For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*" Jesus doesn't speak here of a judgment based on God's standards revealed in His word. He speaks of a judgment made on the bases of a standard that we come up with on our own - that is, "*with what judgment YOU judge*", or of a measuring being made "*with the measure YOU use*".

Clearly, the criteria for judgment that's being used is not something from God, but **something we create**. Jesus is speaking of those cases in which we develop our own standard of judgment; and then evaluate someone, or discriminate against someone, or condemn someone on the basis of standards of our own making.

A word that comes to mind is "judgmentalism". Any sensible person knows that there's a difference between exercising good judgment, and acting 'judgmentally'. And what Jesus is forbidding in this command is a spirit of judgmentalism. The Bible gives some very clear examples of what this sinful "judgmentalism" would look like. The apostle James, for example, wrote;

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:1-4).

Jesus' command means that we are to "*judge not*" in the sense that we are not to show partiality to people based on external things. Jesus has told us elsewhere, "*Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment*" (**John 7:24**).

Something else that James wrote teaches us about what it means to "*judge not*". Unfortunately, it speaks of one of our favorite pastimes. James says:

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges a brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (James 4:11-12).

I saw a button once that said, "If you can't say something nice about someone . . . then sit next to me so I can hear you better." We're all guilty of this sort of judgmentalism at times, aren't we? Jesus' command is a call to stop gossiping about one another, or slandering one another. We're not to hold someone's faults up to others for review and critique and evaluate one another accordingly.

<https://bethanybible.org/archive/2005/031305.htm>

II. (:3-5) AVOID FOCUSING ON THE FAULTS OF OTHERS WHEN YOU SHOULD BE CORRECTING YOURSELF – CONVICTING PARABLE

A. (:3) Misdirected Vision

“And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”

Donald Hagner: The repeated reference in these verses to “*your brother*” indicates that it is primarily the Christian community that is in view. *δοκός*, “*log*,” is an intentionally ludicrous exaggeration in its contrast to the speck of sawdust. What is a tiny flaw in another is seen so clearly by a censorious person, while ironically what is an outrageously huge failure in the latter is conveniently overlooked altogether. It is the self-righteous, censorious person who is particularly eager to correct the faults of others. . . Also to be kept in mind in this analogy, however, is the familiarity of Jesus with the carpenter’s shop (cf. **Matt 13:55**, “*the carpenter’s son*”; **Mark 6:3**, “*the carpenter*”).

B. (:4) Misplaced Focus

“Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?”

C. (:5) Misguided Priorities

“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

John MacArthur: Now, listen to me very carefully. This is fabulous, as we draw this to a close. Immediately we run into two dangers right now. You say, “I’m not going to judge. Woo-hoo, I hear that message. I’m going to go in a corner, and confess my sin, and take care of me, boy. I’m not going to get into this,” and immediately run into two dangers.

Danger number one is we will not be willing to confront a sinning brother. We’ll say, “Boy, I’m not going to. Oh, no, I’m not going to judge. Judge not, lest ye be judged. Who am I to say? We certainly don’t want to do that.” [addressed in **:5b**]

And danger number two, we will not discern or discriminate at all. We’ll say, “Well, we don’t want to get into that. [addressed in **:6**] Boy, oh, whatever you say, we’ll just take everything in.” And those are the two dangers. And we would be devastated, because if we don’t confront sin, then leaven is never put out of the lump, right? And the church is going to get corrupted. And if we don’t discriminate the true from the false, we’re all

going to go waltzing down the line into heresy. So the two dangers are that we would fail to deal with a brother in sin, and we would fail to deal with a heretic, or one who would corrupt the faith, or one who would mock the faith, or blaspheme the faith; and we must do that.

He's not saying, "Don't help a sinning brother." He's saying, "Get your own act together first, because then your help is going to be the right kind. It's going to be the humble help. It's going to be the meek and quiet spirit." "*If you restore a brother,*" – it says in **Galatians 6:1**, "*restore him in love, in meekness and fear, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" You don't come to a sinning brother on top, you come from underneath, in humility.

III. (:6) AVOID INDISCRIMINATE PROCLAMATION OF TRUTH TO VICIOUS OPPONENTS

*"Do not give what is holy to dogs,
and do not throw your pearls before swine,
lest they trample them under their feet,
and turn and tear you to pieces."*

Note chiastic structure: A B B1 A1

Charles Simeon: Caution to be Used in Reproving

The words before us are connected with the prohibition respecting the judging of others. To judge others uncharitably will expose us to similar treatment from them, as well as to the displeasure of Almighty God. Before we presume to judge others at all, we ought to be diligent in searching out and amending our own faults; without which we are but ill qualified to reprove the faults of others. We ought also to consider the state of the person whom we undertake to reprove: for if he be hardened in his wickedness, and disposed to resent our well-meant endeavours, it will be more prudent to let him alone, and to wait for some season when we may speak to him with a better prospect of success. Such is the import of the caution in our text; from whence we may observe,

- I. That religious instruction is often most unworthily received—
The value of religious instruction is but little known—
Many, instead of being pleased, are only irritated and offended at it
- II. That great caution is to be used in administering it—

John MacArthur: Jesus, to His disciples, could only reveal certain things, and He had to hide other things. And to the world it says, "*And He hid them from them, and revealed other things unto the babes.*" Jesus didn't say everything to everybody. . .

Now who are the hogs and the dogs? Look at **2 Peter 2**, and I'll show you, **2 Peter 2**. It says, in this chapter, that, "*There were false prophets among the people; and there will be false teachers,*" **2 Peter 2:1**. And verse 2 says, "*And many will follow their pernicious ways.*"

Listen, many are going to follow the pernicious ways of false prophets, false teachers. So all the people who are involved in the false systems of religion; the adamant, covetous, lustful, evil, vile people such as those who were drowned in the flood, **verse 5**; those who were destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah for their homosexuality; those who walk in the lust of uncleanness, who are self-willed, who mock angels, who are scabs. He calls them scabs; filth spots. . .

Now what is it saying? What is the holy thing, and what is the pearl? I believe, without a doubt, it's the Word of God. It's the **truth of the Word of God**, encompassing the gospel and all of the contents of the Scripture.

Bruce Hurt: We are not to continue to present the gospel to those who repeatedly mock, scorn and deride it. To be sure, this determination sometimes is obvious as in the case of rank infidels but in other situations requires God's wisdom (see role of prayer in **Matthew 7:7-8-note**) and Spirit controlled guidance. There is a limit Jesus says and when that time arrives, it is high time for the ambassador of Christ to depart company.

And so we see Jesus instructing His disciples "*And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away. And as you enter the house, give it your greeting. And if the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you. **And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.***" (**Matthew 10:11-15**)

In the same way Jesus pronounced judgment on the Galilean towns which for the most part rejected the light of His presence and His gospel "*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.*" (**Mt 11:21-23**)

And we see Paul's reaction to the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews of Corinth "*After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean.*

From now on I shall go to the Gentiles.” (Acts 18:1-6, see also Acts 13:44-51, 28:17-28; Ro 16:17-18).

Writing to Titus on the Isle of Crete Paul instructed him "*Reject a factious (divisive, one who causes division) man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” (Titus 3:10-11)*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How should you respond to non-Christians who improperly call you out for “Judging others”?
- 2) Why is it so easy to spot faults in others and so difficult to own up to deficiencies in our own life?
- 3) How should we allow mercy to triumph over judgment?
- 4) Who are the “*dogs*” and “*swine*” in today’s context?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Exhortation must come from a position of **love** and **humility** rather than **hypocritical pride**. Far too many Christians, however, like to play a game I’ll call “Let’s Label,” also known as “The Judging Game.” The gameplay is pretty simple: Someone finds something they don’t like or agree with about a person, usually by quickly and superficially surveying the person’s external qualities. Then they jump to negative, critical opinions about that person. These self-proclaimed judges never take the time to dig deeply, get the facts straight, and draw fair conclusions about a person. Instead, they slap the person with a label and then interpret all that person’s words and actions through that grid. Finally —and this is key —they share their inaccurate observations and conclusions openly and freely with others. . .

What Jesus is condemning in the Sermon on the Mount is a judgmental, negative, haughty attitude that assesses others with a suspicious spirit. People who have such an attitude are always on the hunt for faults, mistakes, or imperfections in others. And they find them! There are always petty flaws and failures to be exposed. They do this out of an attitude of superiority, presumption, prejudice, and pride. The result is a destructive, condemning attitude and a blindness to one’s own faults. This is the glaring hypocrisy that Jesus emphasizes here.

David Thompson: DISCIPLES MUST STOP SELF-RIGHTEOUS, UNMERCIFUL, PREJUDICED JUDGMENTS AGAINST OTHERS WHICH ARE DETERMINED BY THEIR OWN SELF-RIGHTEOUS STANDARDS.

David Guzik: This is the Bible verse that seems to be most popular in our present day. But most the people who quote this verse don't understand what Jesus said. They seem to think Jesus commanded a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. If we see what Jesus said in **Matthew 7:15-16**, He commands us to know people by the fruit of their life, and some sort of assessment is necessary for that.. The Christian is called to unconditionally love. But the Christian is not called to unconditional approval. We really can love people who do things that should not be approved of. Instead, Jesus is speaking against being judgmental, that is, judging motives and the inner man, which only God can know. We can judge the fruit of a man, but we can rarely judge their motives with accuracy.

Jesus does not prohibit judgment of others. He only requires that our judgment be completely fair, and that we only judge others by a standard we would also like to be judged by. Most of our judgment in regard to others is wrong, not because we judge according to a standard, but because we are hypocritical in the application of that standard - we ignore the standard in our own life.

We judge others by one standard, and ourselves by another standard - being far more generous to ourselves than others. With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

John MacArthur: Stop Criticizing

Now the area of human relations goes all the way through verse 12, but we're only going to be considering the first six this morning, and we'll get to the second section, the second six verses, next time. But suffice it to say at this point that the Pharisees were so proud, and so self-styled, and so self-righteous, and so smug, and so convinced of their own superiority, that one of the natural results of that was that they became **totally condemning and judgmental** of everybody else. . .

What is He talking about? What He's talking about is the critical, judgmental, condemning, self-righteous egotism of the Pharisees. They weren't criticizing people because of sin, they were criticizing them because of their personality, their character, their weaknesses, their frailties; perhaps the way they looked, or the way they dressed, or the fact that they didn't do the things the way they did them. They were criticizing their motives, which they couldn't see or perceive anyway in their humanness. You don't know why a person does what he does. . .

And what the Lord here is forbidding is that officious, hasty, unwarranted, unjust, unmerciful condemnation that is spawned by self-righteous pride. We're not to do that. And then worst of all, after we've made that judgment in our heart, we go tell people about it, and we become a tale bearer or a gossip. So we're not to do that. He gives

three reasons why not. And I'm going to go through these rapidly, so hang on to your seat.

Number one: To make that kind of a judgment manifests an erroneous view of God, verse 1, an erroneous view of God: "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*" And He simply reminds them that they are not the final court. "You do this, and you will be judged. Have you forgotten that you are not God?" That is precisely the bottom line in this sin. To judge other people, their motives and so forth, is to play God. It is to usurp the divine position. . .

Secondly: Don't judge, because it's an erroneous view of God, and also an erroneous view of others, verse 2. You see, most people think that they can judge, because they're under a different condition than everybody else is. The Pharisees thought they were exempt. They lived on some strata beyond the purview of any judgment. I mean they were up here where everything was fine, and only people down here got it. But he says in verse 2, "*With what judgment you judge, you'll be judged; and with what measure you measure, it'll be measured to you again.*" You're going to get just what you give. . .

And so I believe it's talking about **God's judgment**. And what He's saying is – and I want you to see this, it's a powerful statement: "What judgment you judge, God will judge you with; and what measure you measure, God will measure to you again." In other words, God is going to evaluate you on the basis of your knowledge, your light. If you say, "All right, I know enough to judge all of you people on this," then you prove you know enough to be judged on it yourself. Right? . . .

Finally, of these three reasons not to judge: when you critically judge other people, **you manifest an erroneous view of yourself**. I mean are you so good that you can sit around checking out everybody else? I mean you've got nothing to work on? I mean you've got it all under control, so that you could spend your time evaluating everyone else? Some of us would do well to take the time we spend criticizing other people, and put it to action in prayer and confession of our own sin somewhere in a closet; because until we get our own life straightened out, we have little usefulness in trying to assist someone else. . .

And so the plank is **self-righteousness**. And as long as you're self-righteous, and you think you're all right, and you never bother dealing with your own sin, there's no way you're going to help anybody else. You're blind. It is the sin of subtle, self-righteous criticism; and it's a plank in your own eye, and you cannot help anybody else.

S. Lewis Johnson: Generally speaking, I think that the average interpretation of this text is, one must always think the best of others: *judge not, that you be not judged*. And therefore, it's a dangerous thing to pass judgment on anything that pertains to someone else. Or, perhaps we might, in the exposition of it, given by others in popular language, say that it is taken to mean that all judgment of others is totally forbidden. That's a

serious error. It's not only a serious error, but it leads to heresy and false doctrine, and the heresy and false doctrine that might destroy the testimony of the Christian church.

In fact, it is the failure of individuals within the Christian church to exercise discipline, based on biblical, discriminating judgment that has led to a great deal of difficulties that exist in the leading churches of our day. You can, for example, trace a failure to apply the truths of holy Scripture with regard to judgment, discriminating judgment. You can trace the failure of some of the leading churches to this very fact. . .

Another question is raised in this passage. You probably noticed it as you read the 6th verse. Is the gospel that we proclaim for all the lost, or should all the lost be evangelized at all times? . . .

The lesson is that **if we judge in a censorious fashion**, if we develop the habit of this spiteful criticism, then we shall be judged by God. And furthermore, we shall also be judged by men. There is, in other words, a principle of **mutual reciprocity** in judgment, and therefore it is something that Christians should avoid. . .

Now the second lesson is that we must **exercise self-criticism**. Very interestingly – to me, at least, being a student of the Greek New Testament for a few years – is that in the verses 3, 4, and 5, there are **four different words for “seeing” or “observation.”** For example, in the 3rd verse we read, “*Why beholdest thou the mote which is in thy brother's eye?*” That is a Greek word that means, simply, to look at something, just as I am looking at you. It means to look without thinking, and that, of course, is applicable also to me. “*Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not?*” – this is a word that means “*to fasten down upon.*” You look out and you see the splinter in someone else's eye, and you do not spend a great deal of time thinking about it, but you do not consider – fasten your mind down upon – the beam that is in your eye.

And then he goes on to say, “*Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull the mote out of thine eye and behold (here's the third word for seeing, and this is a word that means, in its root, “*to see with perception*”) *a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou shalt see clearly?*”—and this is the emphatic form of the word translated “*beholdest*” in verse 3 (the first of these words for observation). So that to see clearly, one must cast the beam out of one's eye. These four words for observation illuminate the emphasis and stress of the passage. . .*

Now, I'm sure that when the Lord Jesus first said this, this must have produced a chuckle, because the idea of a person looking out and seeing a little splinter in someone else's eye, when he himself has a rafter protruding from his own eye, must have produced something of a chuckle as the Lord gave this to the disciples. But this judgment, this **self-criticism**, should be exercised for the good of others. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye. It is possible to be critical in an approved sense. And, it is evident that the requirements for criticism in the approved sense are that we

ourselves be spiritual, and that we have cast the beam out of our own eyes previous to that. . .

Well now we come to the third and final of the lessons that come from this passage. **We must employ sensible criticism.** *“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and lacerate you.” . . .*

Why is this text given? Why, it is given **to limit the range of the application of “judge not.”** It is true that we are to judge not that we be not judge. But we are not thereby to assume that no criticism is justifiable. And as a matter of fact, there is a particular kind of criticism, and action that follows it, that must be carried out. Now of course, it is necessary, in order to determine who are dogs and who are swine in order to make judgments. It is impossible to do otherwise. People do not go around with a tag on them, “I am a dog.” Others do not go around saying, “I am a hog.” It is necessary for us to pass judgment in order to know who are the dogs and who are the swine. Therefore, sensible criticism is justifiable on our Lord’s own words. . .

Why, this teaches **discrimination in evangelism.** Discrimination in evangelism. Now I say to you, this is a teaching that is rarely, if ever, taught. I dare say that if you have taken a class in personal evangelism, you have rarely, if ever, heard a lecture on keeping quiet. And you probably have never heard a lecture on, “Do not give truth to the unsaved.” Yet that is not what our Lord says. Give not that which is holy to the dogs. Do not cast your pearls before swine. Discrimination in evangelism. . . he refers to individuals who have heard that message and have failed to respond to it, who are in a state of rebellion against the truth of God.

Ray Pritchard: Practical Checklist to assess whether one is prone to judging with a critical or condemnatory spirit:

- Blowing small things all out of proportion.
- Maximizing the sins of others—their faults, foibles and their petty ways.
- Coming to quick, hasty, negative conclusions.
- Making mountains out of molehills.
- Getting involved in situations where you should not be involved.
- Passing along critical stories to others.
- Having a strong bias to find others guilty.
- Being too harsh even when speaking the truth.
- Adding aggravating remarks when telling a story.
- Dismissing an unkind remark by saying, “I was only joking.”
- Saying something critical and then trying to cover it up.
- Being unkind and then quickly changing the subject.
- Telling too many people about what others have done to us.
- Taking pleasure in condemning others.
- Telling the truth in order to hurt, not to help.
- Putting others down in order to make yourself look better.
- Minimizing your sins while magnifying the sins of others.

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:7-11

TITLE: OUR HEAVENLY FATHER ANSWERS PRAYER

BIG IDEA:

GOOD THINGS COME TO US FROM OUR GOOD HEAVENLY FATHER IN RESPONSE TO PERSISTENT PRAYER

INTRODUCTION:

Why is our generation so weak in the area of prayer? This seems to be especially true among Christian men. Where are the prayer warriors of past ages? We must have an inflated opinion of what we can accomplish and a diminished expectation of how our heavenly Father longs to work and provide in response to our petitions. How could we invest our time more productively than in the area of prayer? This passage is a tremendous encouragement to keep persistent in our petitions.

D. A. Carson: Bonnard best exemplifies those who say there is no connection at all between vv.7–11 and the preceding verses. Yet there are, in fact, **deep thematic connections**. **Schlatter** perceives one of them when he remarks that Jesus, having told his disciples the difficulties, now exhorts them to prayer. Moreover, one of the most pervasive features of Jesus' teaching on prayer is the assurance it will be heard. But such praying is not for selfish ends but always for the glory of God according to kingdom concerns. So here: the Sermon on the Mount lays down the righteousness, sincerity, humility, purity, and love expected of Jesus' followers, and now it assures them **such gifts are theirs if sought through prayer**. . .

Far too often, Christians do not have the marks of richly textured discipleship because they do not ask, or they ask with selfish motives (**Jas 4:2–3**). But the best gifts, those advocated by the Sermon on the Mount, are available to “*everyone*” (**v.8**) who persistently **asks, seeks, and knocks**.

William Barclay: Everyone who prays is bound to want to know to **what kind of God** they are praying. So we want to know in what kind of atmosphere our prayers will be heard. Are we praying to a grudging God out of whom every gift has to be squeezed and coerced? Are we praying to a mocking God whose gifts may well be double-edged? Are we praying to a God whose heart is so kind that he is more ready to give than we are to ask?

Jesus came from a nation which **loved prayer**. The Jewish Rabbis said the loveliest things about prayer.

- “God is as near to his creatures as the ear to the mouth.”
- “Human beings can hardly hear two people talking at once, but God, if all the world calls to him at the one time, hears their cry.”
- “A man is annoyed by being worried by the requests of his friends, but with

God, all the time a man puts his needs and requests before him, God loves him all the more.”

Jesus had been brought up to love prayer; and in this passage he gives us the Christian charter of prayer.

Grant Osborne: [This passage] pictures a dependent child asking “*Father*” for something needed; this fits the emphasis on *Abba* in the Lord’s Prayer (see on 6:9). A child **expects a loving response and will get one**. There was a Jewish tradition that celebrated men of God with “holy chutzpah, or boldness,” who had the power to receive great things from God. Jesus boldly promises this power to his disciples.

Donald Hagner: The passage readily divides into two major sections:

- (1) three exhortations and complementary assertions of God’s faithfulness, vv 7–8;
- (2) two examples of human faithfulness, followed by an *argument a minori ad maius* argument concerning the faithfulness of God to those who call upon him, vv 9–11.

Both sections involve considerable **parallelism**. Each of the three imperatives in v 7 is immediately followed by the result expressed in the future tense; v 8 reflects the same sequence of verbs (except for λαμβάνει, “*receives*,” which actively expresses the meaning of the passive δοθήσεται, “*shall be given*”). Furthermore, the rhetorical questions in vv 9 and 10 are almost exactly parallel in form. V 11 ends with a reference to the giving of what is asked for and thus forms an *inclusio* with the beginning of v 7.

I. (:7-8) THE GOLDEN HARVEST LAW OF PRAYER – THE PROMISE THAT PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER WILL PREVAIL

A. (:7) The Unlimited Promise of the Harvest Law of Prayer – requires effort over time; requires faith

“as a man sows, so shall he also reap”

Acrostic: **ASK**

1. Ask – and it shall be given to you

A Gift from God’s grace

Involves confessing bankruptcy and inadequacy to achieve on your own

2. Seek – and you shall find

A Treasure of priceless worth (cf. the commercials)

Involves right priorities and diligently searching for it; mining it

3. Knock – and it shall be opened to you

An Open Door to God’s blessings

Involves taking initiative in step of faith to proceed through open door

Daniel Doriani: In context, therefore, “*Ask and it will be given to you*” leads to the **gospel**. Advocates of prosperity theology think it leads to material blessing. If we ask

with enough faith, they say, God will give us whatever we desire. But Jesus teaches us to seek our daily bread, not our daily caviar. Further, Jesus' topic is **discipleship**, not wealth. When Jesus instructs his disciples to ask, seek, and knock, he means we should seek grace to cover our sin and strength to grow in holiness. God will grant that prayer. It is said, "One may be a truly industrious man, and yet poor in temporal things; but one cannot be a truly praying man, and yet poor in spiritual things." . . .

But Jesus places the emphasis on **the God who hears**, not on the man or woman who asks. He says that God loves his children and knows how to give them good gifts. If we ask, the Father will give what he knows we need. He says this three ways, and each seems to build on the other:

1. "Ask" is a general term. In context, it means "Ask God in prayer."
2. "Seek" implies that we may not know exactly what we are looking for or precisely how to pray (**Rom. 8:26**). A child asks a mother who is close at hand, but when the mother is not visible, the child seeks her. When we seek God, we will find him and discover what we should desire.
3. "Knock" implies that we seek something that is inaccessible to us. We have tried and failed to attain something, to open a door. We cannot, but God can and will open it, if it is right for us.

J. Ligon Duncan: And I want you to notice, that though all of those three words are referring to the same thing, they are pressing towards the same end, they are said for the same purposes. You see an ascending order of emphasis in those prayers. There is an ascending force, or urgency, in those prayers. We are to ask, but more than that, we are to seek, but more than that, we are to knock. Each of those words, tell us something about prayer. They offer secrets to our own prayer life.

First of all, I want you to note the word ask. That is the word that is used for a beggar when he is asking for alms. It is also the word that is used for someone who is pleading a case before a judge. The Lord Jesus is telling us there to ask, to beg, to plead, this word refers to a petition that might be addressed from an inferior to a superior person in society. And it is designed to remind us of the humility that we ought to have and the consciousness of our own needs that we ought to have when we go to the Lord in prayer. . .

So Jesus says, we are to ask, we are to **seek**. There is to be a clear desire, not only should I our demeanor be humble, not only should we be conscious of our need, but there must be a single-minded focus of desire as we go to the Lord in prayer. . .

And we are to **knock**. This is the same word that we would use for pounding or banging on the door. We are to persevere in boldness, in the desire of obtaining favor. .

The whole thrust of Jesus' word here is to remind us that when we need discernment and when we seek for spiritual blessings, if we will ask and we will seek and we will knock, the heavenly father is ready and waiting to pour out blessing on His children. In fact, He is more ready to give than we are to receive.

B. (:8) The Universal Scope of the Harvest Law of Prayer -- No Exceptions
don't doubt this – works every time

1. For everyone who asks receives

2. And he who seeks finds

3. And to him who knocks it shall be opened

Daniel Doriani: In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord wants to give us **his kingdom and his righteousness**. The Bible, incidentally, never shows anyone praying for happiness, never tells us to pray for happiness, and never promises that we will be happy. It does promise that **God will make us holy**. In **Luke 11:13**, Jesus says that the Father will “*give the Holy Spirit*” to those who ask. He grants what we need to grow in holiness, not necessarily to have a carefree life. Paul says, “*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (**Eph. 5:25–27**).

**II. (:9-11) THE GOLDEN PRINCIPLE OF FATHERHOOD –
THE ARGUMENT FROM THE LESSER TO THE GREATER -- ANY FATHER
LOVES TO PROVIDE GOOD GIFTS WHEN HIS CHILDREN ASK TO HAVE
THEIR NEEDS MET**

Richard Gardner: Jesus assures us that God responds to those who ask, search, or knock. To support this promise, he introduces the rhetorical questions found in **verses 9-10**. Here it is helpful to note that a loaf of bread in Jesus' time often had the same round, flat shape that a stone had, and that there was an edible eel-like fish that resembled a snake. The obvious answer to the two questions is thus: No, no parent would mock the request of a needy child by giving the child **a worthless gift that merely looks like the real thing**. In **verse 11**, then, Jesus argues (as he has done previously) **from the lesser to the greater**: If you are capable of giving good gifts to children in spite of your sinful tendencies, how much more will the One who is righteous in every way give good things to his children!

A. (:9-10) Two Examples of the Responsiveness of Any Earthly Father:

(despite being essentially evil with only limited resources)

1. (:9) Loaf vs. Stone

“Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?”

Grant Osborne: The illustration chosen by Jesus concerns a terrible practical joke played by a parent on a child who sits down for lunch, expecting a loving parent to take

care of them. The type of loaf baked would resemble the shape of a smooth round stone, so the child would end up hungrily grabbing a stone instead. Satan tempted Jesus to turn a stone into bread (4:3), and here the parent reverses that, substituting a stone for bread. The form of the question with the negative particle μή expects the answer, “Of course not!” No parent would ever do such a capricious and cruel thing.

2. (:10) Fish vs. Snake

“Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?”

(cf. how Christ demonstrated in His miracles His ability to multiply the loaves and fishes and supply any need imaginable)

Fathers love to respond to the requests of their children and perform the function of Provider.

Grant Osborne: The second illustration is an even more horrible joke, for while a stone is a silly thing, a snake is actually dangerous. This was probably an eel-like fish, which resembles a snake. So as the child went to bite down on the fish, he or she was bitten in turn by the snake (or if it is assumed the snake is dead, that the child is revolted, so **Nolland**). Again, no parent would be so cruel. **Luke 11:12** adds an even worse example, a scorpion substituted for an egg (a scorpion rolled up resembles an egg).

B. (:11) Making the Argument: Greater Responsiveness and Generosity of Our Heavenly Father

(supremely Good with unlimited resources)

1. From the Lesser

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children”

D. A. Carson: People are evil; they are self-centered, not God-centered. This taints all they do. Nevertheless, they can give good gifts to their children. How much more, then, will the heavenly Father, who is pure goodness without alloy, give good gifts to those who ask?

2. To the Greater

“how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?”

D. A. Carson: What is fundamentally at stake is **a person’s picture of God**. God must not be thought of as a reluctant stranger who can be cajoled or bullied into bestowing his gifts (6:7–8), as a malicious tyrant who takes vicious glee in the tricks he plays (7:9–10), or even as an indulgent grandfather who provides everything requested of him. He is the heavenly Father, the God of the kingdom, who graciously and willingly bestows the good gifts of the kingdom in answer to prayer.

Donald Hagner: The three imperatives in v 7 and three participles in v 8 refer to the same activity. **No object is specified.** One is not told what to request, what to seek, or that for which one knocks. The invitation is apparently as **broad** as the questions of vv 9–10 imply and the object thus as general as the ἀγαθά, “good things,” of v 11. These “good things” can be thought of as the **eschatological blessings** that accompany the presence of the kingdom (cf. Luke’s “*Holy Spirit*”), so that the work of the disciples in proclaiming the kingdom is primarily in view, or alternatively the more ordinary and ongoing needs of the disciples (cf. 6:32–33). Less likely is the suggestion (e.g., Carson) that the qualities of character and life demanded by the sermon (i.e., righteousness, humility, purity, love) are intended.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is this repeated promise of Christ limited to only requests for spiritual fruit of the Spirit? (Look at the context of **chapter 6-7.**)
- 2) What are the main obstacles for me in **persisting** in prayer?
- 3) How **generous** was my earthly father? Does that have any impact on how easily I see my heavenly Father as generous and responsive?
- 4) What is our expectation of the desire of our heavenly Father to respond to our requests?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: Jesus here invites his disciples to **rely upon the faithfulness of their heavenly Father.** The threefold invitation and promise of v 7, emphasized in v 8, have as their main point that the disciples may confidently trust God. Much more than parents, who reliably provide their children with what they need, will their heavenly Father provide the disciples with that for which they ask. The unlimited scope of the passage need not entail the expectation that every request will be answered positively; it points rather to the basic principle of God’s comprehensive and faithful care of the disciple. The “good things” cover certainly the ongoing needs of the disciples (cf. 6:25–33, where even the form of the argument is the same), but in the larger context of the Gospel, they suggest also the blessings of the kingdom. **This passage focuses on the answering, providing Father.** It is he who provides the material blessings of the present age as well as the transcendent blessings connected with the coming kingdom of God.

William Barclay: Jesus here lays down the twin facts that

- God will always answer our prayers in his way, in wisdom and in love;
- and that we must bring to God an undiscouraged life of prayer, which tests the rightness of the things we pray for, and which tests our own sincerity in asking for them.

John Kapteyn: Jesus makes a simple, clear promise. (**Matt 7:1-8**) To ask, seek, and knock are all repetitions of the same thing not different ways of asking. When a promise is repeated in Scripture it carries more weight. (ie. *Truly, truly I say to you..*). Jesus in these two verses repeats his promise SIX times. . .

In Luke's parallel, Jesus says that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. It is only through the Holy Spirit that our hearts are changed. The fruit of the Spirit is Christian character or righteousness. This affirms the "what" that we are to ask for. This does not exclude asking for our daily bread, for the physical needs in our lives and other requests we may have. However, God will only give what we ask if it is to our spiritual good.

S. Lewis Johnson: Many years ago, **Andrew Murray** wrote, "Jesus never taught his disciples how to preach, only how to pray. He did not speak much of what was need to preach well, but much of praying well. To know how to speak to God is more than knowing how to speak to man. Not power with men but power with God, is the first thing. Jesus loves to teach us to pray." This fine Reformed minister of the word of God from South Africa has hit upon something that has some significance.

I'm not advocating that we do away with the subject of homiletics in our theological institutions, but I do think that it is a startling thing to realize that all theological institutions have courses on public speaking and homiletics, but so far as I know, there is not a single theological institution of seminary status in the whole of the United States as far as I know – in the whole of the Western World – that has a required course on the doctrine of prayer. It would seem to me that this is a great neglect, so far as the Christian church is concerned. . .

In the immediate context, the 7th verse follows the 6th—that's a very weighty comment, you'll notice -- the 7th verse follows the 6th, and in the 6th we have had, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine.*" It's very difficult for us, as human beings, to know with any sense of assurance, who are those dogs, and who are the swine? And just as one might expect, it would be natural for us to say, how can we possibly know who are the dogs and who are the swine? Well, the answer is through prayer.

Prayer is the indispensable necessity for making biblical judgments, so I'm not surprised, then, that the subject appears here. Let's look then, first of all, at the exhortation to prayer contained in the 7th verse. The connection by the therefore is, as I have mentioned – or rather, the connection of the section with the preceding – is as I

have mentioned: “Where will I ever get the wisdom necessary to exercise judgment in a sensible and discriminating way?” . . .

And second, **prayer combats lethargic passivity**, a too-common condition in the lives of believers which often results in a false kind of quietism. Now many of you know that from the pulpit of Believers Chapel there has proceeded a message which has been grounded, for the most part, in the sovereignty of God. I personally, and others who have preached here, believe that God is sovereign in the affairs of men. And we believe that he is working out his purposes, and that he will accomplish his purposes, and that he cannot be frustrated in the accomplishment of them, that he is a sovereign God.

Sometimes, when individuals come into an understanding of these great doctrines of the grace of God, how he saves us in his wonderful grace, and how he keeps us, and sanctifies us, and how he will ultimately glorify us through his marvelous grace, we somehow take this doctrine and twist it and torture it to mean that therefore we have no responsibility whatsoever to listen to the exhortations of the word of God and seek, under the power of God to perform them.

Now, prayer is an effective combating of that false, extreme emphasis on the sovereignty of God that overlooks human responsibility. We do have human responsibility. We are responsible to read the exhortations of the word of God, and we are not only responsible to read them, but we are to obey them—that is our responsibility. But we do not, in our explanation of the responsibility of man, seek to water down the sovereignty of God so that it means nothing. We as Christians believe that God is working out his purpose, and he will work out his purpose to a successful conclusion. **He is a sovereign God.**

But we are **responsible**, and this evidenced by the fact that we are told to pray: ask—go on, ask him; seek—go on seeking; knock—go on knocking. You should, in Tertullian’s phrase, “with a holy conspiracy besiege heaven,” One of the great Puritans, also a believer in the sovereignty of God, said, “All three of these commands presuppose faith. A man who does not believe will not ask. A man who does not have faith will not seek, and one who does not have confidence in God will not go on knocking. These are the inevitable issue of faith, and the man who asks and seeks and knocks in the name of the Lord Jesus is **exhibiting his faith** in that.

John MacArthur: The summation of the law of God in the Old Testament is clear. In **Deuteronomy 6**, you have the first part, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.*” In **Leviticus 19:18**, you have the second part, “*Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.*” That’s what that verse says. So, repeatedly, Old Testament and New Testament, God’s law is for a **right relationship to Him as a Father and a right relationship to others as brothers in the faith**. Those are the salient features of Christian truth. . .

Jesus gives us a **manifesto of living in His kingdom** that is totally comprehensive. It deals with animate and inanimate objects. It deals with people in the family, such as

here, and people outside the family, such as earlier, in the salt and light passage. It deals with how we treat other people and perceive them: not criticizing, judging and condemning. And it deals with how we treat us: self-examining, humility.

All areas, how we treat God as a person, as a loving Father, and how we treat His Word as a revelation of His heart; all elements of the dimensions of Christian living within the kingdom are discussed in this masterpiece of a sermon. And all of them boil down to tremendous statements which are encompassing all the truth embodied in those areas, and reducing them down to these marvelous truths. . .

Now I would just remind you that the whole concept of **verses 1 to 12** can be boiled back to one statement: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* That is the law and the prophets. **That’s the sum of it all.**

But let’s go and look at this passage specifically. People have been confused about the order of this chapter, and they think a lot of these things are just kind of little tidbits thrown in and they don’t have any connection. I don’t believe that. I think there is a **masterful presentation**. I think the Lord eases from 6 into 7, and from 7 into 9 and 10, and then into 11, and then into 12 in a beautiful, majestic way of flowing this whole thing together. Let me show you why I say that. . .

Listen, **who is able to discriminate?** Who is able to judge? Who is able to discern? Who is able to know when you’ve got somebody that you don’t want to throw your pearls to? Who is able to discern when you have someone there that you don’t want to give a holy thing to, because you know they’ll tramp it under their feet? Who is it that’s able to see sin in a believer’s life, and lovingly go and restore that believer? . . .

And so we have to **ask and seek and knock**, and **He reveals to us**. And I believe that’s the bridge that the Spirit of God would have us see there. It helps us know how to get that splinter out of a brother’s eye, and how to be careful about giving holy things to dogs, and casting pearls before swine. **And so that’s how this text reaches back. But let’s see how it reaches forward to our text. . .**

And why am I willing to do that? Why am I willing to live that principle [v. 12] out and to do unto others what I wish they would do to me? Because I know that whatever I may give away of myself, and whatever good things I may do to others, I know God will replenish my own supply. And so I do it not only because of the **purpose of God** to be obedient to the law and the prophets, but I do it because it is basically to fulfill the **promise of God**, that He will meet my needs. And so I not only do it out of **obedience**, but second word, I do it out of gratitude, gratitude. . .

And, finally, there’s a third reason. Not only does the purpose of God and the promise of God demand that I live according to **verse 12**, but so does the **pattern of God**, the pattern of God. You know something? **Ephesians 5:1** puts it this way: *“As dear children, we are to walk as God walked, or walks.”* Tremendous statement. Walk as God walks. Conduct your life the way God does. . .

And the point is this: if evil, unregenerate, sinful fathers give their kids the basics of life, don't you think God'll do that? And the idea that I see here is that God is the absolute giving Father, who gives to all what they need, knowing full well they could never give back to Him anything in kind or measure. And if that's the way He is, then isn't that the way we, His children, should be toward others? See?

His **purpose** demands it. It's the whole reason for the law. His **promise** frees us up to do it, because He'll replenish everything that we do for others. And here we find the majesty of this thought: His pattern is this way to us. How can we say we are His children and do less for others? "*Therefore,*" – **verse 12** says – "*therefore, all things, whatever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*"

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:12

TITLE: GOLDEN RULE OF RELATIONSHIPS

BIG IDEA:

KINGDOM ETHICS SUMMED UP IN THE GOLDEN RULE CONSISTENT WITH THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS = LOVING OTHERS

INTRODUCTION:

William Barclay: This is probably the most universally famous thing that Jesus ever said. With this commandment, the Sermon on the Mount reaches its summit. This saying of Jesus has been called “the capstone of the whole discourse”. It is the topmost peak of social ethics, and the Everest of all ethical teaching. . .

In its negative form, this rule is in fact the basis of all ethical teaching; but no one but Jesus ever put it in its positive form. Many voices had said: “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you,” but no voice had ever said: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” . . .

To take a very simple analogy – if we own a car, the law can compel us to drive it in such a way that we do not injure anyone else on the road, but no law can compel us to stop and give a lift to someone who is obviously in need of help. It is quite a simple thing to refrain from hurting and injuring people; it is not so very difficult to respect their principles and their feelings; it is a far harder thing to make it the chosen and deliberate policy of life to go out of our way to be as kind to them as we would wish them to be to us.

Grant Osborne: This simple principle would by itself revitalize human relationships if people everywhere were to begin to live by it. It not only summarizes the OT law but also provides a capstone for Jesus’ new covenant principles, setting the standard for the “*greater righteousness*” of **5:20**, i.e., righteousness in action in human relationships. It builds on the “*good gifts*” we receive from God (**v. 11**), so that we in turn do only good to one another as well.

Note that the whole emphasis is on **what we do for others**; there is no expectation of getting something back in return (it is “*do to others what,*” not “*do to others so that*”). So the kingdom comes both in the advent of the Messiah, the Son of God, and in a new level of ethical commitment on the part of the new covenant people. This is not a radical humanism (as some have said), for it is completely dependent on the relationship with God implied in **vv. 7–11**. We can only be good to our neighbor if we have truly experienced God’s goodness to us. Then we have a proper model to follow and a proper source of strength.

Donald Hagner: It is from this saying and that of **22:37–40** that **love** became the dominant and summarizing theme of the Christian ethic. To act in this manner, in constant deeds of love, is to bring to expression that to which the law and the prophets pointed. That is, a world where only good is done to others involves by definition eschatological fulfillment, a return to the paradise of the Garden of Eden. To do good to others is to mirror the activity of the Father (**7:11**), which of course finds its supreme manifestation in the eschatological fulfillment brought by the Son. If the ethics of the kingdom of God anticipate the coming future in the present, then this is especially true of the ethic of the golden rule, which is the **distillation of kingdom ethics**. If this teaching of Jesus were to be lived out in the world, the whole system of evil would be dramatically shaken. Even if it were to be manifested seriously in the Church, its impact would be incalculable. In this sublime command, so simple and yet so deep, we encounter a challenge central to the purposes of God and therefore one that is also eschatological in tone. No other teaching is so readily identified with Jesus; no other teaching is so central to the righteousness of the kingdom and the practice of discipleship.

J C Ryle: In this part of the sermon on the mount (**Mt 7:12-20**) our Lord begins to draw His discourse to a **conclusion**. The lessons He here enforces on our notice, are broad, general, and full of the deepest wisdom. Let us mark them in succession. He lays down a **general principle** for our guidance in all doubtful questions between man and man. We are "*to do to others as we would have others do to us.*" We are not to deal with others as others deal with us. This is mere selfishness and heathenism. We are to deal with others as we would like others to deal with us. This is real Christianity. This is a golden rule indeed! It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and over-reaching. It does much more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and man. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases. It sweeps the whole debatable ground with one mighty principle. It shows us a balance and measure, by which every one may see at once what is his duty. Is there a thing we would not like our neighbor to do to us? Then let us always remember, that this is the thing we ought not to do to him. Is there a thing we would like him to do to us? Then this is the very thing we ought to do to him. How many intricate questions would be decided at once, if this rule were honestly used!

I. CONNECTIVITY TO THE CONTEXT

“Therefore”

Not just a string of isolated teachings

John Nolland: That the linking οὕτως (*‘then’*) functions to introduce a summary (and generalisation) is suggested by the *inclusio* with **5:7** created by “*the Law and the Prophets*”. It will, then, be important to read the Golden Rule as used here closely with what has already been said.

Daniel Doriani: The Golden Rule is widely cited and widely abused. An adult twist on the Golden Rule says, “Whoever has the gold makes the rules.” A child’s version says, “Do one to others before they do one to you.” But a proper understanding of the Golden Rule begins with its context. . .

Once again, therefore, Jesus’ laws lead us to see our sin and our need for grace. We simply cannot keep his law. We cannot stop judging others for their failings. We cannot keep even the simplest summary of his teaching: “*Do to others what you would have them do to you.*” What then shall we do? We return to the first word in our passage. We must ask God for mercy to forgive and ask him to make us new.

Charles Swindoll: This **capstone** serves as a fitting summation of the previous three principles.

1. Treating people the way we want to be treated would mean not judging others unjustly —because to the degree we judge others, we ourselves will be judged (**Matt. 7:1-5**).
2. Treating people the way we want to be treated would also mean not dumping our declaration of the message on those whom God has not prepared; to do so could sour them to the truth and cause them to treat the things of God with hardened contempt (**7:6**).
3. Further, treating others the way we want to be treated would mean modeling for others the rich, loving benevolence God the Father has poured out on us (**7:7-11**). In other words, because of the inexpressible, unconditional grace God bestows upon us, we ought to show the same kind of unconditional grace toward others.

II. CONDUCT DESIRED

“however you want people to treat you”

We all know how we would like to be treated

“by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (**Matt. 7:2**)

Donald Hagner: The emphatic πάντα ὅσα, lit. “*everything whatsoever,*” and the present tense of ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς, lit. “*you be doing to them,*” presents a high challenge to the Christian in his or her relations to others, involving both unlimited scope and faithful persistence.

III. CONDUCT COMMANDED

“so treat them”

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” (**1 John 4:7**)

Not just about how we feel towards them . . . but primarily how we act towards them. This requires an investment of our resources in the lives of others.

IV. CONNECTIVITY TO THE OT

“for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

This is what it is all about – what Christ has been trying to sum up in the Sermon on the Mount as He gives the divine interpretation of the OT law.

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5)

D. A. Carson: The rule is not arbitrary, without rational support, as in radical humanism; in Jesus’ mind its rationale (“for”) lies in its connection with revealed truth recorded in “*the Law and the Prophets.*” The rule embraces quantity (“*in everything*”) and quality (houtōs kai, “[do] even so”). And in the context of fulfilling the Scriptures, the rule provides a handy summary of the righteousness to be displayed in the kingdom.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection, if any, between **verse 12** and the preceding verses?
- 2) What is the difference between the negative expressions of similar proverbial sayings in other ancient cultures and with the positive command given here by Jesus?
- 3) How does this general principle prove to be more effective than trying to legislate a wide range of specific case situations?
- 4) Why is the Golden Rule ineffective as a guideline to reform society in general?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hendriksen: Is there a connection between these verses and **verses 1-6**? There are those who see no connection at all. This, however, would be strange. In the entire sermon up to this point we have witnessed a very logical development of ideas, an easy thought transition from one paragraph to the next. . . After a detailed examination of the entire preceding paragraph (**verses 1-6**) the question cannot be suppressed, “*And who is sufficient for these things?*” (**II Cor. 2:16** A.V.). This question Jesus answers by urging the necessity of persevering prayer accompanied by earnest effort. . . it refers to asking for the fulfilment of every need, particularly ever *spiritual* need. . . .

As a very appropriate conclusion not only of 7:1-11 but of the entire large division beginning at 5:17 (and see also 5:5, 7, 9, 13-16) Jesus now presents his own version of The Golden Rule. . .

“How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.”

Therefore – that is, out of gratitude for the Father’s continuing gifts – you should love your neighbors even as you desire that they love you, in order that the stream of love toward the undeserving may flow on and on, not only to your hearts, but also through and from your hearts until it reaches even the most unworthy. *“Thus, indeed, you will be sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes his sun to rise on evil (people) and good, and sends rain on righteous and unrighteous” (5:45).* This, indeed, and this alone, is The Golden Rule.

Martin Lloyd-Jones: Perhaps we can go further and say that our danger is to think of the law as being something negative, something prohibitive. Of course there are aspects of the law which are negative; but what our Lord is emphasizing here is – as He has said at great length in the fifth chapter – that the law which God gave to the children of Israel through the medium of angels and of Moses is a very positive thing, is a **spiritual thing**. It was never meant to be mechanical, and the whole fallacy of the Pharisees and the scribes, and all who followed them, was that they reduced something that was essentially spiritual and living to the realm of the mechanical, to something that was an end in itself. They thought that as long as they had actually not murdered somebody they had kept the law concerning murder, and that as long as they had not committed physical adultery they were all right in a moral sense. They were guilty of complete failure to see the spiritual intent, to see the spiritual character of the law, and above all to see the great end and object for which the law had been given.

Here, our Lord puts all that in this perfect summary. Why does the law tell us not to covet our neighbour’s good and possessions, or his wife, or anything else? Why does the law tell us “Thou shalt not kill”; “Thou shalt not steal”; “Thou shalt not commit adultery”? What does it mean by all this? Is it designed simply that you and I should uphold these things as rules and regulations, or as sub-sections in acts of parliament which govern and control us and keep us within certain limits? No, that is not the object at all. The whole purpose and the real spirit behind it all is this, that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, that we are to **love one another**. . .

So the failure of man to live by, and to keep, the golden rule is due to the fact that he is **self-centred**. That, in turn, leads to self-satisfaction, self-protection, self-concern. Self is in the forefront the whole time, for man wants everything for himself.

Hoke: When Jesus calls us to love our neighbor and to live by the golden rule, He is calling us to be people who care. The Sermon on the Mount is all about caring. You cannot live by the Sermon on the Mount and refuse to care about others. . .

But if we are seeking Him and His Kingdom first, then our desires will be controlled by His life in us. We will find ourselves desiring and asking for the things that are in concert with His will. And we read in **1 John 5:14**, "*This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*" God hears and answers the prayers of those who ask for what He wants to give us. This is His promise. . .

We must not only see that the promises of God are ours, we must also see that they are ours because God loves us so. . .

And Jesus has given us the motivation to care by revealing to us the Father's heart and the Father's provision. We are freed to care for others because God has revealed His care for us. Knowing that our needs will be met as we ask, seek, and knock frees us to reach out to help meet the needs of others. Being recipients of the father's love frees us to love.

Lenski: Among the good gifts for which the Father's children pray daily is the power to overcome the promptings of their flesh so that by grace for Christ's sake they may love their neighbor with a truly spiritual love and thus heap upon him all the kindness they themselves would like to receive. Christ's Golden Rule has appealed to many, yet only true believers have understood it and have found the power to translate it into life in an ever-increasing degree.

Michael Wilkins: The moral maxim that has come to be known as the "Golden Rule" is one of the commonly accepted bases of human civilization. It occurs in both positive and negative forms. The ancient Roman philosopher and statesman **Seneca** (4 B.C.–A.D. 65) expressed the principle positively, "Let us show our generosity in the same manner that we would wish to have it bestowed on us" (De Beneficiis 2.1.1), while the Chinese philosopher **Confucius** (551–479 B.C.) stated it negatively, "Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you!" (Analects 15:23).A-49

The precept appears to have been a common theme in Judaism of the time of Jesus. **Tobit** gives a negative form of the principle, "Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and discipline yourself in all your conduct. And what you hate, do not do to anyone" (Tobit 4:14b–15). **Hillel the Elder** (c. 70 B.C.–A.D. 10) supposedly had as his motto, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." In the only text in the whole of rabbinic literature that attributes the saying to Hillel, the Elder goes on to say, "That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn!" (b. Šabb. 31a).

For Jesus, the kingdom life that he is inaugurating fulfills the deepest inclination of humans, who are created in the image of God. Kingdom life now enables his disciples to live life the way God intends it to be lived. As such it "*sums up the Law and the Prophets*" (cf. **5:17–20**).

R. T. France: The common description of this saying as the "Golden Rule" is traditionally traced to the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (AD 222–235) who

though not a Christian was reputedly so impressed by the comprehensiveness of this maxim of Jesus as a guide to good living that he had it inscribed in gold on the wall of his chamber. Its influence in Victorian Britain is illustrated by the name given by Charles Kingsley in *The Water Babies* to the good fairy “Mrs Do-as-you-would-be-done-by” (in contrast to Mrs Be-done-by-as-you-did). As a guide to how unselfish love should work itself out in our relations with other people, this simple principle would be hard to improve on.

Warren Wiersbe: This great truth is a principle that ought to govern our attitudes toward others. It only applies to believers, and it must be practiced in every area of life. The person who practices the Golden Rule refuses to say or do anything that would harm himself or others. If our judging of others is not governed by this principle, we will become proud and critical, and our own spiritual character will degenerate.

Practicing the Golden Rule releases the love of God in our lives and enables us to help others, even those who want to hurt us.

But remember that practicing the Golden Rule means paying a price. If we want God’s best for ourselves and others, but others resist God’s will, then they will oppose us. We are salt, and salt stings the open wound. We are light, and light exposes dirt.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Justice of the Kingdom – The Golden Rule

I. Christians are to be deliberately and conscientiously concerned for our neighbors’ best interests.

The ‘*therefore*’ is very interesting. What does the ‘*therefore*’ refer to? What is Jesus referring back to, when He says in light of this, or so, or therefore, treat one another as you want others to treat you. He has just been speaking about prayer. What does prayer have to do with the way we treat one another. Well, as we have said before, Christ has been speaking about judgment, about correction, and about prayer in this passage. As we go to the Lord for wisdom about judgment, and correction and anything else that we go to the Lord, the Lord gives us wisdom and guidance. He walks us along the way, according to the principles of His word, and gives us the moral resolution to do what we know to be right in accordance with His will.

But another benefit that we get in prayer is that it puts us in a **humble posture**. For when we go to the Lord in prayer, we remember that we ourselves are beggars to His grace. We have not earned our position of inheritance in the kingdom. We have received it by a donation of His free grace and mercy. And therefore, we too, ought to have a charitable spirit towards all men, even those who have hurt us, and even those that we do not know. For He has shown mercy in our own experience. **Sinclair Ferguson** has said this, “Only the person who sees that he is a beggar before the Lord, and has nothing to offer, but has discovered that he is the heir of the grace of God, will be sufficiently set free from self-centeredness of character to put others first, and to do to them, what he would appreciate receiving from them.” Only the person who has

bowed before the Lord and humbled himself, herself before the Lord in prayer, realizing that all that He has given us is of His grace, is able to get out of that native self-centeredness, which captures us all and is enabled to be other centered. Christ is here, pressing on His followers their duty of righteousness to all men. This, He sees, as part of true religion.

II. Christians are to deal with their neighbors according to God's standard of righteousness.

You see, the Golden Rule is based on the law's principle of neighbor love, which is found in the last six commandments of the Ten Commandments, and is expounded in all the writings of Moses and the prophets. The Lord Jesus is calling us to treat others as we would wish to be treated on the basis of the law of neighbor love.

III. The Golden Rule is not the gospel.

Chuck Smith: Sermon Notes on 7:12

I. "THEREFORE"

A. Links necessity with power. "*Ask, seek, knock.*"

II. DO UNTO YOUR NEIGHBOR WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE YOUR NEIGHBOR DO TO YOU.

A. Similar to other statements.

1. Hillel, "Do not do to your neighbor what is hateful to yourself."
2. Socrates, "What stirs you to anger when done to you by others, do not do to others."
3. Aristotle, "We should bear ourselves toward others as we would desire they should bear themselves toward us."
4. Confucius, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."
5. These are negative and passive.

B. Christ's command is positive and active.

1. You care not to just refrain from doing him harm, you are to do him good.
2. It is not that you aren't to rob him, you are to give to him.

C. Selfish, self respect might refrain us from harming him, but the higher thing cannot be done without power.

D. Summation on matter of judgment.

1. Summation also of law and prophets.
 - a. Calls attention to misunderstanding of God's law.
 - b. We are prone to think law is just rules we must keep and we forget spirit.
 - c. Think of law as something negative or prohibitive.

E. Modern view of golden rule.

1. Praised not practiced.
2. Sermon on the mount preached not that we should comment on it, but follow it.

F. Why do men forsake golden rule?

1. Theological and Biblical.
 - a. Some say they dislike theology.
 - b. Love Sermon on the mount, practical and simple, not theology.
 - c. Just put this before people and they will see its merits and put it into practice.
2. Why is this so?
 - a. Man is sinful.
 - b. So bound by evil - cannot practice golden rule.
 - c. "*The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the Law of God.*" **Rom. 8:7.**
 - d. Useless to hold law before him, he hates it.
3. Self is worst problem, we are too self-centered.
 - a. Labor disputes.

G. How is it possible to put golden rule into practice?

1. You must start with God.
 - a. What is greatest commandment?
 1. You cannot love your neighbor until you first love God.
 - b. To come into presence of God gives us new view of ourselves.
 1. We also get new view of others.
 2. Victims of sin.
 - c. We see perfect order of Sermon on the Mount. *Ask, seek, knock* - brings the power to do unto others.

Bryce Morgan: Ruled by the Golden Rule

"...*Treat people the same way you want them to treat you...*" There you have it. "Relationships 101", with your instructor, Jesus. In general, no matter the individual, Jesus reveals here that responding to others, interacting with others, relating to others, working with others should be guided by this very simple principle: the way we would like others to treat us, is the way we should treat them. . .

Jesus is speaking to what all of us already know: deep within every person (even those with unhealthy desires), there is a longing to be loved; a longing to be respected; a longing to be heard; a longing to be treated in fairness, with kindness, with patience and understanding, with compassion... with grace. These longings are universal. That's precisely why we find some version of this same **Matthew 7:12** principle in culture after culture, throughout history. . .

But within the context of the entire 'mountain message', this reference to "*the Law and the Prophets*" also reminds us to look back, not simply to the OT, but also to the

beginning of Jesus' discourse. Look back for a moment to **5:17**. Jesus told his disciples: “*Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*” Why is the verse important? Because it explains what Jesus goes on to do in the rest of chapter 5 in terms of true kingdom righteousness. And He carries that explanation on into chapter 6, and... into the opening verses of chapter 7.

Therefore, when Jesus mentions “*the Law and the Prophets*” in both chapter 5 and chapter 7, what he's given us are '**bookends**' to his teaching. And that means, what we have in this 'mountain message' are the specifics of what a life ruled by the “Golden Rule” looks like. It means, for example, we do not respond to others in anger because we do not want to be responded to in that way. It means we do not look at others with lust, because we do not want to be objectified in that way. It means we do not condemn with a critical spirit. Why? Because *we* do not want to be treated that way.

In the same way, as we talked about before, even when we are behaving badly, we ultimately want understanding and forgiveness. Even when we are acting like someone's enemy, deep down, if we were able to, we would choose a loving response over a hostile response; gentle correction over harsh retaliation. Therefore, we should hear the “Golden Rule” when Jesus teaches us to “*love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (**5:44**).

What do we find in **Matthew 7:12**? We find a simple but powerful **summary of the kingdom righteousness** that Jesus is describing for us throughout this 'mountain message'.

<https://www.wayofgracechurch.com/sermons/sermon/2019-07-14/ruled-by-the-golden-rule-matthew-7:12>

TEXT: Matthew 7:13-29

TITLE: CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS

BIG IDEA:
COMMIT TO OBEYING THE TEACHING OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus has now finished giving his new kingdom principles, and he draws his Sermon to a close by removing any possibility of neutrality and **demanding a response**. The Sermon on the Mount has been all about the ethical obligation to live a superior righteousness. This involves the thought life as the key to relationships in the new community (**5:17–48**), the priority of God in every aspect of our religious life (**6:1–18**) as well as in our relation to material possessions (**6:19–34**), and in our social relationships inside and outside the community (**7:1–12**). Now is the time of decision, and Jesus wants us to realize the seriousness of our choices. The path to God is narrow and hazardous, but it is the only path to take.

There are only two paths in responding to the kingdom demands in the Sermon—unquestioning obedience/commitment to God or going the way of the world—and Jesus illustrates this by using a common Jewish metaphor on “*the two ways*” (**Deut 30:15–19; Ps 1:6; Prov 28:6, 18; Jer 21:8; 4 Ezra 7:3–9; Did. 1–6; Barn. 18–20**) and illustrating it in three separate warnings. All three warn about the terrible danger of playing games with our eternal destiny. There is only one path to eternal salvation, and all other attempts will travel the broad road to ruin.

Craig Blomberg: “*Wide*” versus “*narrow*” may refer not only to the majority versus the minority but also to relative levels of difficulty or ease.

Donald Hagner: We are at a major turning point in the sermon; no more ethical teaching is given. What follows are warnings and a concluding parable, all involving, as in the present passage, the use of **strong contrasts**.

Richard Gardner: The final group of sayings in **Matthew 7** constitutes the section of the Sermon identified earlier as an epilogue. It is customary in an epilogue for the speaker to sum up the major issue(s) of a speech and to **challenge the hearers to take appropriate action**. That is clearly what Jesus is doing in **7:13–29**, and doing it in a typical manner.

R. T. France: The Golden Rule of **7:12** concludes the substantive content of the discourse on discipleship. What follows is a series of four short sketches which underline the importance of an **existential response** to what has been heard and warn of the **consequences of failing to respond**. There is no uniformity in their literary form (unlike for instance the six examples of the greater righteousness in **5:21–47** or the three examples of misdirected piety in **6:1–18**), but each in a different way draws out the **contrast between a right and a wrong response**, between the **true and the false**, the **saved and the lost**. This is, then, a rhetorical conclusion to the discourse, aiming to motivate the hearers to take appropriate action. A key word which runs through the last three of the four sections is *poieō*, “*to do*,” though English idiom does not allow the repetition of the same verb in translation: it is represented above by “*produce*” (fruit) in **vv. 17, 18, 19**, by “*do*” (the will of God) in **v. 21**, by “*perform*” (miracles) in **v. 22**, and by “*put into*

practice” (Jesus’ teaching) in vv. 24, 26. In each case except v. 22 it is those who “do” who are commended; in v. 22 the wrong sort of “doing” is contrasted with the right sort in v. 21. In vv. 24 and 26 both men are described as “hearing” Jesus’ words but only the first “does” them; the message is clear, that those who have now “heard” Jesus’ teaching receive no benefit from it unless they also **put it into practice**. . .

The resultant four sections therefore press increasingly closer to home:

- the first is a simple contrast between saved and lost,
- the second concerns outsiders who merely pretend to be insiders,
- the third looks at those who think they are insiders but are not,
- and the fourth draws a line even within the group of insiders (who hear Jesus’ words) between those who respond and those who do not.

In each of the four cases, the result of a failure to respond is **catastrophic**: “*destruction*” (v. 13), “*cut down and burned*” (v. 19), excluded from the kingdom of heaven (vv. 21, 23), and the total collapse of the house (v. 27).

Charles Swindoll: Secrets of an Unshakable Life

As we conclude our exploration of the Sermon on the Mount, we realize that Jesus saved His **most passionate words** for the finale. **Matthew 7:13-27** expresses the Lord’s most intense feelings of the sermon. We could call this part the **application section** of His sermon. In light of everything He preached leading up to this point, Jesus says, essentially, “Now that you’ve heard all this, what are you going to do about it?” As He drove His audience to application, Jesus presented His listeners with four paired alternatives:

- two gates —the narrow one leading to life or the wide one leading to destruction (7:13-14)
- two trees —the good one bearing good fruit or the bad one bearing bad fruit (7:15-20)
- two responses —the genuine disciple who does the will of God or the hypocritical hearer who only gives lip service (7:21-23)
- two foundations —the one built on rock or the one built on sand (7:24-27)

Jesus’ call to a decision in response to His message is really a call to faith for unbelievers and a call to discipleship for believers. It’s a call to repentance, to trust in and obey the King, the long-awaited Messiah and only rightful Lord.

I. (:13-14) ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE – CONTRAST BETWEEN THE NARROW GATE AND THE WIDE GATE

A. (:13a) Exclusivity of Salvation

“Enter by the narrow gate;”

Daniel Doriani: First, the gate is narrow **because Jesus’ commands are restrictive**. Eight of the ten commandments begin with “*You shall not.*” When the law forbids certain actions, it narrows our options. But the law is not the restricting principle. The character of God is the pattern for our character, and that restricts us too. God is faithful, therefore we must be faithful and keep our promises. God is generous, therefore we should be generous. God is kind, therefore we should be kind. The indulgence of bad moods that leads to meanness or cruelty simply is not an option. Disciples resist the temptation to break the law and to ignore God’s character.

Second, the gate is narrow **because the Bible teaches truths—doctrines—that we must believe**. The Bible says that God created the world out of nothing, that Jesus is truly God and

truly man, that this age will end when Jesus returns and calls mankind before him for judgment. The Bible directs us to think in these ways, not in others, and that restricts us. We cannot plausibly claim to be Christians and reject the cardinal truths of the faith.

Third, the gate is narrow **because we can miss it**. We miss it if we do not believe in Christ. We miss it if we deny that we are sinners, in need of a Savior. **Jesus' way is hard**. The word translated "hard" comes from a family of words that refers to suffering and persecution. This reminds us that Jesus' way is also narrow in the sense that it **can lead to opposition**. We enter the kingdom after passing through many hardships (**Acts 14:22**).

B. (:13b-14) Explanation of Why So Few People Find Salvation

1. (:13b) The Wide Gate Leads to Destruction

"for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it."

John Nolland: At this point the imagery expands to include a "way", which is best seen as the way that leads to the gate in question. Having been initially told to enter by the gate, the reader now faces the question of the way to get to the gate. To get to the right gate, one must first choose the right way. The imagery of a way introduces the idea of the **duration of the time** of a journey and therefore adds the notion of **tenacity** to that of **choice**. To the wide gate corresponds the broad way. We are to think of a main roadway, not able to be missed, constructed to carry large numbers comfortably, implicitly claiming to be going somewhere important; perhaps we are to think of **easy travelling conditions**.

2. (:14) The Narrow Gate Leads to Life

"For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

Grant Osborne: The true gate to salvation (articular τὴν ζωὴν, "the [eternal] life") is quite narrow, and the road is as well. "*Confined*" is a good translation for τεθλιμμένη, from the cognate θλίψις, "*trouble, persecution*." There well may be the idea of hardship and persecution, as in **Acts 14:22**, "*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God*." The persecution of the saints is a major Matthean motif (**5:10–11, 44; 10:16–23, 35–36; 13:21; 23:34–35; 24:9–13, 16–21**) and is likely implied here.

There is also the **difficult ethical path** demanded in **5:17–7:12**; such a life in this evil world will be nigh impossible without the power of the Spirit and the love of God in the life of the believer. Only a "*few*" will be willing to travel that difficult road, but the final result will be eternal "*life*." Jesus has made the options crystal clear: take the easy way and find destruction, or walk the difficult path and attain true life.

Warren Wiersbe: Since there are false prophets in the world, we must be careful of deception. But the greatest danger is self-deception. The scribes and Pharisees had fooled themselves into believing that they were righteous and others were sinful. It is possible for people to know the right language, believe intellectually the right doctrines, obey the right rules, and still not be saved. Jesus used two pictures to help us judge ourselves and others.

The two ways (vv. 13–14). These are, of course, the way to heaven and the way to hell. The broad way is the easy way; it is the popular way. But we must not judge spiritual profession by

statistics; the majority is not always right. The fact that “everybody does it” is no proof that what they are doing is right.

Quite the contrary is true: God’s people have always been a remnant, a small minority in this world. The reason is not difficult to discover: The way of life is narrow, lonely, and costly. We can walk on the broad way and keep our “baggage” of sin and worldliness. But if we enter the narrow way, we must give up those things.

Here, then, is the first test: Did your profession of faith in Christ cost you anything? If not, then it was not a true profession. Many people who “trust” Jesus Christ never leave the broad road with its appetites and associations. They have an easy Christianity that makes no demands on them. Yet Jesus said that the narrow way is hard. We cannot walk on two roads, in two different directions, at the same time.

The two trees (vv. 15-20).

The second test is this: Did my decision for Christ change my life?

Donald Hagner: Although the “few” is clearly hyperbolic, it remains true that the majority of the people (πολλοί, v 13) do not receive Jesus’ message (cf. 11:20–24; 12:41–42); they go down the broad path to destruction. Those who do follow Jesus and his summons to the righteousness of the kingdom are **comparatively few** (ὀλίγοι). That those who follow Jesus are a minority and that their path is a demanding one should come as no surprise, nor should it be discouraging. For from another perspective it may be said that “*the harvest is plentiful*” so that many more laborers are needed (9:37–38). . . The deliberate choice of οἱ εὐρίσκοντες, “who find,” to replace the οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι, “who go in,” of the parallel in v 13, has the effect of pointing to the privilege of the disciples. There is an echo of joy and fulfillment in the reference to the finding of this path to life. Again the call to righteousness occurs in the context of the reality of grace.

II. (:15-20) BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS – FALSE PROPHETS CAN BE DETECTED BY EXAMINING THEIR FRUIT

Warren Wiersbe: These show that true faith in Christ changes the life and produces fruit for God’s glory. Everything in nature reproduces after its kind, and this is also true in the spiritual realm. Good fruit comes from a good tree, but bad fruit comes from a bad tree.

A. (:15) Warning Regarding False Prophets – Deceitful Appearance and Destructive Mission

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

Donald Hagner: Despite their outward appearance and profession, these persons are in fact the **mortal enemies** of those who belong to the flock. As the wolf, known for its ferocity (hence “*ravenous*”), is the natural enemy of the sheep (cf. Isa 11:6; 65:25; Sir 13:17; John 10:12), so these deceivers are natural enemies of the truth and the true people of God. (cf. the similar metaphor in Acts 20:29; Ign. Phil. 2:1–2; Did. 16:3.) The disciples must therefore be wary of these false prophets. Following their way will lead only to the destruction of the flock.

John Nolland: Presumably one is to beware of false prophets because their influence may distort

one's own embrace of the teaching of Jesus. Since they disguise themselves as sheep, their falseness is not necessarily immediately apparent. Though "*sheep*" here points in the first instance to **harmlessness** over against the predatory nature of the wolves, we should almost certainly understand that the disguise is, more precisely, to enable free movement among the flock of sheep, which is thus implicitly identified as the prey. Thus an allusion to the image of Israel as the flock of God is probably involved.

D. A. Carson: Warnings against false prophets are necessarily based on the conviction that not all prophets are true, that truth can be violated, and that the gospel's enemies usually conceal their hostility and try to pass themselves off as fellow believers. At first glance, they use orthodox language, show biblical piety, and are indistinguishable from true prophets (cf. **10:41**). Thus it is vital to know how to distinguish sheep from wolves in sheep's clothing. Jesus does not explicitly say who will have the discernment to protect the community but implies that the community itself, by whatever agency, must somehow protect itself from the wolves.

B. (:16-20) Key to Identifying False Prophets – Examine Their Fruit which They Cannot Hide

1. (:16a) Discernment of False Prophets

"You will know them by their fruits."

Grant Osborne: "*Fruit*" in the NT is more than just the deeds of people but everything they are (e.g., the "*fruit of the Spirit*" in **Gal 5:22–23**), including what they say as well as how they act.

Craig Blomberg: v. 16 suggests that **outward behavior** may enable one to distinguish between true and false Christians. Like inspecting vegetation, which inevitably discloses fruit in keeping with its species and state of health, so also one can look for good or bad (literally, rotten or worthless) spiritual fruit (**vv. 17–20**). **Verse 21** further equates this fruit with doing "*the will of my Father who is in heaven,*" precisely what the Sermon on the Mount is elaborating. Of course, any individual action can prove insincere, but those who have detailed opportunities to scrutinize both the private and public behavior of people who claim to be Jesus' followers (and particularly who can watch how those people respond after sinning) will have the best chance of evaluating the **genuineness** of professed commitments to Christ. It is worth emphasizing, however, that one can never know with absolute certainty the spiritual state of any other individual.

2. (:16b-18) Distinctive Bad Fruit of False Prophets

a. (:16b) The Source of the Fruit Determines the Fruit

*"Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes,
nor figs from thistles, are they?"*

Daniel Doriani: Jesus compares false teachers to thornbushes (Matt. 7:16). Thornbushes bear small, dark berries that resemble grapes at a distance. But if you examine them closely, you see what the berries are. So too with false prophets. We distinguish true from false by examining the fruit of their ministry and the patterns of their life. As Jesus says, "*Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit*" (**7:17**).

b. (:17) Good Will Always Produce Good and Bad Will Always Produce Bad

*"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit;
but the bad tree bears bad fruit."*

- c. (:18) Good Can Never Produce Bad and Bad Can Never Produce Good
“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit,
nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”

Robert Gundry: So strong is the link between inward condition and outward behavior, in other words, that a true prophet doesn't even have the capacity to pervert and disobey Jesus' teachings; nor does a false prophet have the capacity to uphold and obey them. So you can be sure in your distinguishing of false prophets from true.

3. (:19) Destiny of False Prophets

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down
and thrown into the fire.”

4. (:20) Discernment of False Prophets

“So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

John Nolland: After the explanation and development of vv. 16b-19, we are brought back to a restatement of v. 16a. The central point has been the need to recognise in order to avoid the influence of those who would represent a different vision from that proposed by Jesus. By watching their deeds one is likely to expose their identity more quickly than simply by listening to their words.

Bruner: The test of their reality is not how they come on but how they come off; not how they appear but what they produce; not how they seem but the theological and moral influence of their teaching and life in the community. Thus the prayer at the end of the Lord's Prayer, “*deliver us from evil,*” also means “deliver us from false prophets and their amoral, immoral, or supermoral messages.”

III. (:21-23) DON'T DECEIVE YOURSELF WHEN YOU HAVE NO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS – FALSE PROFESSORS WILL BE REJECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR DISOBEDIENCE

R. T. France: Some interpreters treat the third scene, vv. 21–23, as a subsection of the second dealing with false prophecy. Apart from a single use of the verb “*prophecy*” as one of a series of charismatic activities claimed in v. 22, however, the two sections have little in common, and v. 20 with its repetition of v. 16a looks like the **conclusion of a section**, after which a new group is introduced in v. 21. As we shall note below, the nature of the deception in vv. 21–23 is quite different from that in v. 15. Whereas that was deliberate deception of disciples by those outside the group, the people of v. 22 are, at least in their own understanding, insiders; they are not so much deceivers as **self-deceived**. Their situation is closer to that of the non-practising hearer of v. 26 than to that of the wolves dressed up as sheep. . .

Whereas v. 15 warned the insiders against interlopers who would pretend to belong to the group, here there is apparently no pretense. We meet people who profess their allegiance to Jesus as “*Lord,*” and who can back up that claim with **impressive spiritual achievements** (“*fruits*”?) all carried out explicitly “*in his name.*” Unlike the consciously fraudulent prophets of v. 15, these people are apparently themselves more surprised than anyone when they find themselves rejected

from the kingdom of heaven. They really thought they had made the grade; like the “goats” of **25:44** they are quite unaware of where they have failed. But the basis of their rejection is expressed not in terms of what they have done or not done, still less in terms of the allegiance they professed, but in the poignant words, the more desolating when addressed to professed disciples, “*I never knew you.*” . . .

even these spiritual activities can apparently be carried out by those who still **lack the relationship with Jesus** which is the essential basis for belonging to the kingdom of heaven.

Charles Swindoll: In the third set of paired alternatives, Jesus described two different responses to His teaching. He thus moved from unsound teachers (**7:15-20**) to unsound hearers (**7:21-23**). These verses can easily be misunderstood unless we read them very closely and consider them very carefully. Here we see the danger of a merely verbal profession of faith that lacks substance in reality. Some people may say things believers say and do things believers do—but it can all be fake.

A. (:21) Mark of Genuine Discipleship

1. Not Profession

“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven;”

2. But Obedience

“but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”

Craig Blomberg: **Verses 21-22** enumerate some of the ways in which individuals can masquerade as Christians. They may verbally affirm that Jesus is their Master, perhaps even with great joy and enthusiasm, but such claims must issue in lives of obedience (an important qualification of **Rom 10:10-13**). Some may be preachers. Others perform exorcisms (see comments under **8:28-34**), and some work various kinds of miracles (see comments under chaps. 8-9 passim). We are reminded that signs and wonders can come from sources other than God, including both the demonic world and human manufacture (cf. **Acts 19:13-16; Rev 13:13-14**).

Grant Osborne: The message here is that mere confession is useless unless accompanied by action. One can make a profession, but without a **changed life**, such an affirmation is without merit. So living under obedience to “*the will of [the] Father*” (this is especially God’s will as unfolded in the Sermon itself = the love commandments of **22:37-40**) is not an option but a necessity for entering the kingdom. A life of obedience (present tense “*do*” [ποιῶν] for continuous action) to his will is, in fact, the definition of the “*greater righteousness*” of **5:20** (cf. also **3:15; 5:6, 10; 6:1, 33**).

B. (:22-23) Exposure of Ultimate Accountability

1. (:22) False Facade

*“Many will say to Me on that day,
'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name,
and in Your name cast out demons,
and in Your name perform many miracles?”*

Donald Hagner: These persons are thus not criticized for their charismatic activities but for their dependence upon them as a substitute for the righteousness taught by Jesus. We may conclude that charismatic activities, done apart from this righteousness, have no self-contained importance

and are in themselves insufficient for entry into the kingdom of heaven. . .

Perhaps no passage in the NT expresses more concisely and more sharply that the essence of discipleship, and hence of participation in the kingdom, is found not in words, nor in religiosity, nor even in the performance of spectacular deeds in the name of Jesus, but only in the **manifestation of true righteousness**—i.e., the doing of the will of the Father as now interpreted through the teaching of Jesus. Relationship with Jesus is thus impossible apart from doing the will of God. For Matthew all is narrowed down to this one necessity. Neither good, important words (“*Lord, Lord*”) nor good, random deeds of mercy (e.g., casting out demons) can substitute for the full picture of righteousness the evangelist has given in the sermon. **Religion can never take the place of actual obedience to the teaching of Jesus.**

2. (:23) Damning Dismissal

*“And then I will declare to them,
‘I never knew you;
depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”*

Robert Gundry: “*Depart from me*” implies that Jesus is the locus of the kingdom of heaven, and therefore of salvation, and that he’ll determine who’ll enter and not enter that kingdom.

Grant Osborne: In other words, these people like Judas pretended to be disciples and probably even acted like disciples (indeed, possibly thought they were disciples) but were never actually committed to him. They were committed to the power Jesus represented and to the status they thought they had, but they never allowed the will of God to control their actions. This is not an anti-charismatic saying but rather means that such actions will never suffice in and of themselves apart from a life committed to doing God’s will.

R. T. France: That these professed disciples did not even realize their religious failure, and would no doubt have rejected the term “*law-breakers*” with indignation, only makes the verdict the more poignant.

Daniel Doriani: “*I never knew you*” means “I never knew you as my child, as a member of my covenant family” (cf. **Amos 3:2**). Jesus says, “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me*” (John 10:14). Paul says, “*The Lord knows those who are his*” (**2 Tim. 2:19**).

IV. (:24-27) BUILD YOUR LIFE ON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION -- CONTRAST BETWEEN THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE ROCK AND THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE SAND (WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS)

E. Michael Green: The final way Jesus presses his claim brings us to the end of the Sermon. In this age of **permissiveness** and **pluralism** (which we forget was much the same in Jesus’ own day), his claims stand out sheer and stark. He does not agree that it does not matter what you believe in so long as you are sincere. He does not allow that we are all climbing up to God by the route of our choice. He does not fit in with our shallow pluralism. Instead he says **there are only two ways we can build**. Not many ways, just two. We can either build on him and his teaching, which we will find is as solid as rock; or else we can build on any other religion or philosophy in the world, and we will find that it is sand, and in the last day it will spell ruin. . .

So, we must build on the Rock. How? Jesus' reply to that question is the heart of Old Testament religion. **We must hear and obey.** Not just hear, but obey. The theological and religious world is full of hearing; it is overloaded with God-talk. What will thrill the heart of God and make the pagans realize that the gospel is true is practical, generous obedience --

- obedience that transforms our characters (5:11–12),
- affects our influence (5:13–16),
- shows itself in practical righteousness (5:17–48),
- touches our devotional life (6:1–18),
- radically alters our ambitions (6:19–34),
- transforms our relationships (7:1–12)
- and marks us out as totally wholehearted servants of the King (7:13–27).

That is what Jesus is looking for. That is the mark of the disciples he calls. That is the kingdom manifesto detailed with immense authority at the outset of his public ministry.

A. (:24-25) House Built on the Rock

1. (:24) Life Decisions of the Wise Man

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.”

Craig Blomberg: It is not enough simply to hear Jesus' call or even to respond with some temporary flurry of good deeds. Rather, we must build a solid foundation that combines authentic commitment to Christ with persevering obedience. Jesus graphically illustrates his point with a parable.

Robert Gundry: “*Therefore*” makes the story of the prudent and foolish builders illustrate both the final doom of false prophets and their followers, whose lawless conduct exempts them from persecution now, and the ultimate security of true disciples, though they're presently persecuted because of their obedience to the Law as interpreted by Jesus. The two occurrences of “everyone” stress the inescapability of eternal doom on the one hand and the certainty of eternal life on the other hand.

2. (:25) Life Destiny of the Wise Man

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.”

B. (:26-27) House Built on the Sand

1. (:26) Life Decisions of the Foolish Man

“And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.”

2. (:27) Life Destiny of the Foolish Man

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.”

Warren Wiersbe: The **foundation** in this parable is **obedience to God's Word**—obedience that is an evidence of true faith (**James 2: 14ff.**). The two men in this story had much in common. Both had desires to build a house. Both built houses that looked good and sturdy. But when the judgment came (the storm), one of the houses collapsed. What was the difference? Not the mere

external looks, to be sure. The difference was in the foundation: The successful builder “*digged deep*” (**Luke 6:48**) and set his house on a solid foundation.

A false profession will last until judgment comes. Sometimes this judgment is in the form of the trials of life. Like the person who received the seed of God’s Word into a shallow heart (**Matt. 13:4–9**), the commitment fails when the testing comes. Many people have professed faith in Christ, only to deny their faith when life becomes spiritually costly and difficult.

But the judgment illustrated here probably refers to the **final judgment before God**. We must not read into this parable all the doctrine that we are taught in the Epistles, for the Lord was illustrating one main point: **Profession will ultimately be tested before God**. Those who have trusted Christ, and have proved their faith by their obedience, will have nothing to fear. Their house is founded on the Rock, and it will stand. But those who have professed to trust Christ, yet who have not obeyed God’s will, will be condemned.

Donald Hagner: This last point receives **great emphasis** with the deliberate breaking of the symmetrical parallelism of the passage in the brief, ominous concluding words: καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη, “*and its fall was great*,” the last word receiving an additional emphasis. This conclusion is analogous to that of **v 23**.

D. A. Carson: The sermon ends with what has been implicit throughout it—the demand for **radical submission to the exclusive lordship of Jesus**, who fulfills the Law and the Prophets and warns the disobedient that the alternative to total obedience, true righteousness, and life in the kingdom is rebellion, self-centeredness, and eternal damnation.

Daniel Doriani: Why does Jesus end the Sermon on the Mount with the words “*a great crash*” (**7:27**)? This is hardly the upbeat way in which preachers typically end their sermons. But Jesus is making a point. It is not enough to study or applaud the words of Jesus. We must do what he says. Otherwise, we are in danger of hypocrisy, in danger of facing a great crash.

(:28-29) EPILOGUE – AMAZEMENT AT THE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING OF JESUS

A. (:28) Amazed Crowd

“The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching;”

Robert Gundry: This comment forms a **bridge** from this first of Jesus’ five, Pentateuch-like sermons in Matthew to the following narrative (compare **11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1**).

Craig Blomberg: Not surprisingly, the crowds marvel and contrast Jesus’ teaching with that of the scribes. For them the difference was one of authority. Of course the scribes and Pharisees were religious authorities, but their right to speak was always based on their ability to quote Scripture or subsequent Jewish teachers and tradition. Strikingly, Jesus quotes Scripture in his sermon only to reinterpret it, he cites no human authorities or tradition, and he speaks with directness and confidence that he himself is bringing God’s message for a new era in human history. Such preaching reflects either the height of presumption and heresy or the fact that he was a true spokesman for God, whom we dare not ignore.

B. (:29) Authoritative Teacher

*“for He was teaching them as one having authority,
and not as their scribes.”*

Donald Hagner: The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was **radical** both in content and in the unique authority that undergirded its forthright, confident delivery. Matthew will not miss the opportunity here at the end of a masterful distillation of the teaching of Jesus to call his readers’ attention to the **supreme authority** of this Teacher. Jesus is not one among other rabbinic teachers; his authority centers not on the tradition of the Fathers, nor even on the Torah, but somehow, mysteriously and remarkably, it centers in himself. As the final and authoritative exposition of the meaning of the righteousness of the Torah, this teaching has an incomparable authority that can be accounted for by only one fact: the unique person of Jesus, the one teacher, the one master, the Christ (**23:8–10**). Only such personal authority can support the radical and surprising teaching and its exclusive claims (cf. **John 7:46**). This authority is in fact inseparable from the newness of the gospel and the presence of the Agent of that gospel.

D. A. Carson: The central point is this: Jesus’ entire approach in the Sermon on the Mount is not only ethical but **messianic**—i.e., **christological** and **eschatological**. Jesus is not an ordinary prophet who says, “*Thus says the Lord!*” Rather, he speaks in the first person and claims that his teaching fulfills the OT, that he determines who enters the messianic kingdom, that as the Divine Judge he pronounces banishment, that the true heirs of the kingdom will be persecuted for their allegiance to him, and that he alone fully knows the will of his Father. . . **Jesus’ authority is unique** (see comments at **5:21–48**), and the crowds recognized it, even if they did not always understand it. This same authority is now to be revealed in powerful, liberating miracles, signs of the kingdom’s advance (**chs. 8–9**; cf. 11:2–5).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage refute the commonly held position of religious pluralism?
- 2) What kind of fruit should we expect a true Christian to produce?
- 3) How is it that counterfeit religion can sometimes look so outwardly impressive and seem to perform actual amazing works?
- 4) Why did the amazement of the crowd fall short of submission to the lordship of the Messiah?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: The basic fault of false prophets is **self-interest**. True shepherds care for the flock more than they care for their own lives; wolves care for nothing but to satisfy their own gluttony and their own greed. False prophets are in the business of teaching not for what they can give to others, but for what they can get out of it for themselves.

There are three ways in which teachers can be dominated by self-interest.

- (1) They may teach solely for gain.
- (2) They may teach solely for prestige.
- (2) They may teach solely for prestige.

What are the false effects, the evil fruits, which a false prophet may produce?

- (1) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which consists solely or mainly in the observance of externals.
- (2) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which consists in prohibitions.
- (3) Teaching is false if it produces an easy religion.
- (4) Teaching is false if it divorces religion and life.
- (5) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which is arrogant and separatist.

E. Michael Green: The Purpose of the Sermon

There is only one solution. The tree must be made good if the fruit is to be good. Only belief in the necessity and possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon with foolish optimism or hopeless despair. It is all of a piece with the ethical teaching of the whole of the New Testament, which can be summed up in the phrase, “**Become what you are.**” Disciples are called by their Master to become in practice what they already are in the election and calling of God. Christian ethics is inextricably tied to Christian beginnings. **You cannot have the fruit of righteousness without the root of relationship with the Righteous One.**

And so, as **A. M. Hunter** suggests, we have here an ethic which has five characteristics.

1. It is a religious ethic, for the imperative is based on an indicative. What we do springs from what we are.
2. It is a disciples’ ethic, given to the new Israel—to the church and not to the world. It is how disciples should behave.
3. It is a prophetic ethic, not a new law. It is revolution, not legislation.
4. It is a comprehensive ethic, pointing to the working out, in all aspects of life, of that agapē love which has grasped us.
5. And it remains an unattainable ethic, which we must nevertheless strive to attain. “A man’s reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what’s a heaven for?”

It remains before citizens of the kingdom as a **standard**. It is a spur for those who possess the Spirit of Jesus, who laid it down.

Michael Wilkins: The religious establishment of Jesus’ day advocated a form of surface righteousness that masked an unstable foundation of **religious hypocrisy**. Jesus gives the bedrock invitation to true life in the kingdom of heaven, but it will be the unpopular way, the hard way, because those who follow him will leave behind the way of comfort found in identifying with the popular religious establishment.

As always, the wise person shows he or she has carefully viewed the shifting sands of life’s teachings and understands that Jesus is the only secure truth in life. The wise person thinks ahead to when there will be storms, and he sacrifices the enjoyment of the present good weather for the sake of building his or her life on the rock of Jesus’ words about reality. The foolish man thinks only of the present convenient situation and does not plan for storms of life or eternity. The

choice is no less stark in our own day. Wise men and women build their lives on Jesus, regardless of cultural weather.

Richard Gardner: How does Matthew want us to hear and understand Jesus' ethic? The following seven theses attempt an answer to that question:

(1) Jesus' ethic is an ethic of the kingdom. From beginning to end, Jesus' message in Matthew is a message of God's reign. Jesus calls us to reorder our lives in light of the rule of God that will encompass history at the end, and that is already drawing near to us in Jesus' ministry.

(2) Jesus' ethic is an ethic for the community. As Jesus teaches on the mountain, he envisions a community of followers who will embody his word and be a light to the world. To put it another way: Jesus' teaching is an ethic for those who welcome God's rule and who seek to live by its vision.

(3) Jesus' ethic is more than a community code. Because the kingdom is wider than the church, the ethic of the kingdom relates to life outside the church. It both defines the way believers are called to live in society and reveals the will of God for all life throughout the world.

(4) Jesus' ethic holds act and attitude together. As the antitheses indicate, Jesus calls for righteousness in our total being, not merely correct performance. At the same time, Jesus calls us to do what he teaches, and he indicates some of the points at which our righteousness must be concrete.

(5) Jesus' ethic is an ethic of provocation. When Jesus redefines the law, he does not go the route of prescribing detailed legislation. Instead, he sets a new direction—and then uses stories and language that provoke us to discover new and appropriate ways to act.

(6) Jesus' ethic is an ethic of love. Although the word love does not occur until **5:43-48**, Jesus is teaching what love requires throughout the six antitheses. He calls for love that makes peace, love that honors boundaries, love that keeps commitments, love that speaks the truth, love that endures evil, and love that includes all.

(7) Jesus' ethic is rooted in spirituality. As we discovered at several points, obedience to Jesus' word does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it grows out of a life of trust and prayer. To put it another way: It is those who seek God who will seek first God's kingdom, and who will find the strength and courage to live for its coming.

TEXT: Matthew 8:1-17

TITLE: *THREE HEALING MIRACLES TO CONFIRM HIS AUTHORITY –
FEATURING THE POWER OF JESUS AND UNIVERSAL SCOPE OF HIS MINISTRY*

BIG IDEA:

**DESPERATE SITUATIONS SHOULD PROMPT EVEN THE OUTCASTS OF SOCIETY
TO REACH OUT TO JESUS FOR THE POWER OF HIS HEALING TOUCH**

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Gardner: The most adequate proposal on Matthew's design in this section [8:1 – 9:34] is that he has organized the collection in terms of **alternating sections on miracles and discipleship** (cf. **Meier**, 1980:79-80; **Gundry**, 1982:138). What we have then are three groups of miracle stories, each containing three narratives (8:1-17; 8:23—9:8; 9:18-34), and two sections of material on discipleship which serve as interludes (8:18-22; 9:9-17). Through this arrangement of material, Matthew portrays the disciples as **apprentices in mission**, who will soon be called to perform mighty works in Jesus' name (9:35 - 10:42). . .

In compiling this material, Matthew has left his imprint in several ways.

- First, he has constructed a new geographical framework for the stories, in which Capernaum serves as the hub for Jesus' movements.
- Second, he has rearranged the order of several Markan accounts, so that they fit better in the new framework.
- Third, he has greatly compressed most of the narratives, focusing on essentials. More specifically, Matthew (cf. **Bornkamm, Barth, Held**: 225):
 - (1) Uses compact, stock phrases to tell his stories.
 - (2) Gives little attention to secondary characters or actions.
 - (3) Repeats certain catchwords to link and unify his material.
 - (4) Lets Jesus' dialogue with supplicants stand out as central.
 - (5) Gives special prominence to the theme of faith.

D. A. Carson: Certainly these chapters cannot legitimately be broken down in some simplistic fashion. Though Matthew's pericopes cohere nicely, he intertwines his themes, keeping several going at once like a literary juggler. Thus these chapters are best approached inductively; and one can trace emphases on faith, discipleship, the Gentile mission, a diverse christological pattern, and more. At the same time, these chapters prove that Jesus, whose mission in part was to preach, teach, and heal (4:23; 9:35), fulfilled the whole of it. . .

One cannot fail to observe that of the many healing miracles Matthew could have related in the first half of this chapter, he has focused on a **leper**, a **Gentile**, and a **woman**. The leper was ceremonially unclean and therefore an outcast; the Roman centurion, though a man of status within Roman legions, was a Gentile and therefore without religious status in this Jewish context; as a woman, Peter's mother-in-law would have been excluded from some privileges and responsibilities open only to males. But they are the ones whose healing Matthew reports.

Richard Gardner: From the outset, therefore, Matthew wants us to appreciate the **inclusive** character of Jesus' mission. His mighty works break through social barriers of every sort.

R. T. France: The first group of three miracle stories seems to be treated as a connected whole, in that here, unlike in the following two groups, there is a concluding general summary of Jesus' work of healing (v. 16) which then prompts Matthew to add a formula-quotations (v. 17) encapsulating the motif of deliverance which underlies these healings. Matthew's rearrangement of the traditional order of the healings recorded in **Mark 1:29–45**, so that the story of the leper comes first, is perhaps also designed to highlight Jesus' work of deliverance by putting up front a more striking instance of Jesus' restoration of the distressed and excluded than the relatively mundane fever of Peter's mother-in-law.

(:1) TRANSITION: FROM AUTHORITY IN TEACHING TO AUTHORITY IN HEALING

“And when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.”

D. A. Carson: The introductory *kai idou* (lit., “and behold”; also in Luke, absent from Mark, untranslated in NIV) does not require that this healing immediately follow the sermon. In Matthew, *kai idou* has a **broad range**, sometimes serving as a loose connective, sometimes introducing a startling thought or event, and sometimes, as here, marking the **beginning of a new pericope**.

Grant Osborne: The “*large crowds followed*” (here “*followed*” [ἀκολουθέω] does not connote discipleship but **interest in Jesus**) repeats **4:25** and **7:28**, showing the Sermon had relevance not just for the disciples but even for the **uncommitted crowds**.

I. (:2-4) HEALING THE LEPER – CLEANSING THE UNCLEAN – ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL OUTCASTS (HELPLESS SINNERS)

Donald Hagner: The **unique authority** of Jesus, just previously heard in his exceptional words, is now to be seen in a series of exceptional deeds. The first of them is recounted briefly and directly. There is a sense in which **leprosy is an archetypal fruit of the original fall of humanity**. It leaves its victims in a most pitiable state: ostracized, helpless, hopeless, despairing. The cursed leper, like fallen humanity, has no options until he encounters the messianic king who will make all things new. His simple confidence in the ability of Jesus to cure his disease is impressive. If only he wills to do it! But this precisely is the work of the Messiah: to restore the created order from its bondage to decay: “I do want to do it!” The very presence of Jesus represents God's “Yes!” to the request of this poor man and to all who suffer. As Jesus reached out to the leper, **God in Jesus has reached out to all victims of sin**. The leper was cured immediately by only a word from Jesus. This same Jesus cures his people, the Church, from a whole host of maladies stemming from the fall, both spiritual and physical. Indeed it is the ultimate purpose of Jesus, as part of the future eschatological consummation, to heal every malady without exception.

A. (:2) The Approach of a Hopeful Leper

“And behold, a leper came to Him, and bowed down to Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’”

William Barclay: Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which the sufferer dies by inches.

The physical condition of the leper was terrible; but there was something which made it worse. The Jewish historian **Josephus** tells us that lepers were treated ‘as if they were, in effect, dead men’. Immediately leprosy was diagnosed, the leper was absolutely and completely banished from human society. ‘*He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp*’ (**Leviticus 13:46**). Lepers had to go with torn clothes and dishevelled hair, with a covering upon the upper lip, and, as they went, they had to cry: ‘*Unclean, unclean*’ (**Leviticus 13:45**). In the middle ages, if anyone contracted leprosy, the priest donned his stole and took his crucifix, and brought the leper into the church. He then read the burial service over the person, who for all human purposes was dead.

In Palestine in the time of Jesus, lepers were barred from Jerusalem and from all walled towns. In the synagogue, there was provided for them a little isolated chamber, ten feet high and six feet wide, called the Mechitsah. The law enumerated sixty-one different contacts which could defile, and the defilement involved in contact with a leper was second only to the defilement involved in contact with a dead body. A leper did not even have to enter a house, but need only look in across the threshold for that house to become unclean even to the roof beams. Even in an open place it was illegal to greet a leper. No one might come nearer to a leper than four cubits – a cubit is eighteen inches. If the wind was blowing towards a person from a leper, the leper must stand at least 100 cubits away. One Rabbi would not even eat an egg bought in a street where a leper had passed by. Another Rabbi actually boasted that he flung stones at lepers to keep them away. Other Rabbis hid themselves, or took to their heels, at the sight of a leper even in the distance.

There never has been any disease which so separated one human being from another as leprosy did. And it was just such a man whom Jesus touched. To a Jew, there would be no more amazing sentence in the New Testament than the simple statement: ‘*And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper.*’

Daniel Doriani: The leper displayed great **audacity** when he cut through the crowd, but he showed great **reverence** when he approached Jesus. He knelt down, in the **posture of adoration**. He also kept his distance, due to his leprosy. He called Jesus “*Lord*” out of respect. He could not yet know the whole truth about Jesus, but he did take steps toward full discipleship.

Robert Gundry: “*If you’re willing*” sets out an unsure possibility. “*You are able*” sets out a sure fact. Thus the leper expresses uncertainty about Jesus’ willingness but certainty about Jesus’ ability.

Craig Blomberg: The leper reveals an astonishing confidence in Jesus’ power (“*you can*”), especially in light of the Jewish belief that cures of lepers were as difficult as resurrections from the dead (based originally on **2 Kgs 5:7**). At the same time, the leper defers to Jesus’ sovereignty (“*if you are willing*”). These twin thrusts are crucial in all Christian prayers for healing.

B. (:3) The Healing by the Compassionate Touch of Jesus

*“And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’
And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”*

Charles Swindoll: Jesus’ response to the man’s plea for cleansing teaches something vital about His character. In this snapshot, we witness not only a confirmation of Jesus’ divine power and authority but also a clear example of His compassion, grace, mercy, and love. Unlike a normal person who feared the hideous disease of leprosy, Jesus didn’t take a step back to avoid accidental contact. Instead, He condescended to the man’s deplorable condition, reached out His hand, and touched him. **Jesus touched him!** I can imagine the gasps from the crowd. Maybe at that moment the Lord even lost a few disgusted hangers-on who couldn’t follow somebody who would sink so low.

With His merciful action came words of divine power: *“I am willing; be cleansed”* (**8:3**). Just as light came into existence in obedience to the word of God (**Gen. 1:3**), the man’s leprosy obeyed Jesus’ word and left him instantly.

Among the inevitable oohs and aahs of the crowd, Jesus leaned in and instructed the former leper to follow the required protocols of the Law regarding leprosy described in **Leviticus 14**. Instead of telling everyone about the miracle, the cleansed leper was to fulfill the requirements before the priest and make the required offering (**Matt. 8:4**). Though Matthew doesn’t recount what happened to the former leper, we can imagine the astonishment of the priest who examined him and heard that Jesus had healed the man instantly, demonstrating not only His divine power but also His divine goodness. This man of Nazareth was surely the long-awaited Messiah, the King of Israel . . . but also so much more!

C. (:4) The Command to Follow the Procedure Required by Moses

“And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.’”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus says, *“Tell no one but a priest,”* for two reasons (**8:4**).

- The report to the priests testifies that God is at work and authenticates the healing as genuine.
- Examination by the priests also lets the man return to home and family, to work and friends.

E. Michael Green: A testimony to what? To the fact that one greater than Moses had come; to the fact that what Judaism could not do, in cleansing from leprosy and from the disease of sin that it represented, the fulfiller of Judaism was doing. Here was no intrusion: it was the completion of all that Judaism pointed to. What a frontispiece for the book of miracles!

Donald Hagner: Jesus desires simply to avoid inflaming popular, but mistaken, messianic expectations that looked for an immediate national-political deliverance. . .

Craig Blomberg: The leper will bear witness to his healing, however, precisely by making it public when he appears before the priest. *“As a testimony to them”* should not be taken as a sign of Matthew’s conservatism regarding the law, as if the phrase meant to prove to others that Jesus was not a law breaker. Rather, Jesus implies that the man should testify to what he has done for him. Jesus’ healings will disclose his unparalleled authority over sickness, matching the unique

authority his preaching and teaching has already illustrated (7:28-29). The identical phrase recurs in 10:18 and 24:14, where the testimony clearly refers to the good news of Jesus himself. In Mark 6:11 it even carries the sense of a testimony against them, and there may be slight overtones of such hostility here too. Jesus does what the religious leaders cannot do and in a way that often alienates them.

II. (:5-13) HEALING THE CENTURION'S SERVANT – MERCY FOR GENTILES – RESPONSE TO ETHNIC “UNCLEANNES” -- DEMONSTRATION OF AUTHORITY – EXAMPLE OF GREAT FAITH

Donald Hagner: The second miracle performed by Jesus in this section is indeed remarkable in its own right: the healing of a terribly ill child at a distance and by the speaking of a word. The story in itself stresses the sovereign authority and uniqueness of Jesus, though Matthew draws no special attention to the Christological significance of the story. Indeed he focuses on **the faith of the gentile centurion**, faith that put Israel to shame. In Matthew's insertion of vv 11–12, Jesus declares that in the future Israel will be displaced by believing Gentiles, an emphasis that comes to sharp expression later in the parables of 21:33–44 and 22:1–10. The kingdom brought by Jesus is by its nature undeniably **universal in scope**. The centurion's faith is the first fruit of a ministry that will be designed to “*make disciples of all nations*” (28:19; cf. 24:14). What is anticipated here and commanded at the end of the Gospel finds its fruition in the course of the events narrated by the Acts of the Apostles. According to Paul's outline of events in **Rom 11**, the failure of the Jews made possible in God's wisdom the opportunity of the Gentiles. And Israel, not excluded from the great commission (28:19), “*if they do not persist in their unbelief*” (**Rom 11:23**), will yet take her proper place at the banquet of the table, together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Gentiles, whose faith (cf. **Rom 11:20**) is ultimately made possible by Israel herself (cf. **Rom 9:5; 11:18**).

E. Michael Green: The apostolic gospel was “*first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*”. That is exactly what we find prefigured in the Gospels. To be sure, Jesus concentrated on Israel during his ministry, but there are a number of pointers to the Gentile mission that would later develop. This is one of them. Jesus reaches out to this Gentile army officer. His concern is universal. We never read of him entering a Gentile home, but we do find him saying the word (8), and that word of Jesus is mighty to heal. The word of the risen and ascended Jesus was mighty both to transform lives and to heal bodies, in the Gentile mission as well as among those Jews who were responding to their Messiah. A story like this would be an enormous encouragement to those Gentile believers (many of them, no doubt, in Matthew's own congregation) who had never seen Jesus, but who had trusted his word and felt his power in their lives. And the attitude of this pagan centurion was a great example of the proper approach to Jesus. For it spoke of **simple, profound faith**. That was what brought Abraham to experience the power of God. *Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness*. But in Israel in Jesus' day there was not too much of that living trust in God's power to heal.

William Barclay: The centurion was a Gentile, and therefore strict orthodox Jews would have said that he was merely fuel for the fires of hell; he was the servant of a foreign government and of an occupying power, and therefore nationalistic Jews would have said that he was a candidate for assassination and not for assistance; the servant was a slave, and a slave was no more than a living tool. Here we see the love of God going out to help the man whom everyone hated and the slave whom everyone despised.

A. (:5-7) The Approach of a Hopeful Centurion

1. (:5-6) The Pleading Request of the Centurion

“And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him, 6 and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.’”

Daniel Doriani: This miracle takes place in Capernaum, a town on the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus adopted Capernaum as his new hometown and the center of his ministry in Galilee. Capernaum was a trading city that stood at a crossroads, so it was logical for the Romans to have a tax station there and to support it with a garrison of imperial troops.

The leader of that garrison was a centurion. A centurion commanded the basic fighting unit of the Roman army. The most talented soldiers became centurions. They were the backbone of the army, maintained discipline, and gave orders. Central players in the alien occupation of Israel, centurions were roughly equivalent to a Nazi captain in the Netherlands or France in World War II. Why would Jesus help such a man?

William Barclay: It is quite clear that this centurion was an extraordinary man, for **he loved his slave**. It may well be that it was his totally unusual and unexpected gentleness and love which so moved Jesus when the centurion first came to him. Love always covers a multitude of sins; those who care for others are always near to Jesus Christ.

2. (:7) The Positive Response of Jesus

“And He said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’”

Grant Osborne: The emphasis once more is on the compassion of Christ, now willing to help even a despised Roman.

B. (:8-9) The Authority of Jesus Recognized by the Centurion

1. (:8) Effectiveness of the Word of Jesus – Reasoning from the lesser to the greater

“But the centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.’”

D. A. Carson: The centurion’s reply opens with “*Lord*,” implying tenacity and deference (cf. **v.6; 7:21–23**). As John the Baptist felt unworthy to baptize Jesus, so this centurion felt **unworthy** to entertain him in his home. The feeling of unworthiness did not arise from an awareness that the centurion might render Jesus ceremonially defiled (contra **Bonnard**); race had nothing to do with it. *Hikanos* (“*sufficient*,” “*worthy*,” GK 2653) here as elsewhere (**3:11; 1Co 15:9; 2Co 2:16**) reveals the man’s sense of unworthiness (NIV, “*do not deserve*”) in the face of **Jesus’ authority** (cf. TDNT, 3:294; **France**, “*Exegesis in Practice*,” 258). “Here was one who was in the state described in the first clauses of the ‘Beatitudes,’ and to whom came the promise of the second clauses; because **Christ is the connecting link between the two**” (**Edersheim**, *Life and Times*, 1:549; emphasis his). . .

Precisely because Jesus was under God’s authority, he was vested with God’s authority, so that when Jesus spoke, God spoke. To defy Jesus was to defy God; and Jesus’ word must therefore be vested with God’s authority that is able to heal sickness. This analogy, though not perfect,

reveals an **astonishing faith** that recognizes that Jesus needed neither ritual, magic, nor any other help; his authority was God's authority, and his word was effective because it was **God's word**.

Grant Osborne: This sense of **unworthiness** happens throughout Scripture (**Gen 18:27; Job 42:6; Isa 6:5; Luke 5:8**) when people come face to face with their own fallenness. The centurion is not a follower at this point but might recognize the presence of God in Jesus and thus realize how little he deserves his help. The first is definitely present, and there may be a hint of the latter.

2. (:9) Effectiveness of the Word of the Centurion

“For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.”

C. (:10-12) The Amazement of Jesus over Such Great Faith in a Gentile

1. (:10) Commendation of the Gentile Centurion for His Faith

“Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.'”

Warren Wiersbe: Twice in the Gospels it is recorded that Jesus **marveled**: here, at the great faith of the Gentile centurion, and in **Mark 6:6**, at the great unbelief of the Jews. Matthew recorded two “Gentile” miracles: this one and the healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (**Matt. 15:21–28**). In both cases, the Lord was impressed with their **great faith**. This is an early indication that the Jews would not believe, but the Gentiles would. Also, in both of these miracles, our Lord **healed from a distance**. This was a reminder of the spiritual position of the Gentiles “*far off*” (**Eph. 2:12–13**).

Grant Osborne: The faith of this military man is indeed remarkable. Such men were normally the ones who most mistreated the Jews and looked down on them with contempt. That one of the very people most mistrusted by the Jewish people would be the one who showed them what faith really was is astounding.

2. (:11-12) Contrast in Final Destiny between Accepted Gentiles and Rejected Jews

a. (:11) Accepted Gentiles

“And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven;”

R. T. France: The imagery of **reclining at table** with the Hebrew patriarchs would inevitably speak to Jewish readers of the **messianic banquet** which was a popular way of thinking of the ultimate blessedness of the true people of God. In popular Jewish thought it would be taken for granted that, while not every Jew might prove worthy of a place at the banquet, it would be a Jewish gathering, while non-Jews would find themselves outside in the darkness; to be the people of God meant, for all practical purposes, to be Jewish. Jesus' saying dramatically challenges this instinctive assumption, both by including “*many*” others from foreign parts (“*east and west*”) on the guest list, and also daring to exclude those who were assumed to have a right to be there, the “*sons of the kingdom*.” To add insult to injury, the fate of these “*sons of the kingdom*” is described in the terms traditionally used in Jewish descriptions of the fate of the ungodly (and therefore, predominantly, the Gentiles), “*darkness outside*,” “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*.” The reason they are rejected is not explicit within this saying, but in the

context in which Matthew has placed it it must be linked with the fact that Jesus has not found in Israel faith like that of the centurion. **Thus belonging to the kingdom of heaven is found to depend not on ancestry but on faith.**

Robert Gundry: Jesus' Authority in Pronouncing Believing Gentiles Accepted and Unbelieving Israelites Rejected –

That believing Gentiles will recline on cushions to eat with the sainted patriarchs at the banquet of salvation, commonly called “the messianic banquet,” strikes an astoundingly happy note for the Gentiles and a dreadfully ominous note for unbelieving Jews, called “*the sons of the kingdom*” in the sense that but for disinheriting themselves through unbelief, as God’s chosen people they should inherit the kingdom.

Their destiny to be “*thrown out into the darkness farther outside*” refers to darkness outside the brightly lit hall where the festivities of the banquet will take place. “*Farther outside*” stresses the distance of that darkness from the banqueting hall. **Such a distance will preclude any hope of late entry.** Sorrow over exclusion from the kingdom will lead to weeping and gnashing of teeth.

b. (:12) Rejected Jews

“but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Charles Swindoll: Jesus then used this remarkable faith —from a Gentile, no less —as evidence that God’s plan of redemption would ultimately include believers not only from Israel but also “*from east and west*” —that is, from among the Gentiles. They would find a place at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the natural “*sons of the kingdom*” —Jews —would be cast far away if they remained in their unbelief (**8:11-12**).

Richard Gardner: For Matthew’s community, the saying in **verses 11-12** is a sobering reminder that the kingdom is open to all but guaranteed to none. Only those who believe as the centurion believed will sit at table with Jesus and Abraham.

Grant Osborne: “*Outermost darkness*” (τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον) is that darkness that is completely “*outside*” the light of God, namely, the **place of final punishment**. It is in complete contrast with the light and joy of the banquet scene.

John MacArthur: Some people are confused, because it says that hell is a place of darkness, and also a place of fire, and they wonder how you can have fire without having light. And that’s part of the supernatural quality of hell, that there will be fire, fire of torment, and along with it, total darkness, a phenomenon created by God for eternal punishment. Outer darkness, that’s a place; just like heaven is a place. And the horror of that place can be seen in the phrase at the end of verse 12: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” That’s the effect of the darkness: the loss of all happiness, the loss of all joy, the rage of helpless despair, the excruciating torment of eternal darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

D. (:13) The Announcement of the Healing Accomplished Remotely in Accordance with the Centurion’s Faith

1. Petition Granted

“And Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; let it be done to you as you have believed.’”

Daniel Doriani: Matthew also wants us to grasp the **extent of Jesus' authority**. Without stating the doctrine in theological terms, Matthew shows us who Jesus is. His power extends wherever his will ordains it. He is omnipotent and can project his power wherever he wishes, since he is also omnipresent. He partakes of the distinctive attributes of God, for he is God.

2. Punctual Miracle of Healing

“And the servant was healed that very hour.”

Craig Blomberg: Matthew concludes the passage by narrating the miracle almost as an afterthought. Jesus' healing nevertheless verifies the appropriateness of the man's faith, and it occurs at a time and in a way which confirms that supernatural power has been at work.

III. (:14-15) HEALING PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW – DEALING WITH INFIRMITIES AND GENDER “UNCLEANNES” – RESTORATION TO SERVICE

Donald Hagner: A third miracle is reported by Matthew with deliberate brevity. With a touch, Jesus cures the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, and again the incomparable authority of Jesus becomes apparent. The passage thus has a basically christological character. Even the concluding words that suggest the proper response of the disciple point again to Jesus himself. The miracle summary passage has the same effect. With a word, Jesus casts out demons; he heals all the sick who come to him. The particular miracle stories chosen by Matthew for his narrative are thus but representatives of the vast healing ministry Jesus had among the people. This is an important part of the story for Matthew and is designated specifically as the fulfillment of OT prophecy. It is a sign of the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus. . .

These single stories, these specific healing narratives, are not the heart of the gospel. Disease is not the true enemy that must be overcome: **that enemy is sin**, for the fallen world produced by sin lies ultimately behind the suffering and sickness of this age. This is the enemy to be conquered by the end of the story (cf. **26:28**). Properly perceived, these healings are most important as symbols of the much greater “healing” that is at the heart of the gospel, the healing of the cross. At the same time, they foreshadow the fulfillment of the age to come when all suffering and sickness are finally removed (cf. **Rev 21:1–4**). During his ministry, the healings performed by Jesus were the fulfillment of prophecy; but **Isa 53:4** guarantees no one healing in the present age. What is guaranteed is that Christ's atoning death will in the eschaton provide healing for all without exception. The healings through the ministry of Jesus and those experienced in our day are the first-fruits, the down payment, of the final experience of deliverance.

A. (:14) Reacting to a Critical Illness

*“And when Jesus had come to Peter's home,
He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever.”*

Charles Swindoll: In the next snapshot of Jesus' power, we move from a display of His divine authority among the religiously remote and physically distant to a close, personal act of healing—a member of Peter's own family in Peter's own home.

D. A. Carson: Peter was married (**1Co 9:5**) and had moved with his brother Andrew from their home in Bethsaida (**Jn 1:44**) to Capernaum, possibly to remain near Jesus (**Mt 4:13**). His mother-in-law's fever (**v.14**) may have been malarial; fever itself was considered a disease, not a symptom, at that time (cf. **Jn 4:52; Ac 28:8**). Jewish *halakah* forbade touching persons with many kinds of fever (Str-B, 1:479–80). But Jesus healed with a touch (**v.15**). As in **v.3**, the touch did not defile the healer but healed the defiled.

Robert Gundry: That she was “*thrown*” on a bed portrays the fever as a **malevolent force**, just as in **8:6** a servant's having been “*thrown*” on a bed by some disablement portrayed the disablement as a malevolent force. In both cases, Jesus' conquest of the force exhibits **lordly authority**.

B. (:15a) Responding with a Healing Touch

“And He touched her hand, and the fever left her;”

William Barclay: Jesus was never too tired to help; the demands of human need never came to him as an intolerable nuisance. Jesus was not one of these people who are at their best in public and at their worst in private. No situation was too humble for him to help. He did not need an admiring audience to be at his best. In a crowd or in a cottage, his love and his power were at the disposal of anyone who needed him.

C. (:15b) Restoring Her to Health and Service

“and she arose, and waited on Him.”

Richard Gardner: She typifies the way all those restored by Jesus should serve him.

Warren Wiersbe: Women did not hold a high position in Israel, and it is doubtful that a Pharisee would have paid much attention to the need in Peter's home. Jesus healed her with a touch, and she responded by serving Him and the other men.

This seems like a “minor miracle,” but the results were major, for after sundown (when the Sabbath ended), the whole city gathered at the door that the Lord might meet their needs (**Mark 1:32–34**). Blessing in the home ought to lead to blessing in the community. The change in one woman's life led to miracles in the lives of many people.

(:16-17) -- EPILOGUE – GENERAL HEALING IN FULFILMENT OF OT PROPHECY

A. (:16) General Healing

*“And when evening had come,
they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed;
and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill”*

Grant Osborne: News of Jesus' miracles traveled fast, and now many are brought to Jesus. Matthew centers on the “*demon-possessed*” here and mentions such in three summaries (**4:24; 7:22; 8:17**) and five exorcism stories (**8:28–34; 9:32–34; 12:22–24; 15:22–28; 17:14–20**). Jesus' authority extended not only to nature and physical illness but to the spirit world as well. This is the second occurrence of “*demon-possessed*” (δαίμονιζομένου) in Matthew, and it will become a **major theme** in terms of Jesus' authority and victory over the cosmic powers (of nature as well as of the satanic realm; see **4:24; 8:28–34; 9:32–34; 10:8; 11:18; 12:22–29; 15:21–28; 17:14–23** for demons; and **8:23–27; 14:22–33** for storms).

B. (:17) Fulfilment of OT Prophecy

“in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.’”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus took all our brokenness on himself when he suffered and died for our sins. Isaiah 53 says he did this by covering the sin that causes grief and disease.

Matthew’s great insight is this: Jesus’ healings also flow from his death on our behalf, as a substitute for our sins. The substitution offers healing because it removes the sin that is the root of disease. So atonement and healing belong together. When Matthew speaks of sin one minute and disease the next, he follows Jesus, who came to cure sin and all its effects. For Jesus links salvation and healing. When Jesus met a paralyzed man, first he said, *“Your sins are forgiven.”* Then he said, *“Get up, take your mat and go home”* (**Matt. 9:2, 6**).

When we believe in Jesus, God begins to deliver us from all the consequences of sin. Some day, he will restore all that we lost because of sin, but that process is never complete in this life. The Lord will fully vanquish sin and disease when he comes again and restores the earth. But we have the right to expect real and substantial healing now.

Richard Gardner: The quotation from **Isaiah 53:4** concludes the narrative and attests Matthew’s creative use of the OT. In the Hebrew text of Isaiah, sickness or infirmity is a metaphor for suffering related to sin, which the Servant takes upon himself and bears vicariously (cf. **Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:24**). As cited by Matthew, however, Isaiah’s words describe physical diseases or infirmities, which Jesus removes through his ministry of healing. This too is a part of Jesus’ fulfillment of the biblical promise.

E. Michael Green: But here the Isaiah passage seems to be used with a **secondary application**. It is related not to the death of Jesus but to his **healing ministry**. And it seems to say that so costly was this healing that Jesus took up our infirmities on himself, and carried our diseases (17). He **bore our sicknesses as well as our sins**. There is no suggestion of Calvary here. There is no justification for the claim of some charismatics that Jesus bore our sicknesses as well as our sins upon the cross. But Matthew does see the healing ministry of Jesus as part of the pain and hardship which Isaiah foresaw for the Servant of the Lord in **chapters 40–55** of his book. Of course, sickness is related (though not, according to Scripture, directly related) to sin, and so it is not possible entirely to dissociate the healing ministry from the vicarious suffering in this picture of the Servant. But Matthew sees him here coming from the mountain of revelation (**chs. 5–7**) and entering into the valley of the shadow, where sickness and demonic forces held sway. And he was willing to carry the burden of the pain, ostracism and defilement of broken humankind, just as he would later bear its sin. Here is a fulfillment of the prophet’s words deeper than he could ever have imagined.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do you believe that Jesus still heals physical infirmities today when He wants to?

- 2) Is there any defilement that is too severe for Jesus to be willing to engage and offer deliverance?
- 3) What prevents you from exhibiting the same type of “*great faith*” that we see here from the Roman centurion?
- 4) How can you be confident that Jesus is concerned about all of the minute trials and difficulties and infirmities experienced in your inner circle of family and friends?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: As a first-century Jew viewed affairs, many of Jesus’ healings restored the sick to the **community of Israel**. A maimed person could not enter the assembly of the Lord’s people (**Deut. 23:1**). A leper had to live alone, outside the camp of Israel (**Lev. 13:45–46**). In Jesus’ day, there is evidence that the blind, lame, deaf, and mute were not considered full Israelites. Many believed that their disease or deformity proved that they were far removed from God, who had perfect life in himself.

So when Jesus healed the body of maimed, leprous, or blind Israelites, he did two things. He granted them physical health, and he publicly restored them to the family of God. This renewed sense of belonging to the people of God was a great blessing that attended many miracles. These restorations are essential to Jesus’ ministry to the whole person. Jesus healed the body, the spirit, and the social life of the sick. This was part of his larger plan to welcome outcasts and outsiders of every kind into the family of God. . .

What then is a miracle? Let me offer a definition that we will explore as we study Matthew. **A miracle is a direct act of God in the external world, in which he works outside (not against) the common course of events to reveal himself, authenticate his servants, and manifest his nature and redemptive purposes.** By this definition, childbirth is not a miracle because it is not a direct act of God and it does follow the common course of events. A sense of calm during a time of great stress is not a miracle because it does occur in the external world. Miraculous events are manifestly extraordinary, whether the witness is a believer or a skeptic.

A miracle is more than an amazing turn of events. Certain experts studying the Red Sea believe that thousands of years ago, when Moses led the Israelites across it as they escaped from Egypt, there was a place where a very strong, sustained wind could have blown all the water away, exposing the sea bed. Now Exodus says, “*The LORD drove back the sea by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land*” (**Ex. 14:21** ESV). But the miracle is not simply that the wind blew, but that it blew when it had to, at God’s command, to deliver his people, as he had promised.

Thus, amazing events are not, by themselves, miracles. **Amazing events are miracles when they fulfill God’s word and accomplish his purposes.** Our text leads us to the purposes of Jesus’ miracles. It shows how miracles reveal God’s redemptive plan and call us to discipleship.

Charles Swindoll: We’ve all faced **desperate situations we lack the ability to change**. You know the feeling —making the change you want is humanly impossible. You would if you

could, but you have no supernatural power. Maybe you've tried everything to help yourself or to help somebody you love deeply. You've cared, reached out, and expended a lot of effort, but some situations simply defy human intervention. There are no steps toward a solution. You can't unravel it. It's too complicated.

You may see yourself in one of the snapshots of desperate need recorded in **Matthew 8:1-17**. A physician may have told you it's terminal. Remember, the power of Jesus is limitless. It may be a day-in, day-out struggle with deep emotional scars. Remember, the authority of Jesus is unfathomable. It may be an issue that surfaces in moments of shame when you reflect on the past and realize you can't change it. Remember, **the mercy of Jesus is immeasurable**.

The three snapshots of desperate need in this passage can help you turn to the Lord Jesus and cling to Him, whether He chooses to deliver you instantly here on earth or ultimately in heaven, and whether He does so through a gentle touch or a distant word. Perhaps you're like the leper (8:1-4) or those afflicted with deep spiritual oppression or physical torment (**8:16**). You've got it bad, and it feels like there's no way out, no hope. Remember, Jesus' power is awesome. Don't think your need is too extreme for Him —“*He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases*” (**8:17**). Whether He chooses to deliver you from your affliction sooner or later, in this life or in the glorious, miraculous resurrection, His will is ultimately to deliver you. **Turn to Him.**

Or perhaps you're like the centurion. You're doing okay, but you're caring for somebody who's at the brink. You're worn out. You're desperate. You can't stop thinking about them and praying for them, hoping for a solution, a recovery, an answer. Maybe it's a relationship that's broken, and you just can't rebuild the bridge. Maybe there's spiritual distance; a friend or family member needs the Lord or has wandered from the right path, and you can't seem to say or do anything to bring them around. Take these needs to the Lord too. Commit that person or that situation — whatever the distance —to Him. Leave it with Him, like the centurion did. Know that the Lord can say a word and bring a change. Let it be. **Leave it with Him.**

Finally, perhaps you're like Peter's mother-in-law. Who knows how long she was on that bed with a high fever? Maybe you, too, are simmering in agony, wasting away in the dark — spiritually, emotionally, or physically. Lonely, depressed, silent, cut off from the world, and shut in, you need the Lord's touch, and it hasn't come. Don't be afraid to ask the Lord to reach out through the body of Christ on earth —through His people commissioned to be His arms and legs, to extend comfort, love, and kindness toward their brothers and sisters. And count on Him to take care of you, in His way, at His time, as He pleases. **Don't be afraid to ask.**

We need to live our lives in light of this promise: **The Lord is for us, not against us**. He is full of compassion and understanding. He's not some distant deity simply frowning and judging us. The Lord is intimately interested in the details of our lives —disfigured lepers, anonymous servants of pagans, family members of believers, and all those who are spiritually and physically afflicted. He cares for them; He cares for you, too. The Lord is capable of handling whatever we're struggling with. The love and power of Jesus is like nothing you've ever heard of or seen before. It's inexhaustible. And He's ready to hear us when we call. Rather than living your life behind the shades of depression, discouragement, doubt, and denial, open the blinds. **Focus on the power of Jesus Christ**, and let that power give you the strength to get up each morning and take on the day, whatever it may involve.

Warren Wiersbe: Purpose of the Miracles of Jesus

Before we survey these miracles, however, we must pause to answer the obvious question: **Why did our Lord perform miracles?** Certainly He wanted to **meet human needs**. God is concerned about the temporal well-being of His creatures as well as their eternal happiness. It is wrong to separate ministry to the body and ministry to the soul, since we must minister to the whole person (see **Matt. 4:23–25**).

Certainly our Lord's miracles were **additional credentials** to prove His claim as the Messiah of Israel. "*The Jews require a sign*" (**1 Cor. 1:22**). While miracles of themselves are not proof that a man has been sent by God (even Satan can perform miracles [**2 Thess. 2:9**]), they do add weight to his claim, especially if his character and conduct are godly. In the case of Jesus Christ, His miracles also fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (see **Isa. 29:18–19; 35:4–6**). **Matthew 8:17** refers us to **Isaiah 53:4**, and Jesus Himself in **Matthew 11:1–5** referred John the Baptist to the Old Testament promises. These same "*signs and wonders*" would be the credentials of His followers in their ministries (**Matt. 10:8; Heb. 2:1–4**).

Along with His **compassion** and **credentials**, there was a third reason for miracles: **His concern to reveal saving truth to people**. The miracles were "**sermons in action**." Even Nicodemus was impressed with them (**John 3:1–2**). It is worth noting that five of these miracles were performed at Capernaum, and yet the city rejected Him (**Matt. 11:21–23**). Even the rejection by the nation of Israel fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (see **John 12:37–41**). Like the judgments against Egypt in Moses' day, the miracles of the Lord were judgments in Israel, for the people had to face facts and make decisions. The religious leaders decided that Jesus was working for Satan (**Matt. 9:31–34; 12:24**).

One thing is certain: Jesus did not perform miracles to "get a crowd." He usually avoided the crowd. Time after time, Jesus instructed those whom He had healed not to talk too much (**Matt. 8:4, 18; 9:30; Luke 8:56**). He did not want people trusting Him simply on the basis of spectacular deeds (see **John 4:46–54**). Faith must be based on His Word (**Rom. 10:17**).

Grant Osborne: While faith is central in the first two healings here, it is not in every healing, and definitely faith does not create the healing. Paul was not healed of his "*thorn in [the] flesh*" (**2 Cor 12:7–10**), and he stated in **Rom 8:26–28** that we do not know how to pray in accordance with the will of God; only the Spirit does. It is due to the Spirit's intercession that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*" and in this instance that means whether we are healed or not. God alone is sovereign, not our faith. When we are not healed physically, God is doing what is best for us, and his very refusal to heal us physically becomes the means of healing us spiritually, so that God's healing presence is always involved.

John MacArthur: It's so refreshing and so exciting to see Jesus walking through the world, touching human need and human life. It's different than studying the vast, sweeping prophecies of Daniel. It's not like the logical, theological treatises of the apostle Paul. It's not like the historical, covenantal approach of the writer of Hebrews. There's just something fresh and living and practical about **seeing Jesus walk through the world**; and that's exactly what we have the privilege of doing, beginning in this eighth chapter.

Now particularly in the eighth chapter, we noted to you last time that our Lord **expresses His authority**. Having preached this monumental sermon in chapters 5 through 7, He faced the inevitable question: "What gives You the right to speak like that? Who do You think You are?"

Where did You come from? What is Your authority?” And so that is the question to which the following chapters are the answer.

In effect, what chapter 8 and 9 says is, “I’m God. I came from heaven, and I have all authority.” That’s the answer. And Jesus demonstrates His deity. He demonstrates His heavenly supernatural power in a series of incredible miracles that could be explained no other way than that God was present among men. So Matthew very carefully continues in his presentation of the kingship of Christ, here giving us the credentials of the King, showing us that He has a right to say what He said, He has a right to do what He did because of who He is. He is God, and no other explanation fits these series of miracles.

Now let me give you just a little bit of background. You have to understand how really dramatic the whole scene was. In the day of Jesus Christ, disease was rampant throughout the world. The world was literally filled with disease; and, frankly, medical science was, for all intents and purposes, well nigh nonexistent. So disease could not be dealt with properly, and so you just sort of let it run its course, and you always had the sick and the dying in your midst perennially.

There was a tremendous fear of disease. There was the pain and the suffering and the anguish that goes along with disease, and there were no miracle drugs to alleviate that. There were plagues that wiped out cities, wiped out countries, and were greatly feared. There were more incurable diseases than we have now, and so that was a world literally filled with disease. People didn’t live very long. They died very young. It was not abnormal to die in your 20s from disease. . .

It’s important to note how different He is than the contemporary so-called healers. I’ve incorporated a chapter in my book on *The Charismatics* on the subject of healing, and I noted there how Jesus healed. And let me just remind you of those major points.

First of all, He healed with a word or a touch. There were no gimmicks, no exercises, no folderol, no fanfare, no nothing; just a word and a touch. Just say the word, just touch.

Secondly, He healed instantaneously, instantaneously; that very hour, it says. And the woman with the bleeding problem in Mark was healed immediately; and the ten lepers were healed instantaneously. And in **Luke 5**, immediately the leprosy departed from him. And the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda immediately became well. And the blind man, when he washed his eyes, saw instantly.

Thirdly, He healed totally. There was never a recuperation. Can you imagine that you were thirty five years and never taken a step, and Jesus made your legs whole and told you, “Get up and walk?” Why even if your legs were whole, you couldn’t walk. There would be rehabilitation. There is never rehabilitation in any miracle Jesus ever performed, never. It was instant, it was total, immediate.

Fourthly, Jesus healed everybody. He didn’t have to screen out the tough cases, He healed everybody, everybody. He didn’t send away long lines of disappointed people like the so-called healers of today, He healed everybody. **Luke 4:40** says, “*And while the sun was setting, all who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on every one of them, He was healing them.*”

Fifthly, Jesus healed organic disease, the real stuff: crippled legs, withered hands, blind eyes, paralysis, the kind of healings that would show a miracle beyond doubt. He didn't heal low back pain or some supposed functional disorder.

And sixthly – and this is where Jesus really departs from everybody else – Jesus **raised the dead**. In the process of all of this, people, you've got to understand: this has never happened in the history of the world. And what the Jewish people are seeing with this miraculous work of Christ is something for which there is only possible a divine explanation. And that's what makes the Pharisees' unbelief so utterly incredible, and it shows the depth of the sin in their hearts. They would not believe in the face of incredible, inexplicable evidence. Nonetheless, Matthew indicts them again in this section by pointing up the credentials of Jesus; and out of the thousands of miracles, **he picks three for this chapter**. . .

1) And remember, I pointed out to you, there were four things that were so wonderful about the man? First of all, he came with confidence. In other words, he didn't care if he was a leper. He got rid of the social stigma. He got rid of the embarrassment, and he came because he was desperate. And then he came with reverence; it says he worshiped. And then he came with humility; he said, "*If You will.*" And then he came with faith: "You can make me clean; I believe it." And when a person comes to Christ in desperation, worshiping in humility and in faith, that person can be really redeemed; and so the healing of the leper became, for us then, an analogy of salvation. . .

2) What a beautiful scene this man; this is a man's man. You didn't become a centurion by going from a desk job into this, you became a centurion by working your way up through the troops, through the ranks. This was a guy who was tough. He had to lead a hundred men, that's what a centurion did. He handled a hundred men. He was a drill sergeant, tough, combat oriented. But what a gentle, humble, meek, sensitive, loving tenderness; and all this for a sick slave?

A true, God-fearing Gentile like Cornelius; and now his faith becomes evident at the end of verse 8. Listen to what he says: "*You don't need to come under my roof. Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*" . .

3) Now just in case the Jews might completely come apart at the seams, He adds one more healing in the next two verses – very brief. I'm just going to mention it. Look at it: "*And when Jesus was come into Peter's house,*" and the other Gospels tell us it was on the Sabbath, and they had been to the synagogue. In fact, all of these, as I said, may have happened the same day.

"*And they went over to Peter's house.*" You know, they do what we do: they go to synagogue or church, and then they go home and have dinner. But they were having a problem there, and the other writer, Mark it is, tells us that Andrew was there, and James was there, and John was there. So you got Peter, Peter's wife, James, John, Andrew, and Jesus. You got six people, and they got a real tragedy. How can you have Sabbath dinner when mother-in-law is sick, right? That's what mother-in-law's for, right? How can you possibly have a decent meal? Plus it puts a damper on the whole operation. . .

You know, there's something wonderful about that. I think the reason that you have the little miracle here about the mother-in-law, **she's Jewish**. And it might have been hard for the Jew to accept the leper. But then to accept a Gentile, and then to hear the words of Jesus that they're

going to be shut out of the kingdom. And so Jesus immediately drops back in this healing of a Jew, almost as if to say, “Yes, I’ve turned to the Gentiles; yes, the kingdom will embrace the Gentiles; but I’ll never turn aside My people Israel. There’ll be healing for them, too.” Isn’t that right?

TEXT: Matthew 8:18-22

TITLE: THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

BIG IDEA:
DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS RADICAL COMMITMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Shallow Christians are not accepted by Jesus as disciples until they have counted the cost and deepened their commitment. Both of these men are more sincere than many who attend church regularly but are unwilling to get involved. Yet Jesus still sends them away with a curt, startling demand for a deeper surrender to him. Too many think they can get into heaven on the basis of a basic “faith” while clinging to the world. Yet James says clearly that “*faith without deeds is dead*” (**Jas 2:26**); unless we show by the way we live our lives that Christ is first, we are not disciples. We are saved by grace apart from works (**Eph 2:8–9**), but our good works are a necessary proof that we have found faith.

R. T. France: In this situation two potential followers declare their intention to go with him. But the interest of the story is not in these two men in themselves (we are told nothing about them, not even whether they in fact joined Jesus or not), but in Jesus’ remarkable responses to them both which raise an **abrupt challenge to any easy understanding of discipleship**. They express both the uncompromising authority of the demand Jesus makes on his followers and also the radical change of life-style which such following must involve.

Van Parunak: So in these two individuals, the Lord warns us against two errors of discipleship:

- premature enthusiasm, and
- distraction by the cares of the world.

Charles Swindoll: Because of His supernatural discernment, Jesus often responded to people in ways that seem strange to us at first glance. As we journey with Jesus through this section of Matthew’s account of His earthly ministry, we’ll be able to see how He responded to people in four separate settings. If we pay close attention along the way, we’ll learn **how not to follow Jesus**.

Leon Morris: The paragraph brings out the necessity of **wholeheartedness** in following Jesus. There were people who were well disposed to him and apparently recognized that his teaching was outstanding, but who were not prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to be real disciples. Matthew leaves his readers in no doubt that Jesus demanded wholehearted loyalty.

William Barclay: Jesus did not want followers who were swept away by a moment of emotion, which quickly blazed and just as quickly died. He did not want those who were carried away by a tide of mere feeling, which quickly flowed and just as quickly ebbed. He wanted disciples who knew what they were doing. He talked about taking up a cross (**Matthew 10:38**). He talked about setting himself above the dearest relationships in life (**Luke 14:26**); he talked about giving away everything to the poor (**Matthew 19:21**). He was always saying: ‘Yes, I know that your heart is running out to me, but – do you love me enough for that?’

John MacArthur: Impressive words of affirmation are easy to make, especially when one does not know the cost of commitment involved. The Lord knew that the initial declared faith of many of His followers was **shallow** and **superficial**. When Jesus was in Jerusalem during the first Passover after He began His ministry, “*many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing.*” Yet, John goes on to say, “*Jesus on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man*” (**John 2:23–25**). The Lord had no faith in their faith because He knew it was not genuine. Those people were only committed to the wonder and excitement that accompanied His work, not to Him as Lord or to the work of the gospel itself. Jesus repeatedly refused to take advantage of temporary popularity, which He knew would soon turn to permanent rejection.

Craig Keener:

- First, following Jesus may cost a disciple even the most basic security such as a place to live (**8:18–20**). ...
- Second, following Jesus takes precedence over all social obligations, even those family obligations one’s society and religion declare to be ultimate (**8:21–22**).

(:18) TRANSITION

*“Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him,
He gave orders to depart to the other side.”*

D. A. Carson: Perhaps Jesus’ imminent departure to the east side of the lake prompted certain people to beg him to include them in the circle of disciples going with him. Discipleship in the strict sense required close attachment to the master’s person.

J. Ligon Duncan: We don’t know exactly why the Lord Jesus determined at that point to cross to the other side of the sea and continue His ministry there, but it may well be like in other places; He wanted a break from the attention. We know times in which the crowds pressed around Him, and the Lord Jesus would withdraw to a solitary place, sometimes to pray. It may well be that He wanted a solitary time on that boat crossing to the other side so that the crowds couldn’t be pressing in on Him. There could have been other reasons. It may well have been to keep the enthusiasm of these crowds who had already seen His miracles from going too high. The Lord Jesus knew that He had certain things that He had to accomplish during His ministry, and these people had seen Him perform miracles, and no doubt their enthusiasm for His message and His work would have been spreading around Galilee by this time, and it may well be that the Lord Jesus didn’t want that enthusiasm to get out of hand, and so He withdrew to another place to minister. It could have been that He withdrew in order to test the zeal of the more faithful of those who were following and listening to Him. We know that huge crowds gathered and listened to Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, but it would have been relatively easy to walk outside of one’s village and hear Him preach just outside of that village. It would have been rather more difficult to follow Him when he had gone to the other side of Galilee, into the land of Gad, to preach. You would really have had to be a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ to make that hike to hear Him preach! He may well have intended that as a test of those who were truly committed to Him, to see if they would follow. Or, it may simply have been that it was the Lord Jesus’ job to preach the gospel in all the land, and as He had preached on that side of Galilee, now he was going to Gad, on the other side, so that the word of God would have been heard at

every place throughout the land of Israel. We don't know exactly why. The text doesn't give us anything, but to tell us that when that crowd crushed in on Christ, He told the disciples to 'get in the boats, we're going to the other side.' And so they began to make their way.

I. (:19-20) DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS COSTLY COMMITMENT AND FORSAKING OF EARTHLY COMFORTS AND SECURITY

A. (:19) A Scribe Volunteers for Discipleship

*“And a certain scribe came and said to Him,
‘Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.’”*

E. Michael Green: In response to the enthusiastic ‘*I will follow you wherever you go*’ (19), Jesus points out the **cost of commitment**. To follow him will involve hardship, insecurity and homelessness. That was his lot. It would be the lot of his disciples too. It is remarkable that a teacher of the law should honour Jesus as highly as is reported here, for Jesus had not been educated at the scribal schools. But admiration will not suffice. Discipleship demands sterner stuff: blood, toil, tears, sweat. Is he prepared for the cost?

B. (:20) Jesus Confronts Him with Discipleship Demands

“And Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’”

Walter Wilson: During his time on earth, this exalted figure lacks the sort of refuge available even to humble creatures such as birds and foxes (cf. **Ps 84:3**), his existence being defined instead by displacement and deprivation. To be a disciple, then, entails more than an initial decision to follow Jesus. It entails also a willingness to follow him specifically in his capacity as the Son of Man (cf. **20:28**), the assumption being that Jesus's vagrant existence establishes a pattern for those who would follow him. Accordingly, his disciples will have to substitute conventional sources of human security with Christ's protection (cf. **23:37**, also with avian imagery).

Grant Osborne: Jesus speaks of his itinerant ministry and lifestyle (cf. **2:13–14; 12:15; 15:21; 16:1–5**), as does Paul when he notes the “homeless” nature of the apostolic ministry (**1 Cor 4:11**, cf. **Heb 11:13–16**). There will be no comfortable, settled life for one who truly follows Jesus. To the man's “*wherever you go*” Jesus adds, “OK, will you go this far?” Jesus does not want shallow commitments but demands that the one who truly “*follows*” him **count the cost** (cf. **Luke 14:25–35**) and make a radical commitment.

R. T. France: Here in **8:20** the reference [“*Son of Man*”] is to Jesus' current status, but whereas in **9:6** and **12:8** the title will denote a figure of unique authority, here it speaks paradoxically of a state of **earthly deprivation** which is sharply contrasted with the heavenly glory of **Dan 7:13–14**. As Matthew's gospel progresses it will be the future, heavenly authority of the Son of Man which will be increasingly in focus, but this first use of the title brings out the contrast between its literal meaning and its specifically Danielic connotations: the one who is to rule over all first shares with his disciples in all the **insecurity of their human condition**.

Charles Swindoll: Jesus called the scribe's bluff. He was all talk but no follow-through. The principle here is again simple: Don't follow Jesus full of yourself. Don't be a person with lots of words but who's short on humility. There's a saying among the seasoned ranchers in West Texas

when they meet up with a kid with a big mouth and a lot of ambition but no scars or experience —“The kid’s all hat and no horse.” That was the scribe. He was all books, but no wisdom; all knowledge, but no courage.

John Nolland: Thus far in Matthew’s story all that offers itself is the leaving behind involved in the call of the four fishermen in **4:18-22** and the pattern of itineration in **4:23**. But as the story unfolds, Jesus will soon be unwelcome in “*the country of the Gerasenes*” (**8:33**), and the disciples will be warned to anticipate (sometimes) not being welcomed (**10:14**), judicial persecution (**vv. 16-20**), and family and wider hostility (**vv. 21-22, 34-36**) and will be advised to flee from their persecutors (**v. 23**). And these isolating experiences are to be linked with taking up the cross and following Jesus (**v. 38**), a concept which will gradually become clear as Jesus announces his coming Passion and then goes through the experience (**chaps. 26–27**). Deprivation plays its part in what Jesus is speaking of, but the main focus is on being made unwelcome by others. The scribe is offering to **join what is to become an outcast group**.

S. Lewis Johnson: Since we have become believers, **this world is not our home**. *The foxes have holes. The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.* And the disciple of Jesus Christ, who intends to truly follow him wherever he goes, can never be at home in this world. The world is not my home. We are passing through, on the way, to our true home, **for our citizenship is in heaven**.

Donald Hagner: Discipleship, as Jesus will suggest, involves more than just willingness to follow in the sense of accompanying someone, or even willingness to listen to and learn from someone and to live with that person as did students with their rabbis; it involves at bottom a **total lifestyle**. It is important to note (with **Kingsbury**, NTS 34 [1988] 45–59) that although the scribe reflects good Jewish practice in choosing his teacher, in the Gospel narrative it is consistently Jesus who **initiates the disciple-master relationship** by his sovereign choice of disciples. This perhaps explains the coolness of Jesus’ response in the next verse.

Leon Morris: “*Laying the head*” here stands for owning a place where one may rest; Jesus cannot claim a place of his own where he can sleep. As **Schweizer** puts it, he was “devoid of all middle-class security.” If the scribe wished to follow him, he must bear this in mind. Jesus sat loose to possessions, he had no secure job, and he owned very little. To be the disciple of such a man might well be interesting, but it would be **far from comfortable**. The scribe’s reaction is not given, but certainly the **cost of discipleship** is brought clearly before him. . .

“*Son of Man*” -- **Why did Jesus use the term?** I have suggested elsewhere that that was

1. firstly because it was a rare term and one without nationalistic associations. It would lead to no political complications....
2. Secondly, because it had overtones of divinity....
3. Thirdly, because of its societary implications. The Son of man implies the redeemed people of God.
4. Fourthly, because it had undertones of humanity. He took upon Him our weakness.

John Broadus: Frequently journeying far and wide over the country, even as now he was about to cross the lake into a wild, inhospitable region, his life was one of peculiar trial and self-denying toil, and if the Scribe proposed to follow him wherever he went, he must make up his mind to follow a homeless wanderer, and so to endure many hardships.... We see from this incident how careful our Lord was to warn men beforehand what they were to expect in entering upon his

service as in **Luke 14**. And although it is not now the duty of all his followers to spend their lives in wandering labors, it is still the duty of every one to “*renounce himself, and take up his cross,*” and in the highest sense to “*follow*” Jesus

II. (:21-22) DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS URGENCY OF COMMITMENT AND PRIMACY OF ALLEGIANCE IN PURSUING KINGDOM PRIORITIES

A. (:21) A Potential Disciple Volunteers for Discipleship

*“And another of the disciples said to Him,
‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’”*

R. T. France: The potential disciple’s words are usually understood of the immediate and pressing responsibility of arranging the funeral for his father who had just died. Burial took place within 24 hours of the death, so he would not be asking for a long postponement, though subsequent ceremonies could last up to a week. The arrangements were the responsibility of the eldest son (**Gen 50:5–7; Tob 4:3; 6:15; 14:11–12; Sir 38:16**), and Jewish custom and piety demanded that they take priority over all other commitments, even the most essential prayers (**Lev 21:1–3; m. Ber. 3:1**). The request would thus be entirely reasonable, indeed essential. If his filial duties prevented him from joining the group in the boat just now, he could catch up with Jesus as soon as his responsibilities had been discharged; the word “first” implies that was his intention. No Jew, especially one who took religious obligations seriously, could have expected him to do otherwise. Jesus’ refusal to allow so essential a filial duty would then be profoundly shocking.

But **K. E. Bailey**, drawing on the insight of Arabic commentators and on his own experience of cultures and idioms of the Middle East, insists that such a scenario results from a “western” reading of the text and is culturally impossible. If the father had just died, the son could hardly be out at the roadside with Jesus; his place was to be keeping vigil and preparing for the funeral. Rather, to “*bury one’s father*” is standard idiom for **fulfilling one’s filial responsibilities for the remainder of the father’s lifetime, with no prospect of his imminent death**. This would then be a request for indefinite postponement of discipleship, likely to be for years rather than days. In that case Jesus’ reply would be less immediately shocking—the man’s proposed “discipleship” was apparently not very serious.

Charles Swindoll: The man had a situation at home regarding his aging father. Evidently, he was the eldest son of his family, and thus responsible for his father’s eventual burial. Contrary to what many readers assume, the father was not dead yet. If the man’s father had already died and was awaiting burial, it’s highly doubtful the son would have been out among the crowd of Jesus’ followers, especially since burial generally took place the same day a death occurred. The expression “*bury my father*” (8:21) thus likely referred to staying at home for the remainder of his parent’s life so he could settle the family estate. The man hoped that he could indefinitely defer enlistment among the ranks of Jesus’ close disciples until his father died and he received his inheritance. Perhaps then, being fully funded from his family estate, he would be able to provide for himself and serve Jesus in style. . . The only reason the man wanted a rain check from discipleship was because he wanted a piece of the pie back home!

B. (:22) Jesus Confronts Him with Discipleship Demands

*“But Jesus said to him,
‘Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead.’”*

Michael Wilkins: Jesus will later rebuke the Pharisees and teachers of the law for not rightly honoring father and mother (**15:1–9**), so he is not advocating the contravening of the Old Testament prescription. Trying to understand Jesus' response has led to a number of explanations.

- Some think that the person's father has not yet died and that he wants to stay with him until then.
- Or perhaps he is returning to fulfill the second stage of burial by the transfer of the bones of his father a year after death to an ossuary.
- Others look for explanation in a metaphorical allusion in Jesus' language, so that he intends to mean something like "let those who are spiritually dead bury the physically dead."

In any case, Jesus perceives the real problem with this disciple: He had not yet understood clearly the place that Jesus must have as the **primary allegiance** of his life.

Allen Browne: So, did Jesus lose this disciple? Probably. Surely we could do a better job of selling people the gospel message. How about some popular music, with a good light show to load up people's senses? Then get a motivational speaker to convince them they could fulfil their potential much better with faith. Then reel 'em in with a moment of decision, where they can buy in simply by raising their hand. We could make it so easy, with no expectations or demands on their life. We could even ask the crowd to close their eyes, since it's just a personal decision and we wouldn't want them publicly embarrassed.

Yep. In the last 200 years, we've finally developed what Jesus was missing: a response mechanism that's sophisticated, slick and sensitive. It's so much easier to get results now than with his approach.

I mean, we wouldn't want people to go away with the idea that following Jesus would so change their priorities that they could end up homeless. We wouldn't want people to think following Jesus would take priority over every other duty in life.

When Jesus spoke of lacking accommodation, he meant it literally: he and his followers slept rough as they travelled from place to place. Perhaps his comments about death also reflected awareness of the final battle they would face in Jerusalem.

There's something honest about Jesus' picture of discipleship as **suffering and struggle**. He called people to give their lives for the kingdom of God.

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/07/12/the-decision-moment-with-jesus/>

Robert Gundry: False disciples find supposedly legitimate reasons not to meet the rigorous demands that Jesus makes. Again the present tense in "*Jesus says to him*" underlines Jesus' command to follow him and to let the dead bury their own dead, which probably refers to **secondary burial**, the custom of boxing up the bones of dead people after the decomposition of their flesh. The custom made room for further corpses on burial shelves in tombs. In the present passage, if the father had just died his son would have been already engaged in the initial burial of his father rather than talking to Jesus. But if the father was already buried, his son might want to delay following Jesus till the father's remains were ready for secondary burial, a filial duty just as the initial burial was. "*The dead*" who should "*bury their own dead*" then refers to family members already dead and secondarily buried in the same tomb with the father: they should take

care of his secondary burial since he's already in their midst. As though they could! But Jesus is **speaking ironically**. His point is that **an immediate following of him takes precedence over all else**, even over the duty of a son to take care of his father's bones (compare **1 Kings 19:19–21**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Isn't this an **outrageous claim**? The Lord Jesus claiming that he himself should have implicit obedience even above our responsibilities to our families? Why if he were only a man, this is an outrageous claim. But if he is more than a man, then it's the only wise and right claim for God to make.

E. Michael Green: At all events it is a warning against missing the boat, and a challenge to respond and begin discipleship while opportunity knocks.

D. A. Carson: In this inquirer he detected insincerity, a qualified acceptance of Jesus' lordship. And that was not good enough. Commitment to Jesus must be without reservation. Such is the importance Jesus himself attached to his own person and mission.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus replies, "*Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead*" (**8:22**). This is a metaphor. The dead, by definition, cannot do anything. He means let the **spiritually dead** care for the spiritually dead, for matters of this world, such as burials and aging parents. **True disciples follow Jesus now.**

In a way, therefore, Jesus' challenge is milder than it initially seems. He is not interrupting funeral proceedings. Yet in a way the challenge is stronger than it seems. For Jesus is asking the man to give him greater honor and service than his parents. There is only one person, in that culture, who deserves greater honor than our parents: God. Jesus is telling the man, "I deserve your supreme honor and attention." In our culture, self-development commands supreme loyalty for many of us. Jesus tells us the same thing: "**I deserve your supreme loyalty and attention.**"

Donald Hagner: Disciples are therefore in a sense always learners who are discovering more about discipleship as they attempt to live in obedience to Jesus. But the key point is that the call is **radical**; so too must the responding commitment be radical. It would be as much a mistake to take the statement of **v 22** quite literally (unless in fact the proposed delay was to be a long one) as it would be to dismember oneself for the sake of righteousness (thus **Carson** rightly). But, despite the hyperbole, there is a fundamental principle here about the **radical character, urgency, and uncompromising nature of discipleship** that is to be heard with every invitation to, or volunteering of, discipleship to Jesus and the cause of the kingdom.

William Barclay: The tragedy of life is so often the tragedy of the **unseized moment**. We are moved to some fine action, we are moved to the abandoning of some weakness or habit, we are moved to say something to someone, some word of sympathy, or warning, or encouragement; but the moment passes, and the thing is never done, the evil thing is never conquered, the word is never spoken. In the best of us, there is a certain lethargy and inertia; there is a certain habit of **procrastination**, there is a certain **fear and indecision**; and often the moment of fine impulse is never turned into action and into fact.

Jesus was saying to this man: 'You are feeling at the moment that you must get out of that dead society in which you move; you say you will get out when the years have passed and your father has died; **get out now – or you will never get out at all.**'

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are we so scared of making Christian discipleship sound **difficult** and **challenging**?
- 2) How has our commitment to Jesus proven to be **costly** and required **sacrifice** on our part?
- 3) When have we had to put **allegiance to Jesus** above allegiance to family or close friends?
- 4) Why does Jesus prefer to use the title “*Son of Man*” to refer to Himself?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Wilkins: The expression “*Son of Man*” would strike a relatively ambiguous chord with the scribal teacher of the law. In Ezekiel, God refers to the prophet with the expression “*son of man*” over ninety times, pointing to Ezekiel’s frailty as a human before the mighty God revealed in the vision. But “*Son of Man*” is also used in Daniel’s prophecy to refer to a glorified Sovereign, the apocalyptic messianic figure who rules forever with the Ancient of Days (**Dan. 7:13–14**). This latter sense of the expression found its way into use in Judaism, in the pseudepigraphal writings 1 Enoch and 2 Esdras 13 (or 4 Ezra 13). The reference in 1 Enoch is particularly interesting because it precedes the time of Jesus: “... pain shall seize them when they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. [These] kings, governors, and all the landlords shall [try to] bless, glorify, extol him who rules over everything, him who has been concealed. For the Son of Man was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy and the elect ones” (1 En. 62:5–7).

With such a general ambiguity, “*Son of Man*” is convenient for Jesus to use to give instruction about his true identity. It does not have popular associations attached to it, such as were attached to titles like “*Messiah*,” “*Son of David*,” or even “*Son of God*.” Instead, he can teach the meaning of his true identity by referring to himself with the expression, which indeed is **his favorite self-designation**. With a general threefold progression, Jesus uses the expression to clarify exactly who he is and what is his ministry.

1. The Son of Man is the **humble Servant**, who has come to forgive sins of common sinners in his earthly ministry.
2. The Son of Man is the **suffering Servant**, whose atoning death and resurrection will redeem his people.
3. The Son of Man is the **glorious King and Judge**, who will return to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

Jesus’ mission is not always understood because of the misperceptions and faulty expectations of the people, the religious leaders, and even his own disciples. But at the end, it is perfectly clear that he is claiming to be the divine Messiah of Israel (cf. **26:63–68**).

Van Parunak: Development of the Title “Son of Man”

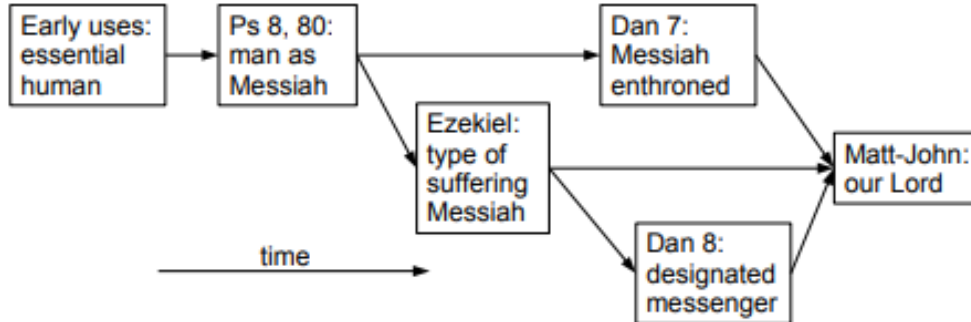


Figure 12: Development of the Title "Son of Man"

John MacArthur: What Keeps Men from Christ?

Now there were many **Pharisees** who hated, turned, and walked away. They loved their sin. They loved darkness rather than light. But then there were others who were attracted to Him, the magnetism of His personality: the thrill seekers. And they came. But in each case, something kept them from genuine conversion. Let's see what it was. Three classic, classic cases.

Number one: Personal comfort. Personal comfort. **Verse 18:** *“Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart to the other shore.”* They were on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The crowd was becoming so massive; the Lord was weary in His physical body. In fact, on the boat ride across, He fell asleep down in the hole of the boat on the wood planks. He needed time for prayer and refreshment. He needed time for respite, for meditation. And the crowd could put pressures on Him that were not necessarily in the plan of God. And so He said, “I think we’d better leave, go to a new place,” commanded them to depart to the other side.

Now when He did that, immediately it pressed the **issue of commitment** with certain people, because by then He had a lot of people following Him. In fact, Mark tells us that when He went on His little boat, a bunch of other little boats went behind Him like a little flotilla, following along. So some people were at the very crux of decision: “Do I get in the boat and go, or do I stay? What do I do?” And we meet these three people in our lesson this morning.

The first man was so interested, but he never came to true salvation, because he wanted personal comfort more than he wanted Christ. **Verse 19:** *“And a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, ‘Master, I will follow Thee wherever Thou goest.’”* Oh man, that sounds good, doesn’t it? Oh, you could sing that song: “Follow, I will follow Thee every passing day.” Wonderful. “Hey, we’ve got a live one, Lord. And guess what; he is a scribe.” . . .

Well, you say, “Why did He bring that up?” [vs. 20] Because He could read his mind, and He knew what the guy’s hang-up was. The guy was saying, “Man, my life is full and rich, and I got all I want, and my lifestyle satisfies me, and I just want to add You to my lifestyle. I just want to take my whole gig, and drag it along, and follow You.” Jesus refuses to cash in on a moment’s popularity. . .

There's a **price to pay** to be a Christian. This guy wasn't willing to pay the price, he just wanted to add excitement to his life. He was a potential Judas, and nobody needs more than one of those. So, Jesus drove him away. . .

The second one wanted personal riches, verse 21. Now watch this: "*And another of His disciples.*" Now the word "disciple" is not an official word with a capital D. It simply means learner, follower. And at this particular point, He's got a lot of people following Him of all different levels. And another one of these followers said to Him, "*Lord, permit me to go first and bury my father.*" . . .

He's not saying Christians are forbidden to go to funerals. He's not saying if you're a Christian, you're not supposed to make sure your father or mother gets buried. It's a proverb, and what he means is the world's passing affairs, the coming and going of people, the passing of fortunes from one to another is all part of a dead system. "You are called to a living kingdom: go and preach the kingdom."

You see, **the man's priorities are fouled up.** Secular matters belong to the people who are secular. The human system takes care of itself. But this young man, what does it say he did? It's not there either. He left somewhere between verse 22 and 23. He disappeared. Why? **Personal possessions were the big thing to him.** He had waited a long time for his piece of the action, he wasn't bailing out now. Hey, he liked the thrill and the charisma and the wonder and the miracles, and this was fabulous stuff, and he wanted to get on the bandwagon. But there was no commitment there; he wanted his money.

Matthew McCraw: Jesus as Number One

Matthew is going to tell us today about two short conversations that Jesus had with two men who wanted to follow Him. Jesus will tell them that it takes sacrifice and it will involve them living by different standards.

I. Following Jesus requires *uncommon sacrifice* (18-20) --

One of the challenges in the American church is that so many people have been duped into thinking that following Jesus is no big deal, that it takes no commitment, and that it involves no sacrifice. Not so, says **Matthew 8:19-20!**

II. Following Jesus requires *unusual standards* (21-22) --

You see, it doesn't matter if the man has to miss his funeral, or delay the completion of the family burial, or miss out on taking care of his aging father, following Jesus is more important than any and all of that!

There is nothing in this world that should take precedence over following Jesus! Nothing! That's the point of **verses 21 and 22!**

Don't let anything get in the way of you following Jesus.

Followers of Jesus don't have the standards of the world when it comes to what is most important to us. Jesus has unusual standards. You should want the usual standards.

<https://fbcbartow.org/sermons/jesus-as-number-one-matthew-818-22/>

J. Ligon Duncan: What are the evidences of Christ's Lordship in our lives? Do we desire to read His word, to study His word, to hear His word, to feast on His word? Do we desire to be conformed to His image? Do we desire to be filled afresh with His spirit? Do we desire to love His people, to serve His people? Are His people our people? Even though they are different promised culturally, even though they are different promised economically, even though they're different promised in so many ways? Are His people our people? Do they take priority in our lives? Do we desire to serve them? Today we have an opportunity to show His Lordship in another way. We have an opportunity to show His Lordship with our money in the year to come. What does our giving say about the Lordship of Christ in our lives. Where does our giving say our priority is? Do we look at what we have from God and say, "Lord, this is from You. It's Yours. You have graciously, You've generously, You've even extravagantly given to me and now I want to use what You've given to me strategically for the kingdom. It's yours. It will not be my master. I will master it and I will use it for Your cause." Our Lord made discipleship hard and lost many prospective followers, because He called them to a pilgrimage, not to a parade. He called them to a fight, not to a frolic. Christ's disciples have been called to the fight. Are you there with him as your Lord?

TEXT: Matthew 8:23 – 9:8

TITLE: 3 MIRACLES SHOWING THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

BIG IDEA:

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS STIRS UP REACTIONS OF BOTH AWE AND REJECTION

INTRODUCTION:

Leon Morris: For the second time in this section of his Gospel Matthew brings three miracles before his readers. He is emphasizing the authority and the power that were manifest throughout Jesus' ministry.

Charles Swindoll: The Bible is filled with amazing scenes and stories that almost take our breath away. When we picture ourselves being there, seeing through our own eyes the incredible events as they take place and wondering how everything will turn out, we're held in the grip of our imagination. The disciples of Jesus occupied front-row seats throughout His earthly ministry. How often they must have stared in **amazement** at what they saw and heard —mouths wide open, shocked beyond words!

R. T. France: The second group of miracles are linked both geographically and thematically. Geographically they are grouped around the **crossing of the lake**, which was signalled in v. 18. The first miracle takes place during the crossing, the second on arrival on the other side, and the third on their return to Capernaum. The explicit mention of the boat in **8:23** and **9:1** reinforces this connection. . .

The thematic connection between these three miracles is in the **unparalleled authority** displayed by Jesus, which is the explicit focus of the third (**9:6–8**), but is also expressed in the reaction of the disciples to the first (**8:27**) and of the people of the Decapolis to the second (**8:34**). The miracles in the first group were physical healings (though exorcisms were also included in the general summary in **8:16**). In this group the third (**9:1–8**) is also a physical healing, but that is not the main focus of the pericope which contains it. Rather we now see Jesus' authority revealed in three new ways, different from one another but all equally astounding. He has authority to quell wind and water, to expel demonic spirits, and to forgive sins. The question "*What sort of person is this?*" (**8:27**) thus becomes ever more insistent.

Warren Wiersbe: The persons involved in these three miracles all had a need for peace, and Jesus provided that peace.

1. Peace in the storm (**8:23–27**).
2. Peace in a community (**8:28–34**).
3. Peace in the conscience (**9:1–8**).

Richard Gardner: What the three stories in this unit do have in common is their focus on the **dramatic scope of Jesus' power or authority**. In one instance Jesus demonstrates authority over the elements. In another it is authority to destroy demonic powers. And in the third account Jesus confronts us with his authority to forgive sin. The question that all three stories raise for the reader is the question found in 8:27: What sort of person is this, who commands such authority?

I. (8:23-27) AUTHORITY OVER NATURE -- CALMING OF THE STORM

William Barclay: When the cold, bleak wind of sorrow blows, there is calm and comfort in the presence of Jesus Christ. When the hot blast of passion blows, there is peace and security in the presence of Jesus Christ. When the storms of doubt seek to uproot the very foundations of the faith, there is a steady safety in the presence of Jesus Christ. In every storm that shakes the human heart, there is peace with Jesus Christ.

Grant Osborne: There is in general a four-part development:

1. the appearance of the storm (vv. 23–24),
2. the interaction between Jesus and the disciples (vv. 25–26a),
3. the stilling of the storm (v. 26b),
4. and the shocked reaction of the disciples (v. 27).

Still, the chiastic outline of **Davies and Allison** has merit:

Jesus boards (v. 23a)

The disciples follow (v. 23b)

A storm arises (v. 24a-b)

Jesus is sleeping (v. 24c)

The disciples address Jesus (v. 25)

Jesus addresses the disciples (v. 26a)

Jesus arises and rebukes the storm (v. 26b)

The storm calms (v. 26c)

The disciples are amazed (v. 27)

Jesus disembarks (v. 28)

A. (:23) Setting

“And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him.”

B. (:24-25) Crisis

1. (:24a) Agitated State of Nature

“And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves;”

Warren Wiersbe: The storm came because they obeyed the Lord, and not because (like Jonah) they disobeyed Him.

Michael Wilkins: The lake’s low elevation (at least 636 feet [212 meters] below sea level) provides it with relatively mild year-round temperatures. However, encompassed with mountain ranges to the east and west that rise over 2,650 feet from the level of the lake, especially infamous is an east wind that blows in over the mountains, particularly during the spring and fall (cf. 14:19, 24; John 6:1–4). The lake’s low-lying setting results in sudden violent downdrafts and storms (cf. Mark 4:37; Luke 8:23; John 6:18) that can produce waves seven feet and more, easily able to swamp a boat.

William Barclay: On the west side, there are hills with valleys and gullies; and, when a cold wind comes from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind, as it

were, becomes compressed in them, and rushes down upon the lake with savage violence and with startling suddenness, so that the calm of one moment can become the raging storm of the next. The storms on the Sea of Galilee combine **suddenness** and **violence** in a unique way.

John Nolland: Matthew identifies the cause of the problem as a σεισμός. This word means ‘*a shaking*’, and is normally applied to an earthquake rather than a storm. He has most likely chosen the word because its generality allows readers to think in terms of the many kinds of disturbance that may threaten their own lives. The choice of the word may also make it possible, retrospectively, to see anticipated here the eschatological turmoil of the period through which the disciples will be called upon to live out their discipleship (24:7). It is further possible that the general language allows the evocation of mythical images of the sea as a frightening monster, once roused. The sea is being shaken up, and so there are large waves; but only with the mention in 8:26 of the presence of the wind will it become clear that the likely cause is a storm. The danger is that the boat will be swamped and sunk. . .

There is a curious relationship between the present account and the story of **Jonah’s sea voyage**. The strongest verbal links are between v. 24 and **Jon. 1:4-5**. But there are also verbal links between **Mt. 8:25** and **Jon. 1:6, 14**; **Mt. 8:27** and **Jon. 1:16** (much stronger for the Markan account at this point). Further content parallels can be noted between **Mt. 8:23** and **Jon. 1:3**; **Mt. 8:26** and **Jon. 1:15**. . . In very different ways Jonah and Jesus are both presented as figures through whom **God manifests his power over nature**.

2. (:24b) Peaceful State of Jesus
“*but He Himself was asleep.*”

Leon Morris: *But* has adversative force and introduces what is contrary to what might have been expected. And it is certainly surprising that in a storm of the magnitude of that described by Matthew anyone could stay asleep. But Jesus had had a very heavy day with healing and teaching, and dealing with potential disciples. Wearied as he was with all his labor, he fell asleep and remained asleep despite the magnitude of the storm.

Grant Osborne: In the OT sleep in difficult situations symbolized a deep trust in God (**Job 11:18–19**; **Ps 3:5–6**; **Prov 3:24–26**); that is the likely message here, as the calm of Jesus is in absolute contrast with the deep anxiety of the disciples.

3. (:25) Agitated State of the Disciples
“*And they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying,
‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing!’*”

Daniel Doriani: All-consuming dread is another matter. Irrational fear resists comfort. It forgets the power and goodness of God. It extinguishes faith. Godly fear recognizes the threat at hand, but it is tempered by confidence in God. When dangers loom, we should remember that God masters storms. We should remember the story of Jonah. Although Jonah was in a state of rebellion and the Lord had a different agenda with him, he raised the storm, placed Jonah in it, and delivered Jonah from it, all for his good. He will do the same for us.

C. (:26) Miracle = Calming the Winds and the Sea

1. Rebuke of the Disciples
“*And He said to them, ‘Why are you timid, you men of little faith?’*”

John Nolland: The situation may be terrible, but the disciples' terror is a mark of little faith. It indicates that they have lost sight of the reality of the power and presence of their Lord. When this happens, appropriate action on the basis of faith becomes impossible. The present episode illustrates, however, the point already made in **6:30**, that God does not withhold help even from those whose faith is small.

R. T. France: A significant contrast with Mark's telling of the story is the different order of events: in Mark the appeal is immediately followed by Jesus' remedial action, only after which does he comment on their fear and lack of faith, whereas in Matthew the comments immediately follow the appeal—**Jesus deals with the disciples before he deals with the storm**. This order is perhaps intended to underline Jesus' control of the situation (there is no need for panic action), but also serves to highlight the **significance of the disciples' failure in trust**.

Grant Osborne: Jesus, who so trusted God that he slept through the storm, is aghast at the low level of faith on the part of the disciples. Matthew uses "*you of so little faith*" (ὀλιγόπιστοι) often (**6:30; 14:31; 16:8**) to describe the inadequate God-centeredness of the disciples. It is always the result of a basic self-interest and an earth-centered perspective, thus producing fear. It must be remembered that they cry out to Jesus for help and so at the deepest level do have a basic trust, but they also feel they are about to perish, and so it is **terror** rather than **faith** that drives them.

2. Rebuke of Nature

*"Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea;
and it became perfectly calm."*

Walter Wilson: When Matthew reports how Jesus "*rebuked*" the winds and the sea in **8:26**, he employs a verb (ἐπιτιμάω) found elsewhere in accounts of **exorcisms**. Within the author's cultural context, such a tactic would have made sense, given the common belief that demonic forces ("*the spirit of the wind,*" "*the spirit of the sea,*" etc.) were responsible for violent weather. In this respect, **8:23–27** anticipates **8:28–34**, which is itself an exorcism story. Looking at the stories in terms of genre, it appears that a nature (or sea) miracle with exorcistic features segues into an exorcism story with a feature borrowed from nature (i.e., the sea), the implication being that the same godlike power that informed Jesus's quelling of the demonic sea is now manifested in his subjugation of demonic men. An important item linking the two stories rhetorically, then, is their **shared adversarial dynamic**. In both narratives, Jesus overcomes active demonic opposition, which (as such) is associated with the power of death, symbolized in the former by an adversary that emerges from the sea and in the latter by adversaries who emerge from tombs, only to be destroyed in the sea.

Leon Morris: Jesus turned to the boisterous winds and the troubled sea and **rebuked** them (for addressing the waves of the sea cf. **Job 38:11**). This is a somewhat surprising verb and perhaps indicates that Jesus saw an **evil force** in the tempest that put him and his disciples in peril. He deals with that force as **sovereign over it**. The result of the rebuke was a great calm ("*it became perfectly calm,*" NASB). Matthew does not describe a gradual diminution of the force of the winds and the waves, but a **sudden cessation of all the storm's activity**, so that everything was peaceful. We are not to think that the storm had blown itself out, but that Jesus had power over the elements and replaced tempest with calm.

D. (:27) Response to Manifest Authority of Jesus over Nature

“And the men marveled, saying,

‘What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?’”

Craig Blomberg: There are implications for discipleship here, to be sure; we must turn to Jesus as the one to trust in all circumstances of life. But the focus of this passage remains squarely **Christological**—on **who Christ is**, not on what he will do for us. One who has this kind of power can be no less than God himself, **worthy of worship**, irrespective of when and how he chooses to use that power in our lives. Sometimes he leaves storms unstilled for good and godly ends (cf. **2 Cor 12:7-8**).

II. (8:28-34) AUTHORITY OVER DEMONIC SPIRITS -- EXORCISM OF TWO DEMON-POSSESSED MEN

A. (:28a) Setting

“And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes,”

Michael Wilkins: The “*other side*” is often a reference to the movement from a Jewish to a Gentile region. “*Gadarenes*” refers to both the village of Gadara, located about five miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, and to the surrounding region, which probably included a little village that lay on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee called Gerasa (modern Khersa or Kursi), the traditional site of the exorcism.

Warren Wiersbe: This dramatic incident is most revealing.

- It shows what Satan does for a man: robs him of sanity and self-control; fills him with fears; robs him of the joys of home and friends; and (if possible) condemns him to an eternity of judgment.
- It also reveals what society does for a man in need: restrains him, isolates him, threatens him, but society is unable to change him.
- See, then, what Jesus Christ can do for a man whose whole life—within and without—is bondage and battle. What Jesus did for these two demoniacs, He will do for anyone else who needs Him.

B. (:28b-29) Crisis

1. (:28b) Agitated State of Demon-Possessed Men

“two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road.”

John Nolland: *Coming out from the tombs* probably represents a connection with the aberrantly supernatural, but it may also suggest a hiding place from which to emerge and attack travellers.

Walter Wilson: Matthew is alone in stating that the demoniacs “*were so fierce that no one could pass that way* [ὀδός]” (**8:28**; cf. **Mark 5:2**). According to **b. Pesah.** 109b–112a, in a passage that explains how pairs of different kinds can be associated with demonic activity, the need for wariness in dealing with such phenomena is said to arise “especially when one is setting out on the road” (110a). This concern, in turn, reflects the notion, common in Jewish folklore, that demons can often be found lying in wait to ambush travelers, a belief that may be applicable to the scenario depicted in our text, where Jesus encounters a pair of demoniacs while abroad in a strange land.

William Barclay: The ancient world believed unquestioningly and intensely in **evil spirits**. The air was so full of these spirits that it was not even possible to insert into it the point of a needle without coming against one. Some said that there were 7,500,000 of them; there were 10,000 of them on a person's right hand and 10,000 on the left; and all were waiting to do harm. They lived in unclean places such as tombs, and places where no cleansing water was to be found. They lived in the deserts where their howling could be heard. (We still speak of a howling desert.) They were specially dangerous to the lonely traveller, to the woman in childbirth, to the newly married bride and bridegroom, to children who were out after dark, and to travellers by night. They were specially dangerous in the midday heat, and between sunset and sunrise. The male demons were called *shedim*, and the female *lilin* after Lilith. The female demons had long hair, and were specially dangerous to children; that was why children had their guardian angels (cf. **Matthew 18:10**). . .

We must try to visualize what happened. The men were shouting and shrieking (**Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28**). We must remember that they were completely convinced that they were occupied by demons. Now it was normal and orthodox belief, shared by everyone, that when the Messiah and the time of judgment came, the demons would be destroyed. That is what the men meant when they asked Jesus why he had come to torture them *before the proper time*. They were so convinced that they were possessed by demons that nothing could have rid them of that conviction other than visible demonstration that the demons had gone out of them.

Grant Osborne: There are two important aspects of the message: demons always torture the people they possess, and they are entirely under Jesus' control. There is a spiritual battle here, but it is one-sided. . .

When the demons add the title "*Son of God*" (Mark/Luke—"Son of the Most High God"), they are not acting as Jesus' PR team, telling everyone who he is. In the ancient world it was believed that everyone had a **hidden name that expressed their true essence. To discover that name was to gain a certain power over a person.** **Twelfree** notes that "the demons attempted to disarm Jesus by exposing his allegiance and special relationship with God (Ps 106:16; Sir 45:6; b. Pesah. 112b)." At the same time, they knew his absolute lordship as God's Son and had to acknowledge his superiority. Throughout the gospels **the highest Christology occurs in the mouth of demons**; they know who Jesus is! Realizing the absolute authority of Jesus as Son of God, **the demons realize they have already lost.**

2. (:29) Agitated State of the Demons

*"And behold, they cried out, saying,
'What do we have to do with You, Son of God?
Have You come here to torment us before the time?'"*

John Nolland: The demons know themselves to be **doomed**, but the time has not yet arrived. However, since with the coming of Jesus the forces of the kingdom of God are freshly stirring, we might expect action that is anticipatory of the final judgment of the demons. The demons ask not to be tormented, but they will be. βασανίσαι (*'torment'*) has a literal sense of 'torture in judicial examination (to establish the truth)'. That is not quite what we have here, but the discomfiting of the demons in being sent into the pigs (though there is also an element of concession in this) will reveal their utter destructiveness. Jesus has come to *'torment them before the time'*, but not with the full intensity of what will come afterwards.

Craig Blomberg: To the demons his arrival seems **premature**; Judgment Day has not come. They overlook the “already” of the “already-not yet” equation. The end times were breaking into human history with Jesus' exorcisms, demonstrating the inauguration of God's kingdom (cf. **12:28**), even if he still granted the demons limited freedom for a time.

C. (:30-32) Miracle = Casting Out the Demons into the Swine

1. (:30-31) Entreaty of the Demons

“Now there was at a distance from them a herd of many swine feeding. And the demons began to entreat Him, saying, ‘If You are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’”

John Nolland: What are we to make of the **affinity between demons and pigs**? We could think in terms of the role of pigs as sacrificial animals in the wider world beyond Judaism and make a link here with the Jewish conviction reflected in **1 Cor. 10:20** that worship of pagan gods is worship of demons. We could content ourselves with a link between the Jewish ritual uncleanness of pigs (**Lv. 11:7; Dt. 14:8**) and the uncleanness of demons (reflected in the designation ‘*unclean spirit*’).

Grant Osborne: **Mark 5:9, 13** tells us that their name was “*Legion*” (**many spirits**—a Roman legion contained six thousand soldiers) and that the herd numbered two thousand, probably the combined herds of an entire village.

2. (:32) Exorcism Performed by Jesus

“And He said to them, ‘Begone!’ And they came out, and went into the swine, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters.”

Grant Osborne: Jesus speaks for the first and only time in this story. It was normal for exorcists to prattle on and on, finding out the name of the demon and its territory of operation, and using various incantations to try to get it to leave. Jesus’ great authority is forcefully presented, for he needs only **one word**, “*Go*” or “*Be gone*” (BAGD), and the demons must instantly obey.

Craig Blomberg: Readers concerned about the destruction of animal life and the loss of the farmers' livelihood exhibit a contemporary **sentimentality** not shared by a Jewish audience who knew these pig farmers should not have been raising animals whose meat was forbidden to eat. Human sanity and salvation, moreover, must always take priority over financial prosperity.

Daniel Doriani: The story of the demoniac teaches that even if a life is **far out of control**, Jesus can bring **restoration**. This episode is a miracle, a direct, immediately effective act of God. Our restoration usually is not so rapid. But Jesus is the same and his power is the same. He has power over demons because he has power over all the forces of evil, over Satan, and over our sins.

E. Michael Green: The destruction of the herd of pigs served as a graphic assurance to the men in question that they really were free at last and that the evil spirits would never return. Jesus is Lord over all the forces of Satan.

D. (:33-34) Response to Manifest Authority of Jesus over the Spirit Realm

1. (:33) Shock and Fear

*“And the herdsmen ran away, and went to the city,
and reported everything, including the incident of the demoniacs.”*

2. (:34) Separation and Opposition

*“And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus;
and when they saw Him, they entreated Him to depart from their region.”*

Leon Morris: For the third time in this story and the fifth time in this chapter Matthew has his vivid *And look*. It is a good story, and he does not let his readers miss its **dramatic force**.

William Barclay: Here is **human selfishness** at its worst. It did not matter to these people that two men had been given back their reason; all that mattered to them was that their pigs had perished. It is so often the case that people in effect say: ‘I don’t care what happens to anyone else, if my profits and my comfort and my case are preserved.’ We may be amazed at the callousness of these people of Gadara, but we must take care that we too do not resent any helping of others which reduces our own privileges.

R. T. France: Whereas Mark gives a touching account of the rehabilitation of the former demoniac, of his wish to join Jesus’ party and of his commission instead to tell his own people about Jesus, Matthew is concerned rather with the impression left on the local population by Jesus’ awesome authority. This is not a story about mission but about **power**. But whereas among the Jews his miracle-working power has attracted people to follow Jesus, here in the Decapolis they want to get rid of him. For them he is not a messianic figure, but a wandering Jewish “holy man” whose activities have already caused a great deal of damage; he will be safer back among his own people. It is a strangely unflattering ending to the story, but it has reinforced Matthew’s message that Jesus is not like other people. Before long we shall hear of similarly unflattering reactions to Jesus’ exorcistic activities even among his own people: his power is not doubted, but its source is called into question (**9:34; 12:24**).

D. A. Carson: This ending of the pericope bears significantly on its total meaning. If the story shows once more that Jesus’ ministry was not restricted to the Jews but foreshadowed the mission to the Gentiles, it likewise shows that **opposition to Jesus is not exclusively Jewish**. To this extent it confirms earlier exegesis that showed that opponents in Matthew are not selected on the basis of race but according to their response to Jesus.

III. (9:1-8) AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS -- HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

Richard Gardner: To appreciate the story, one must keep in mind two tenets of Jewish faith that govern the discussion.

- One is the belief that sin and sickness are connected in some way (cf. **John 9:2; 5:14**).
- The other is the belief that only God can forgive sin (cf. **Mark 2:7**).

Grant Osborne: All the action revolves around the central aspect, the forgiveness of sins, showing that spiritual healing has precedence over physical healing and that the two are indissoluble. Behind it all, of course, is the authority of Jesus to provide both spiritual and physical healing. The conflict is part of the rejection of God’s new work by the leaders.

A. (:1) Setting

“And getting into a boat, He crossed over, and came to His own city.”

Walter Wilson: The introductory verse (9:1) links the pericope to the preceding narrative by explaining how Jesus returned from his journey to the Decapolis, thus completing the sequence that had begun in 8:18. As for the healing story itself (9:2–8), Matthew follows a familiar pattern, both abbreviating the Markan account and doing so in a way that makes the element of dialogue more pronounced.

Michael Wilkins: Jesus “crosses over,” which marks the transition from the Gentile to the Jewish regions surrounding the Sea of Galilee. He comes back to the town explicitly named **Capernaum** in Mark’s narrative (cf. **Mark 2:1; 5:18**), which is now “*his own town*,” the home base of Jesus’ ministry in the Galilee region (cf. **4:17; 8:5; 11:23**).

Charles Swindoll: As we work through this next section, we witness a strange phenomenon, already foreshadowed back on the other side of the lake in the response of the Gadarene pig herders. Some people’s reaction to Jesus’ miraculous power was **negative**: They didn’t want Jesus around, disrupting their everyday “normal,” as mundane as it was. They preferred the status quo to bowing to the intrusive power of the Lord God.

When we travel with Jesus back to the other side of the lake, we see the same kind of simmering resentment by the “powers that be.” As Jesus continues to perform miraculous healings, bring spiritual restoration, and provide deliverance from unrighteous living, some rejoice in the Savior, but others harbor feelings of jealousy and lash out in criticism. As those who presumed to have a monopoly on righteousness and a cornered market on spirituality, the scribes and Pharisees **slowly begin turning against Jesus**, seeing Him as a threat to their illegitimate claim on the hearts and minds of the people.

B. (:2a) Crisis

“And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed;”

Grant Osborne: Matthew moves straight to the main event, skipping Mark’s details (**Mark 2:4**) about lowering the man through the flatbed roof, with “*look*” (ἰδοὺ) pointing to a dramatic turn in the action. Jesus has already healed paralyzed people (**4:24**), so a group of men feel he can do the same for their friend. The man cannot move, so they have to bring him on a mat or stretcher, probably something like a modern bedroll.

C. (:2b-7) Miracle = Healing of Paralytic

1. (:2b) Greater Miracle = Spiritual Healing of Paralytic / Forgiveness of Sins

*“and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic,
‘Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven.’”*

Leon Morris: Then Jesus said, “*your sins are forgiven*,” words that must have astounded everybody. It is interesting that Jesus begins by ignoring the man’s physical need and grants him forgiveness. The tense points to a gift now: Jesus is not pointing to a future time when the forgiveness would take place. *Sins* is a comprehensive term, including all the man’s departures from the way of righteousness. Now the man has nothing to fear — all his sins are gone. In the early part of this Gospel we were told that Jesus would save his people from their sins (**1:21**), but

this is the first occasion when we read of his giving anyone forgiveness. Indeed, it is the only occasion in this Gospel when Jesus forgives a specific individual.

2. (:3-7) Lesser Miracle = Physical Healing of Paralytic

a. (:3) Charge of Blasphemy

*“And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves,
‘This fellow blasphemes.’”*

John Nolland: The NT uses ‘blasphemy’ much more loosely than does later Jewish discussion. Here the objection is to Jesus’ declaration of forgiveness of sin. While Judaism had clear provision for forgiveness with temple sacrifice and more broadly, in an ultimate sense God was thought to have reserved to himself the declaration of forgiveness on the day of judgment. The expectation of eschatological forgiveness was built up on the OT promises of forgiveness linked to the assurance of restoration beyond the period of the Exile. Forgiveness at the human level was always possible, but only God could have the last word on the matter. Here the scribes see Jesus as claiming to speak from God in this ultimate manner.

b. (:4-5) Challenge of Jesus

1) (:4) Exposing Their Evil Thoughts

*“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said,
‘Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?’”*

Craig Blomberg: Jesus simply stresses that their objections issued from evil hearts (cf. **7:15-20**). Their internal disposition is rebelling against God’s will.

Grant Osborne: Their hearts are guilty of “evil thoughts” (πονηρά), which connotes an attitude of **malice** toward Jesus. It was important to test teachers/leaders to see if they were truly from God (**1 Thess 5:21; 1 Cor 14:29; 1 John 4:1**), but the scribes were not concerned to find out the truth. They had already rejected Jesus and so wanted only to condemn him; that is where the malicious “evil” lay. In turning against Jesus, they were turning against God.

2) (:5) Exposing Their Malicious Condemnation

*“For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’
or to say, ‘Rise, and walk?’”*

Grant Osborne: In reality, of course, forgiving sins is much more difficult than healing the sick, for only God can do it. But from an earthly perspective, it is **easier to pronounce forgiveness**, the effects of which can neither be seen nor authenticated. So Jesus is speaking from the human perspective of the scribes. So Jesus offers apologetic proof of his power and authority, something that can be empirically confirmed, something they can “know” has happened.

Walter Wilson: We encounter yet another interpretive puzzle. This is because the appropriate answer to the question varies depending on one’s point of view. From the perspective of external proof, it is easier to declare that a person’s sins have been forgiven than to declare that a person’s illness has been cured, because the latter is subject to observable verification in a way the former is not. In this case, Jesus is making an argument from the greater to the lesser: if he can accomplish something that is demonstrably more difficult (healing the paralytic), then logically he can accomplish the easier task as well (forgiving his sins). The ensuing healing, then, serves as visible proof and public validation of the claim that Jesus makes in **9:2**.

From the perspective of internal actuality, it is easier to cure someone's illness than to forgive someone's sins, since the former conceivably falls within the scope of human ability (Jesus, after all, was not the only charismatic healer), while the authority to absolve individuals of their guilt belongs to God alone. Thus the act of forgiving the paralytic represents the more difficult and momentous accomplishment, since it is something that could be accomplished only if Jesus were acting on God's behalf.

c. (:6) Crux of the Controversy

"But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic—"Rise, take up your bed, and go home."

John Nolland: Though **Jesus' authority** has been central to the three linked miracle accounts, the word '*authority*' now occurs for the first time since **7:29; 8:9**. 'The Son of Man' picks up language from **8:20** (see there). Where the emphasis there was on the human marginalisation of this figure of dignity and authority, here his authority as such is in focus. The Son of Man in **Dn. 7:13-14** is given authority (ἐξουσία in the Greek texts as in Matthew); the Daniel links for Matthew's use of Son of Man will become clear as the story progresses.

R. T. France: Jesus is not arguing that it is not God's prerogative to forgive sins, but rather than he himself, uniquely, shares it. The Son of Man, who according to **Dan 7:13-14** will be enthroned in heaven to share God's sovereignty over all peoples, is already during his earthly ministry (hence the addition of "*on earth*," in distinction from his future heavenly sovereignty) authorized to dispense God's forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins as such was not, of course, a part of Daniel's vision of the authority of the Son of Man. Jesus is not expounding **Daniel 7**, but boldly extrapolating from that vision to make a claim for his present status, as he will do again in **12:8**.

d. (:7) Conclusion of the Interaction

"And he rose, and went home."

D. (:8) Response to Manifest Authority of Jesus over Forgiveness of Sins and Disease

"But when the multitudes saw this, they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men."

John Nolland: As with the two preceding miracle accounts, the unit ends with a collective response to what has happened. The interest is sharply focussed on Jesus' **authority to forgive**, not on the physical restoration.

Leon Morris: The effect of the miracle on them was that they were **awe-struck**. They reacted as in the **presence of God**. The healing of a man who had to be carried by four others was not to be taken as commonplace, and the crowds recognized this. They recognized the hand of God in it all, and they glorified him. They saw that the power that had raised the man from his bed was divine, not human. But they also recognized that God had given this authority to men.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When do we allow our fears and panic to interfere with our faith in the Lord? How severe must this storm have been to terrify even seasoned fishermen and experienced boaters?
- 2) Why did Jesus risk the ire of this Gentile region by allowing this large herd of pigs to stampede over the cliff?
- 3) Do we place more importance on physical healing or spiritual healing?
- 4) How are we responding to the authority of Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Excursus: Demonology 101

Popular portrayals of Satan and demons range from the cute and comical to the ghastly and horrifying. You can buy little red demons as stuffed plush toys or pay homage to them in heathen religions. You can reject their existence or run in fear of their influence. But mark my words: Demons are neither funny nor phony. **They are real**, and understanding just what they are and what they aren't—and what they can and can't do—is important for dealing with demons in a way that is biblical.

When it comes to demons, people often go to extremes. Some totally deny their existence. Even those who believe in a personal God and angelic beings will often reject other dimensions of the supernatural world—especially Satan and demons. Others treat the demonic in a lighthearted way, making jokes about spirits of wickedness or playing games with the occult, magic, or sorcery as if they were harmless hobbies. Still others nurture an inordinate preoccupation with the subject of demons, seeing Satan and his minions behind every mishap, every temptation, and every sin or sickness. Each of these distorted perspectives can be damaging to Christian living.

- Denial leads to lack of preparation for demonic attacks.
- Lack of seriousness leads to careless flirtation with things of spiritual wickedness.
- And obsession leads to blaming demons even for our own weaknesses and sins.

The Bible presents a clear picture of demons and what they can and can't do. Demons are invisible, angelic beings in the service of Satan (**Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9**), and they are actively engaged in evil objectives through relentless deception (**Matt. 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thes. 2:8-10; Rev. 16:13-14**). Demons clearly have supernatural powers, but as finite, created beings, they are not all-powerful, all-knowing, or omnipresent. They are limited by the sovereign power of God and are subject to His plan and purpose (**Job 1:12; Dan. 10:12-13; Rev. 12:7-9**). Because they crave worship and adoration, they inhabit temples and associate with idols; involvement with such pagan worship can result in communion with demonic forces (**1 Cor. 10:14, 19-21**). We also know that demons can sometimes inhabit living beings, both animals and humans, taking control of their victims' bodies and wreaking great havoc on their physical, mental, emotional, and especially spiritual well-being (Gen. 3:1; Matt. 8:16, 28).

A short summary of Demonology 101 will help put things in **perspective**: “While God’s good angelic beings are spirits ministering on behalf of His people (**Heb. 1:14**), the wicked spirits attempt to undermine God’s kingdom and the salvation of His people. And although, for His own purposes and according to His own plan, God allows evil spirits to continue to operate in this world, one day He will vanquish them forever, and never again will they inflict evil on His creation (**Rev. 20:10**).”

E. Michael Green: In these three stories, then, Jesus is **laying claim to divine authority**. The claim is explicit. It is superbly documented. It challenges the hearers to the roots of their being.

- Some, like the disciples, are awed (**8:27**).
- Some, like the people of Gadara, do not want anything to do with him (**8:34**).
- Some, like the scribes, are scandalized (**9:3**)—the first indication of the Jewish opposition that will eventually send him to his death.
- Some, like the crowd who had witnessed the healing of the paralytic, praise God (**9:8**).

But none of these is an adequate response. Nothing less than complete and immediate obedience to such a call and allegiance to such a person will suffice. And this, therefore, is the precise moment for the call and response of Matthew to be recorded. There is a deep inner logic in it. ‘If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him,’ said England cricketer and missionary pioneer **C. T. Studd** many centuries later. Matthew had no such clear light as **Studd**, but the three preceding stories demonstrate that Jesus was no mere human. He was bringing in God’s kingdom. **Matthew was challenged to respond.**

Grant Osborne: The Primary Human Dilemma: Not Sickness but Sin

Sin is the origin of all sickness and suffering. Here we are at the heart of the human equation and the basic question in all God-talk: How can a loving, all-powerful God allow the innocent to suffer? In an ultimate sense, there are no innocents. It is clear in Scripture that we are all conceived and born in sin (**Ps 51:5**). We have inherited our sin condition from Adam (**Rom 5:12–21**), and we therefore live in a sin-sick world. In fact, all creation “*groans*” with us, longing to be released from what we have brought upon God’s creation (**Rom 8:19–22**). Thus, when tsunamis, mudslides, avalanches, plane crashes, and the like happen, we cannot help but ask, “*Where is God?*”

Yet we must also realize that we have brought such things on ourselves. Through our trespass sickness and death have entered this world, and we must live with the consequences. It is not God; we have brought it on ourselves! Yet at the same time, the kingdom of God has entered this world through Christ, and the solution is in process of being realized. God is sovereign over these tragedies, and through the Spirit’s intercession “*in all things God works for the good*” of God’s people, even in tragedies (**Rom 8:26–28**).

TEXT: Matthew 9:9-13

TITLE: CALLING ALL SINNERS

BIG IDEA:

THE MISSION OF MAKING DISCIPLES REQUIRES CONSORTING WITH SINNERS WITH HEART OF COMPASSION

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The first discipleship segment centered on the radical demands of Jesus (**8:18–22**). This one centers on the **reality and meaning of that new kingdom presence**. It means a **new social paradigm**, as Jesus has come not for the elite or the superficially pious but for the true sinners, the downtrodden, and the despised (**9:9–13**). The forgiveness of sins in the previous pericope (**9:1–8**) now leads to **Jesus’ ministry to sinners**. Here Jesus goes beyond just reaching out to these despised people. He invites one of them to join his apostolic band!

One of the major themes of Jesus’ ministry is here introduced—his scandalous (to the leaders) **preoccupation with reaching out to sinners**. This leads to a **major confrontation** with the leaders, leading to the key pronouncement of Jesus regarding a major mission principle—namely, that the ministry of the church is not so much to those who believe they are right with God but to those who know they are sinners.

R. T. France: Matthew the tax-collector represents a wider group of “**undesirables**” who are also interested in Jesus and his message and who join him and his disciples at a meal in Matthew’s house. Their interest, and Jesus’ acceptance of them, even to the extent of sharing table-fellowship, give rise to some pungent comments of Jesus in response to Pharisaic criticism (**vv. 11–13**), which sharply characterize the sort of people Jesus is looking for as his followers. Discipleship is not for the comfortable and respectable, but for those whom conventional society would rather keep at arm’s length. The Pharisees can see only their failures, but Jesus sees their need, and the fact that they acknowledge it themselves gives him the opportunity to fulfill his calling to “*save his people from their sins.*” (**1:21**)

Leon Morris: Matthew inserts a little section on **discipleship**, starting with his own call to be a disciple of Jesus. That leads to a meal that he apparently gave for Jesus and his disciples at which a question of the Pharisees leads to an important saying about Jesus’ calling of the disreputable. Discipleship means something very different from anything the Pharisees had imagined.

John MacArthur: The kingdom of God is for

- the spiritually sick who want to be healed,
- the spiritually corrupt who want to be cleansed,
- the spiritually poor who want to be rich,
- the spiritually hungry who want to be fed,
- the spiritually dead who want to be made alive.

It is for ungodly outcasts who long to become God’s own beloved children.

I. (:9) CALL OF MATTHEW – A SINNER PAR EXCELLENCE

A. Authoritative Command to Follow Jesus

“And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’”

D. A. Carson: The locale is probably the outskirts of Capernaum. Matthew was sitting “*at the tax collector’s booth,*” a customs and excise booth at the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas. . . Having demonstrated his authority to forgive sins (**vv.1–8**), Jesus now called to himself a man whose occupation made him a pariah—a sinner and an associate of sinners (cf. **1Ti 1:15**).

S. Lewis Johnson: When we look at men, we look at their position. We see their position, their influence, their personality. We see the way they look. We notice their age, we notice their sex, we notice various other things about people which are, generally speaking, outward things. When the Lord Jesus looks upon a person, he has faculties and capacities that you and I do not have, and he sees beneath the outward to the man. He saw a man named Matthew. He sees the real being within. Something we cannot see. And evidently, by the Holy Spirit’s direction, for he ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, he sensed that this man was a man in whom God had been working, and his heart was ready for a call from him. So he understands it. He sees what is transpiring. He recognizes that the field is white to harvest before he gives his command.

Grant Osborne: In **Mark 2:14** he is named “*Levi son of Alphaeus,*” and it is debated why he is named “*Matthew*” here, a name that in Hebrew means either “*gift of Yahweh*” (*Mattatyâ*) or “*faithful*” (if from *‘emet*). It was common for people to have two or even three names (a Hebrew, Greek, or Latin name or even two Hebrew names, as here) as with Saul/Paul or Simon/Peter. That is undoubtedly the case with Levi/Matthew. Why Matthew uses this name is unknown; perhaps like Peter he later became known more by this name. . .

The Jewish people had an especially onerous situation because they had to pay in effect three taxes:

- Jewish males over the age of twenty had to pay the annual half-shekel (one day’s wage) temple tax;
- non-Roman citizens had to pay the tribute or “direct tax,” including the land tax (for those who owned property) and head tax (one denarius or day’s wage per year);
- and everyone had to pay “indirect taxes,” such as sales tax, customs duty, tolls, etc.

Tax collectors like Matthew sat in booths at the gates of the city to collect tolls and customs duties on goods coming from Herod Philip’s territory into that of Herod Antipas. They were part of organizations to which Rome farmed out (to the highest bidder) the responsibility. For customs duties they did not pay Rome but the municipal government, yet still they could charge extra for “commissions” on the taxes, which became their pay.

Needless to say, **dishonesty was rampant**, and they were among the most **despised workers** in the ancient world. Matthew would have collected taxes under Herod Antipas either at the lake where ships brought trade goods (if they were collecting taxes from fishermen) or more likely along the Via Maris, the major trade route from the north that passed by Capernaum. The taxes would have been paid on trade goods as well as on fish caught by the commercial fishermen in the lake (two different groups of tax collectors).

Donald Hagner: Since Jesus' mission is predicated upon mercy and not merit, no one is despicable enough by the standards of society to be outside his concern and invitation. . .

Everyone whom Jesus called to follow Him for discipleship in the Gospels responded positively to that call (including Judas Iscariot). This is an indication of **irresistible grace**. Jesus' calling was **efficacious**: it was successful in obtaining the desired and intended result—effective. Likewise, all whom He calls to Himself for salvation will be saved (cf. **John 15:16; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4-5**).

William Barclay: The problem for the Roman government was how to devise a system whereby the taxes could be collected as efficiently and as cheaply as possible. They did so by auctioning the right to collect taxes in a certain area. The man who bought that right was responsible to the Roman government for an agreed sum; anything he could raise over and above that, he was allowed to keep as commission.

Bruce Hurt: **Follow Me** is not a suggestion and not even an "invitation" per se (invitations usually don't come as commands!), but is actually a command in the present imperative. **Follow Me** and keep on following Me as a way of life, with the implication of doing so for the rest of your life. Given that our fallen human flesh does not seek after God, one has to propose that in some way the Holy Spirit was actively working in Matthew's heart to give him both the desire and the power to leave everything and follow Jesus.

B. All-In Commitment to Follow Jesus

“And he rose, and followed Him.”

R. T. France: By working for an unpopular government sanctioned by Rome a *telōnēs* incurred the hatred and disdain of Jewish patriots, quite apart from any economic grievances resulting from their reputation for exacting more than was officially necessary. The conventional pairing “*tax-collectors and sinners*” (v. 10; cf. **11:19; Luke 15:1; 18:9–14**) shows how society regarded them; cf. also **5:46; 18:17; 21:31 – 32.12** For Jesus to call such a man to follow him was a daring **breach of etiquette**, a calculated snub to conventional ideas of respectability, which ordinary people no less than Pharisees might be expected to balk at. Fishermen may not have been high in the social scale, but at least they were not automatically morally and religiously suspect; Matthew was. Almost as remarkable as Jesus' decision to call him is Matthew's confident response; he does not seem to have felt uncomfortable at being included in a preacher's entourage, though we are not told what the other disciples thought.

Leon Morris: He concentrates on the one central thing: Jesus called him with the words “*Follow me*”; the present imperative seems to indicate a **continuing following**, and there is no doubt that Matthew is describing a call to discipleship with all that that means. And Matthew obeyed: he got up and followed him. He says no more, but concentrates on that one decisive action. Luke brings out a little of its meaning by telling us that **he left everything (Luke 5:28)**, and this is implied here. Matthew left a whole way of life to follow Jesus. Tax collectors were usually wealthy men, for there was ample scope for profit in their business, so Matthew was probably making a great material sacrifice when he walked out of that office. And the action was final. They would surely never take him back again if he later decided he wanted to return. The fishermen might go back to their fishing, but the tax collector would not be able to return to the levying of customs duties. Anyway, his lucrative post would soon be filled. And if he tried to get

another job, who would want to employ a former tax collector? Matthew's response indicated a **thoroughgoing trust in Jesus**.

II. (:10-13) CONFRONTATION WITH THE PHARISEES OVER CONSORTING WITH SINNERS

A. (:10-11) Helping Sinners Requires Spending Time with Them

1. (:10) Farewell Dinner Hosted by Matthew brought Jesus into Contact with Sinners

“And it happened that as He was reclining at the table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.”

William Hendriksen: This may be considered a kind of **farewell banquet**, arranged by Matthew and at his house, in honor of Jesus, bidding farewell to the old life, ringing in the new, and beckoning all to become spiritual followers of the Lord.

R. T. France: In the ancient world generally a shared meal was a clear sign of **identification**, and for a Jewish religious teacher to share a meal with such people was scandalous, let alone to do so in the “unclean” house of a tax-collector.

John Nolland: “*Sinners*” here should be understood primarily “sociologically as identifying those publicly known to be unsavoury types who lived beyond the edge of respectable society”. But the presence of the term creates a link back to **9:2, 5, 6**.

Daniel Doriani: **Matthew brought his friends to Jesus**. Everyone who knows and loves Jesus wants to bring their friends to him. No one can make any other person a Christian, but we can bring our friends to the Lord. Some people have the gift of evangelism. I once stood in a line with a friend in an empty business establishment. While we finished our simple transaction, this friend struck up a conversation with our clerk. Within five minutes, he had learned the essentials of her beliefs and her spiritual journey and had warmly invited her to our church. Few people have the tender boldness to do such things. But disciples find ways to bring their friends to Christ, his church, and his people.

2. (:11) Phony Pharisees Separated from Sinners by Hiding behind their Self-Righteousness

“And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, ‘Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?’”

Bob Deffinbaugh: God delights in those who seek relationship with Him, not in those who keep their distance and trust in their ritualistic law-keeping. Jesus delights in the presence of these sinners, whose joy is to be in His presence. He does not delight in those who choose to keep their distance, from sinners and the Savior. If these Pharisees would enjoy salvation, they must desire fellowship with the Savior, along with sinners, like themselves.

J. Ligon Duncan: Now the Pharisees are **scandalized** by the fact that the Lord Jesus is spending time with these tax collectors in the house of Matthew. And they bring a charge against Jesus' disciples. They don't go to Jesus, by the way, they go to the disciples. Their aim is to cause the disciples to question Jesus' judgment, and their logic would go something like this: “Well, you disciples who esteem this man so highly. You follow Him as your master, as your rabbi. Why would He be violating the teaching of the first Psalm which says that the man is blessed who

does not sit and stand with sinners? Why, this man is not only standing with sinners, He's reclining with sinners at the dinner table. What kind of man is this man that you're following? Why would you want to follow Him?" Notice that these Pharisees don't go to Christ to rebuke Him, they go to His more immature disciples hoping to cause those disciples to question Jesus' character, to question His judgment, to question the rightness of His actions. They hope to cause His disciples to doubt Him. Perhaps they even hope that His disciples will fall away from Him and return to following in their teaching.

B. (:12-13) Helping Sinners Must be the Goal of Gospel Evangelism

1. (:12) Our Mission Must be Focused on Those Who Admit their Need

"But when He heard this, He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.'"

R. T. France: Jesus' first response is in the form of a **proverb** which uses physical illness as a metaphor for spiritual need. **Plutarch** quotes a similar saying of the Spartan king Pausanias when he was criticized for neglecting his own people: "It is not the custom of doctors to spend time among people who are healthy, but where people are ill." The philosopher **Diogenes** is quoted as saying that as a doctor must go among the sick so a wise man must mix with fools. The point is obvious: any effective "healer" must expect to get his hands dirty.

William Barclay: Jesus' defence was perfectly simple; he merely said that he went where the need was greatest. It would be a poor doctor who visited only houses where people enjoyed good health. The doctor's place is where people are ill; it is a doctor's glory and task to go to those who need healing. . .

This is a highly compressed saying. Jesus was saying: "I did not come to invite people who are so self-satisfied that they are convinced they do not need anyone's help; I came to invite people who are very conscious of their sin and desperately aware of their need for a saviour." He was saying: "It is only those who know how much they need me who can accept my invitation."

2. (:13) Our Motivation Must be to Show Compassion to Sinners

"But go and learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Van Parunak: Like the other seventh century prophets (Isaiah, Micah, Amos), Hosea records the Lord's displeasure with superficial ritual from insincere worshipers. The scribes were more concerned with ceremonial purity and avoiding defilement from an unclean person than they were with the covenant responsibilities of Jews to care for one another.

Grant Osborne: "*Go* [for this circumstantial participle, see on v. 9] *and learn*" was a rabbinic expression for Torah study, and in the context of the Pharisees who prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture, it is a particularly powerful comeback. Since they call Jesus "*teacher*" (9:11), he will give them a "learning" assignment! Jesus takes his text from **Hos 6:6** (quoted again in **12:7**). In Hosea the apostate nation still followed the letter of the law (sacrifice) but had forgotten the heart of the law (mercy and love). Jesus is saying the Pharisees are recapitulating the same terrible error.

Thomas Constable: The last part of **verse 13** defines Jesus' ministry of preparing people for the messianic kingdom. *Compassion*, or *mercy* (NIV, Heb. *hesed*), was what characterized His

mission. He came to call (Gr. *kalesai*) or **invite** people to repentance and salvation. Paul used this Greek word in the sense of efficacious calling, but that is not how Jesus used it. If someone does not see himself or herself as a sinner, that person will have no part in the messianic kingdom, because he or she will not respond to God's call.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus is dealing the Pharisees a double rebuke by treating them first as learners rather than teachers and second as beginners who have yet to learn Scripture correctly. His logic is impeccable; the Pharisees have no reply. “*I have come*” hints at his prior existence in heaven, from which he was sent.

Leon Morris: The attitude of the Pharisees was such that **these people were left far from God**; they made no attempt to bring them near. Since they were ready to let these people die in their sins, their attitude lacked **compassion** and thus failed to comply with the standards taught by the prophet they professed to honor so highly. This failure meant that in fact the Pharisees belonged among the people Hosea condemned — a startling accusation for these so outwardly religious people! Luke tells us that Jesus came to call the sinful people “*to repentance*” (**Luke 5:32**), but Matthew lets this be understood. He leaves his emphasis on the fact that the people Jesus came to call were sinners. Later we find that he came to die for them (**20:28**). Jesus never said that the people in question were anything other than sinful. But that was not the point. The point was that he came to save sinners.

E. Michael Green: He charged the Pharisees with being immaculate in their pattern of sacrifices, but **devoid of mercy**. They despised people like Matthew, and God will not tolerate it. The divine mercy welcomes sinners like Matthew when they repent and follow Jesus. But the Pharisees choose to exclude themselves from the party. Here we see among the Pharisees a tendency, which will reappear more strongly as the story unfolds, to judge Jesus rather than revel in the mercy he offers, and to pride themselves on their own fancied goodness instead of recognizing his. The Pharisees could not tolerate the generosity of God to the paralysed man, to Matthew or to his crooked friends. Those who think they are healthy do not need a doctor: ironic words. There are, of course, no ‘healthy’ under God’s expert examination, but there are lots of people who think they are. Such people do not see their need of a doctor, although they harbour germs of the same fatal disease of sin which they condemn in its cruder forms in others. There is no room for the Pharisee spirit in the kingdom. The word means ‘*separated ones*’, proud that they stand out from the crowd and are good people. Such an attitude stinks in God’s nostrils. The kingdom is a one-class society—for sinners only.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we see instant obedience when Jesus calls one of His disciples (like Matthew here) compared to some type of confrontation over the cost of discipleship when someone tries to volunteer?
- 2) How much time do we spend interacting with the unsaved in social settings?
- 3) Is it futile to present the gospel to those who are confirmed in their own self-righteousness? (Does this fall into the category of casting pearls before swine?)

4) Where have we prioritized religious activities over showing compassion and mercy to those who are vulnerable and in need?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: Edersheim states that there were two categories of **publicani**. The first, whom the Jews called **gabbai**, collected general taxes, which included those on land and other property, those on income, and those referred to as poll, or registration, taxes. The basic land tax (the amount paid to Rome) was a tenth of one's grain and a fifth of one's fruit and wine. Income tax amounted to one percent of one's earnings, and the amount of the poll tax varied. The second type of tax collector was called a **mokhes**, who collected a wide variety of use taxes—taxes similar to our import duties, tollway fees, boat docking fees, business license fees, and the like. The mokhes had almost unlimited latitude in their taxing powers and could attach a tax to virtually any article or activity. They could, for instance, levy a tax on a person's boat, on the fish he caught with it, and on the dock where he unloaded it. They could tax a traveler's donkey, his slaves and servants, and his goods. They had authority to open private letters to see if a taxable business of some sort might be related to the correspondence. There were two kinds of mokhes. One kind, called the great mokhes, hired other men to collect taxes for them and, by virtue of partial anonymity, protected at least some of their reputation among their fellow countrymen. The other kind, called small mokhes, did their own assessing and collecting and therefore were in constant contact with members of the community as well as with all travelers who passed their way. The gabbai were despised, the great mokhes were more despised, and the small mokhes were despised most. Matthew was obviously a **small mokhes**, because he himself was sitting in the tax office as Jesus passed through the outskirts of Capernaum.

Charles Swindoll: These self-righteous, ever-judging, grace-killing elitists couldn't see the redemption of lives that was taking place before their very eyes. Instead, they complained to the disciples of Jesus, "*Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?*" (**Matt. 9:11**). Driven by jealousy over Jesus' sudden popularity and their loss of influence among the masses, they were probably trying to plant little seeds of doubt and discord among the disciples. They probably hoped that Jesus' followers would be ashamed of His new associations with the "scum of Capernaum" and would turn their backs on Him.

But Jesus was again one step ahead of them. He made three stinging points, aimed directly at the faultfinding Pharisees. First, He pointed out that **physicians deal with people who are sick, not with the healthy (9:12)**. How could tax collectors and sinners ever get the spiritual therapy they needed if the One with the cure avoided them? It didn't take an expert in the Law to read between the lines: Jesus was calling Himself the true Physician, who cared enough to reach out to the sick with a cure —while the selfish and self-righteous Pharisees were avoiding the ones who most needed spiritual help!

Second, Jesus argued that, in terms of **spiritual priorities**, God demanded compassion shown through grace, mercy, and love far more than sacrifices —especially "*sacrifices*" that were man-made like the (flaunted) public purity of the Pharisees. Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees, who were the renowned teachers of the Law, by quoting **Hosea 6:6** and sending them away to do their homework —"*Go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice'*"

(**Matt. 9:13**). There, in front of everybody, Jesus schooled them in Bible 101! How humiliating and offensive it would have been to the Pharisees to be given homework assignments from Jesus—who seemed to be just a common carpenter.

Finally, Jesus showed that His mission stands in contrast to the actions of the Pharisees. Rather than seeking to cozy up with the so-called righteous as a member of the “Holy Club,” **Jesus’ mission is to reach out to sinners and call them to repentance**. Jesus’ heart went out to the outcasts—those who lived in the muck and mire of shame and disgrace. He stepped into their lives to extend forgiveness and grace so that they could start over on a new path of faith and righteousness.

William Barclay: Those scribes and Pharisees had a view of religion which is by no means dead.

(1) They were more concerned with the preservation of their own holiness than with the helping of another’s sin. They were like doctors who refused to visit the sick in case they themselves became infected. They shrank away in fastidious disgust from sinners; they did not want anything to do with people like that. Essentially, their religion was selfish; they were much more concerned to save their own souls than to save the souls of others. And they had forgotten that that was the surest way to lose their own souls.

(2) They were more concerned with criticism than with encouragement. They were far more concerned to point out the faults of other people than to help them conquer these faults. When doctors see some particularly unpleasant disease, which would turn the stomach of anyone else to look at, they are not filled with disgust; they are filled with the desire to help. Our first instinct should never be to condemn sinners; our first instinct should be to help them.

(3) They practised a goodness which issued in condemnation rather than in forgiveness and in sympathy. They would rather leave people in the gutter than give them a hand to get out of it. They were like doctors who were very much concerned to diagnose disease but not in the least concerned to help cure it.

(4) They practised a religion which consisted in outward orthodoxy rather than in practical help. Jesus loved that saying from **Hosea 6:6** which said that God desired mercy and not sacrifice, for he quoted it more than once (cf. **Matthew 12:7**). We may diligently go through all the motions of orthodox piety, but if our hands are never stretched out to help those in need, we are not really religious people.

Matthew McCraw: Health and Sickness, Righteousness and Sin

God had been saying for centuries that He wanted **true devotion**, not fake formalities. Jesus is calling the Pharisees out.

He’s saying that they think that they have it all figured out when it comes to worshipping God, but they are really just **pretending**.

Jesus is following up on this theme, which we have come to time and time again: God desires faithful followers, not fakers.

Jesus put it very simply in **verse 12**: *“It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”* Again in **verse 13**, He says, *“I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they had it all wrong.

They thought they were well. They thought they were righteous. Jesus is basically saying, “I didn’t come for people like you who think they have it all figured out and everything is good. I came for those who know that they are messed up and know that they need help. I came for the sick. I came for sinners.”

Think about it: if you’re not sick, you don’t need a healer. If you’re already righteous, you don’t need to be made righteous.

Jesus is calling sinners to Himself. Matthew understood this. He followed Jesus and he took his friends to Jesus.

Are you faithfully following Jesus? Are you doing so with the knowledge that you were a sinner who desperately needed to be healed? Are you doing so realizing that you must take other sinners to Him as well?

<https://fcbartow.org/sermons/health-and-sickness-righteousness-and-sin-matthew-99-13/>

Ray Fowler: Calling Sinners

Today’s passage has to do with sin and associations and relationships. There’s a right way to view sin and sinners. And there’s a wrong way.

I. Jesus calls sinners (9)

A. Jesus calls you as you are

First of all, Jesus calls you as you are. Now Matthew was an unlikely person for Jesus to call because he was a tax collector. Matthew most likely collected taxes on goods that people were bringing into town. That’s why he was sitting at the tax collector’s booth. Think toll booth nowadays, except there were no set fees, which meant Matthew could charge a little extra here and there and skim a nice profit for himself.

So, Matthew was a Jew working for the Romans against his own people and likely stealing from his own people to line his own pockets. Doesn’t sound like the kind of person you want on your team. And yet Jesus still called him.

And where was Matthew when Jesus called him? Sitting right there at the tax collector’s booth! Matthew didn’t need to leave the tax collector’s booth before Jesus called him. Jesus calls him while he is still sitting there. Jesus doesn’t wait for Matthew to change first. He calls him as he is, while he is still sitting at the tax collector’s booth.

Now here’s the important part for us. Jesus does the same thing for you and me. He doesn’t wait for you to clean up your act or get your life together first. He calls you as you are.

B. Jesus calls you to follow him

Jesus calls you as you are, but he doesn’t leave you as you are. He doesn’t call you to stay where you are. He calls you while you are still in your sin, but he also calls you out of your sin. He calls you to follow him. He calls you to be his disciple, to walk as he walked, and to live as he lived. As we read in **Ephesians 4**: “*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of*

your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

II. Jesus associated with sinners (10-11)

It’s important to understand what Matthew means by the word ‘sinners’ here. He’s not saying that some people are sinners and some people are not. We’re all sinners. But the general populace used this word for those people who participated in what they felt were the very worst of sins – the tax collectors and drunkards and prostitutes in town. They called them ‘sinners,’ because they felt that these particular sins were so much worse than their own sins.

A. Don’t avoid those who need Christ

B. Be prepared to receive criticism

You see, the Pharisees did avoid sinners. In fact, one of their sayings was this: “Keep far from an evil neighbor and do not associate with the wicked.” (Aboth 1:7) That was one of the principles they lived by. The Pharisees did not associate with the wicked. They stayed far away from the tax collectors, the drunkards and the prostitutes. They did not want to be “contaminated” by those whom they deemed sinners, and so they avoided them like the plague.

III. Jesus came to help sinners (12-13)

A. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick

B. God desires mercy, not sacrifice

Now the reason the Pharisees didn’t get it is because their attitude was wrong. So, the second thing Jesus tells them is this: “*But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” (Matthew 9:13)* Jesus is quoting from **Hosea 6:6**. Why does he choose this particular quote? Because we cannot help people if we do not have mercy on them. Our attitude towards sinners should not be acceptance or avoidance but rather **mercy**. As followers of Jesus we neither accept the sin nor avoid the sinner. Rather in mercy we seek to lead them to Christ who can help them.

C. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners

Think about it. The only qualification you need for Jesus to call you is that you are a sinner. You know what that means? We all qualify! We all qualify, because we are all sinners. And we’re all really bad sinners, too. We should all be able to echo what Paul said to Timothy in **1 Timothy 1:15**: “*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.*” (**1 Timothy 1:15**) I’m the worst sinner I know. How about you?

<https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/calling-sinners/>

TEXT: Matthew 9:14-17

TITLE: THE QUESTION OF FASTING CONTRASTS THE OLD WITH THE NEW

BIG IDEA:

JESUS BRINGS THE INWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE MESSIANIC AGE THAT CANNOT MESH WITH FORMER EXTERNAL SYSTEMS OF RELIGIOUS RITUAL

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Gardner: The point that both metaphors make is that the new thing God is doing through Jesus cannot simply be tacked onto or poured into existing structures. On the contrary, the reign of God present in Jesus' ministry calls for a radical transformation of life and worship. For the reader, the sayings in **verses 16-17** raise a critical question about the direction the story is going: Can Israel itself be sufficiently transformed to receive what God is doing through Jesus? Or do fresh wineskins hint at the formation of a new community of God's people? Matthew's answer to that question will come in **chapter 16**.

Grant Osborne: Jesus continues to **challenge the old traditions**. He not only freely associates with sinners, but also he and his disciples do not even observe a key religious practice like fasting (see on **6:16-18**). The reason is that Christ is bringing with him a **new era**, a kingdom reality that cannot be simply immersed into the old ways of Judaism. . . In **5:17-20** Matthew stresses Jesus' **continuity** with the past; here he expresses the **discontinuity**. . .

Jesus has not come to amalgamate Judaism with Christianity. **New forms are needed**. The OT has not been annulled but fulfilled, and this requires the Torah of the Messiah, a new set of ethical norms and gospel practices established by Jesus. The early Palestinian church did not realize the fullness of what Jesus meant and considered themselves the new messianic sect of Judaism. It was not until the Gentile movement had begun that they gradually understood the enormity of this truth.

Donald Hagner: It is becoming clear in the progress of the narrative that despite the emphasis found in **Matt 5:17-20**, Jesus possesses a rather **different concept of righteousness than do the Pharisees**. He associates with tax collectors and sinners, even banqueting together with them, and now as the disciples of John point out, he and his disciples do not fast. **What in fact is the position of Jesus concerning the accepted standards of righteousness?** In this pericope that subject is addressed directly, and a very important summary of the situation is given by Jesus.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr.: Jesus, however, was **not out to patch up an old system**, like sewing a new unshrunk cloth on an old garment, which would then tear, or pouring new wine into old wineskins which would then burst. His purpose was to bring in something **new**. He had come to lead a group out of Judaism into the kingdom based on Him and His righteousness. **True righteousness is not built on the Law or on Pharisaic traditions.**

I. (:14) RAISING THE QUESTION OF FASTING? WHAT HAS CHANGED?

“Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying,

‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’”

Robert Gundry: Appropriately, a question about **fasting** follows a question about **eating (9:10–13)**.

John MacArthur: The three major expressions of the Judaistic traditions of that time were fasting, alms giving, and prayers. And they had their little routine during the day, when they said prayers at so many intervals, and they would stand on the corner, in the middle of the street, and do it. And they had their little alms giving routines. And they also had their routine fasts. And they would look like they were fasting, with a drawn face, and they would decorate themselves so everyone would know they were fasting.

Well, these external, outward rituals were the substance of their religion. And what they're really saying is, "How come You don't do what we do? How come Your approach is so different?" That's really a very important question. You see, they don't see religion as a matter of humility, sinfulness, repentance. They see religion as a matter of ceremony, as a matter of ritual. . .

You know what the Lord is saying? Listen to this; if you go through any religious exercise apart from an honest attitude in the heart, it is **ritual** and nothing more. If you fast just to fast, pray just to pray, go to church just to go to church, read the Bible just to read the Bible, sing a song just to sing a song, you've missed it.

He's saying, "Look, we're saying we have an internal, vital, real relationship with the living God, and what we do is a result of what's happening in that relationship. And right now," He says, "the Bridegroom is here, and the wedding is going on. You don't cry at a wedding; you cry at a funeral. You're happy at a wedding. I'm here with them. **This is not a time for mourning.**"

Bruce Hurt: All three synoptic accounts include the fact that **the Pharisees were fasting**, which is very important in interpreting this section. As we have seen, the **Pharisees** were practicing a **religion of ritual**, a religion of externals, a religion based on law, a religion of works aimed at promoting self-righteousness, all of which was in diametric contrast to the "religion" which Jesus brought, which was one of relationship (with God), of internals (heart change), of grace (not law), and of faith in Jesus (not works) trusting in imputation of His righteousness. The Pharisees ceremonial practice was "bad news," while Jesus had come to introduce a "religion" of "good news." One is reminded of the statement in **Hebrews 8:13** "*When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*" The ritualistic practices of the Pharisees were about to disappear!

Charles Swindoll: We often get the impression that when Jesus began His ministry and John was imprisoned by Herod, all of John's disciples simply transferred allegiance to the One to whom John had been pointing—the Lamb of God. Not so. For whatever reason, some disciples were still loyal to John, unwilling or unready to turn to Jesus. In fact, such a group seems to have endured even into the apostolic church (**Acts 18:24 – 19:7**).

Stan Toussaint: John belonged to the old age; Jesus was the One who was bringing a new dispensation. They should therefore leave the forerunner and join themselves to the King. Unless they did, they could not partake of any new dispensation which Jesus might bring.

Richard Gardner: The question they raise is not who eats with Jesus, but the more fundamental question of why Jesus and his companions are **more inclined to feast than to fast!** In this

respect, Jesus' practice differed both from that of the Pharisees (who fasted twice a week) and from the ascetic lifestyle of John and his followers (cf. **11:16-19**).

Craig Blomberg: Neither the Pharisees nor John's disciples were wrong in fasting as a prelude to the reception of spiritual blessings, but now those blessings are present. Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom stimulates celebration and rejoicing, as at wedding festivities.

II. (:15-17) RESPONDING TO THE QUESTION OF FASTING – EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED! 3 ILLUSTRATIONS HIGHLIGHTING THE RADICAL TRANSFORMATION USHERED IN BY JESUS

A. (:15) Primary Illustration – Bridegroom Metaphor – It's All About Jesus

1. Presence of Jesus Now Makes This a Time for Joy, Not Mourning

“And Jesus said to them, ‘The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?’”

William Barclay: It tells us that to be with Jesus is a **thing of joy**; it tells us that in the presence of Jesus there is a sheer, thrilling effervescence of life; it tells us that a gloom-encompassed Christianity is an impossibility. Those who walk with Christ walk in radiance of joy.

D. A. Carson: In exonerating his disciples' eating, Jesus used **messianic-eschatological terms**. In the OT, the bridegroom metaphor was repeatedly applied to God (**Isa 54:5–6; 62:4–5; Hos 2:16–20**); and Jews sometimes used it of marriage in connection with Messiah's coming or with the messianic banquet (cf. Str-B, 1:500–518; in the NT, cf. **Mt 22:2; 25:1; 2Co 11:2; Eph 5:23–32; Rev 19:7, 9; 21:2**). Thus Jesus' answer was implicitly **Christological**: he himself is the messianic bridegroom, and **the messianic age has dawned**.

Donald Hagner: In his answer Jesus turns to the idea of **messianic jubilation** expressed specifically in the imagery of the **bridegroom and his attendants**. The announcement of the presence of the messianic kingdom is similar to being present at a great wedding banquet (cf. **Feuillet**). This imagery is elsewhere particularly appealing to Matthew (cf. **22:1–14; 25:1–13**). The phrase οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος, “*the sons of the bridal chamber*,” means those in relation to, belonging to (cf. BAGD, 834, s.v. υἱός 1δ; 545), or hence, attending to, the bridegroom (cf. **8:12**, “*sons of the kingdom*”). Whereas the bridegroom image in the OT refers to God (cf. **Isa 62:4–5; “husband”**: **Isa 54:5–6; Hos 2:16–20**), in the NT it is applied to Christ (**2 Cor 11:2**; cf. **Eph 5:22–27; Rev 19:7**).

2. Crucifixion of Jesus Will Make Fasting Appropriate for a Season

“But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

R. T. France: This is the first hint that Jesus will be “*taken away*” (the verb suggests a violent and unwelcome removal, with a possible echo of **Isa 53:8**), a theme which will become dominant after **16:21**. No details are yet given, but in a response to John's disciples it would naturally be taken as linking his fate with that of John, already imprisoned for his opposition to the authorities (**4:12; 11:2**) and soon to be unjustly executed (**14:1–12**); in **17:12–13** Jesus will explicitly say that he is to be executed “*by them*” as John has been. The agents and the circumstances will in fact be different, but the principle of official suppression is the same.

B. (:16-17) Two Supporting Illustrations – Transition from Old to New Covenant Times

R. T. France: Two little parables pick up the theme of a new and joyful pattern of religion which is incompatible with the old traditions represented by the fasting régimes of the Pharisees and the followers of John.

Grant Osborne: The next two analogies (**Luke 5:36** calls them “**parables**”) expand on Jesus’ point regarding the appearance of the new covenant reality and its incompatibility with the old covenant. Just as the joy of the new covenant cannot cohere with the mourning of the old ways, so the new kingdom as a whole cannot be forced into the old one, lest both be destroyed. This first analogy is clear. The old garment has long ago shrunk, but the new cloth has not. To sew a new piece of cloth onto an old robe to repair it is foolish, for as soon as the new patch is washed it too will shrink, pulling the threads from the old robe and ripping it anew.

John Nolland: Once again the image is clearer than the application, but the idea commends itself that what is being asserted is that **the new does not need to be constrained by the old**, and that only in this way can the new be welcomed and the abiding value of the old be preserved.

Donald Hagner: If fasting has lost its fixed place in the fabric of righteousness because of a new reality now present in and through the ministry of Jesus, then a question mark can be raised over the whole body of inherited practice, and even that stipulated in Torah. **How, in fact, is the newness represented by the presence and message of Jesus to be combined with previous conventional modes of conduct?** And Jesus replies with two analogies (Luke alone introduces them with the word παραβολή, “*parable*” [5:36]) that illustrate vividly that **the new cannot simply be superimposed upon or contained within the framework of the old.**

1. (:16) Not Appropriate to Mesh New Patch with Old Garment

*“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment;
for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.”*

John MacArthur: Now, in those days, the garments were cotton or wool, and both would shrink. If you had an old robe, and you got a big hole in it – right? – and you take a piece of brand new cloth, stick it in that hole and stitch it all around, then as soon as you washed that garment, that new cloth shrinks, and the old fibers are going to be ripped by the strength of the new cloth, and all you’re going to get is a bigger hole. You keep doing it, and it just gets bigger and bigger. You can’t put a new one in an old robe. Anybody who knows knows that if you’re going to patch an old robe, you’ve got to use an old piece of material. What Jesus is saying is this, “There is no way that what I teach can fit into your system. No way. There is no way that the message that I am giving of an internal holiness, of a real repentance, of a hard attitude can ever fit in the ritualistic system that you hold. No way. Not only won’t it connect, but secondly, **your system can’t contain it.**” . . .

that is not to say that the Old Testament is disconnected. Oh, no. He came to fulfill the Old Testament. Their religion was not the religion of the Old Testament. It was a **rabbinic tradition** that denied the very truth of the Old Testament as He made abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

So, Jesus said, “**Look, your system says you’re righteous. Mine says you’re vile and sinful. No way to match those two together. If you hang onto yours, that’s it.**”

I really believe, people, that when someone comes to Christ, they have to say goodbye to a ritual system. Now, there are people in ritualistic systems, and they'll confess Christ. I think if it's genuine, eventually they're going to come out of that ritualistic system to the freedom of Christ, to the expression of an inward relationship.

2. (:17) Not Appropriate to Pour New Wine into Old Wineskins

“Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

D. A. Carson: Skin bottles for carrying various fluids were made by killing the chosen animal, cutting off its head and feet, skinning the carcass, and sewing up the skin, fur side out, to seal off all orifices but one (usually the neck). The skin was tanned with special care to minimize disagreeable taste. In time, the skin became hard and brittle. If new wine, still fermenting, were put into such an old skin, the buildup of fermenting gases would split the brittle container and ruin both bottle and wine. New wine was placed only in new wineskins still pliable and elastic enough to accommodate the pressure.

Donald Hagner: It is not unwarranted allegorizing to draw out the following symbolism, which is inherent in the passage. The new wine is the **newness of the gospel** (cf. John 2:1–11), personified in Jesus; the old wine skins are the established patterns of conduct regarded as exemplifying the righteousness of the Torah. The former is too dynamic to be contained by the traditional framework of obedience. The proposal to combine the two may well have been a temptation to Matthew's Jewish-Christian readers. But the new reality of the gospel requires instead *“new skins,”* i.e., **new patterns of conduct based on the ethical teaching of Jesus as the true exposition of the meaning and intent of the Torah.** Here Matthew's special interests and viewpoint (and conservatism too, compared to Mark) become obvious: *“both are preserved,”* that is, **the new wine of the reality of the kingdom and the new skins (not the old skins!) of faithful obedience to the law, but as expounded by Jesus.** For Matthew, gospel and law (not Christianity and Judaism; contra **Fenton, A. Kee**) are held together in the Church, but the standard of interpretation of and obedience to the latter is always solely the **authoritative teaching of Jesus.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is fasting a spiritual discipline that you practice? Why or why not?
- 2) Why weren't these disciples of John the Baptist on the same page as the disciples of Jesus?
- 3) How can religious people get bogged down in their traditions and external religious rites?
- 4) Why can't people just append Jesus to their former life without any type of radical transformation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

E. Michael Green: But Jesus is clear that his coming marks a discontinuity with all that. The old skins cannot contain the new wine he is bringing. Old regulations about ceremonial defilement cannot stand before the joy of forgiveness, fellowship, excitement and new direction which the coming of the kingdom inaugurates. How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while the bridegroom is with them? At a Jewish wedding, open house was maintained for a week. It was a time of great rejoicing and hospitality, dancing and fun, such as might rarely come into the lives of poor people. And it was all paid for by the bridegroom's family. It was free to all comers. What a description of the kingdom Jesus came to usher in! And there may be the hint that Jesus plays the bridegroom role that was ascribed to God in the Old Testament. Jesus brings joy. But there is clear prediction of sorrow too, as he looks ahead to his death: *'then they will fast'* (15). **Joy and sorrow** are inextricably wound together in the lives of disciples as they were in the life of the Master.

One thing is clear as the claims of Jesus are brought before us: **here is something new**. It simply is not tolerable to make Jesus a patch in the garment of Judaism to cover a threadbare area. No, for as soon as that garment goes to the wash the new piece will shrink, and the tear will get worse. It is the same with new wine and new wineskins. Old wineskins are shrivelled hard, and cannot cope with effervescent new wine. **New wineskins, new garments are needed.**

Walter Wilson: By this point, it is apparent that Jesus is not only responding to the question posed in 9:14 but also looking back at the events of 9:1–14 as a whole, asserting the **incompatibility of the “old”** (represented by the scribes, the Pharisees, and John) **with the “new”** (represented by the Messiah and his followers). In order to appreciate the implications of this incompatibility, it is necessary to recognize the **level of violence** implicit in the symbolism to which Jesus resorts in his response. To begin with, the bridegroom of 9:15 is not simply absent. Rather, he is *“taken away”* (ἀπαρθῆ ἀπό) from his guests, a possible allusion to **Isa 53:8**: *“For his life is taken away (αἴρεται ἀπό) from the earth”* (cf. **Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:10; Prov 24:11; Jer 11:19**). The verbal correlation between 9:15 and 9:16 provides additional insight into how Matthew may have understood the meaning of Jesus's death:

the bridegroom is taken away from [ἀπαρθῆ ἀπ'] them....

for the patch pulls away from [αἴρει ... ἀπό] the cloak.

The old order will *“take away”* Jesus because what he represents *“takes away”* from its very fabric (cf. **21:43**). Jesus goes on in **9:16** to describe how this pulling away creates in the garment a *“tear”* (σχίσμα), a word that, as **Marcus** observes, is used elsewhere in the New Testament of *“schisms”* between different groups. Given the allusion in **9:15b** to Jesus's death, a more compelling analogy comes from an event with which his death coincides: *“Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. And then the veil of the temple was torn [ἐσχίσθη] in two from top to bottom”* (**27:50–51**). The tearing of the old garment in **9:16** foreshadows the tearing of the temple's veil in **27:51**, the implicit violence in both cases being linked to the violent end of Jesus himself. Viewed from this perspective, the veil can be seen as a symbol of the *“old”* order that opposes Jesus, its rending a portent of its demise (cf. **24:2; 27:40**).

The **symbolism of violence** extends into the final verse of the pericope (9:17). The reference to wine in the context of a meal scene would have been natural enough, especially insofar as it was traditionally included among the items served at the messianic banquet. In 9:17b, however, the reference to wine is employed to depict not a scene of fulfillment but a **scene of destruction**.

the wine will burst the wineskins and the wine is destroyed [ἀπόλλυται] and the wineskins as well. (Mark 2:22)

the wineskins burst and the wine pours out [ἐκχεῖται] and the wineskins are destroyed [ἀπόλλυνται]. (Matt 9:17)

The verb ἀπόλλυμι is found scattered throughout the First Gospel to describe both efforts to “destroy” Jesus (2:13; 12:14; 27:20) and the fate awaiting those who murder the righteous (21:41; 22:7). The imagery of wine being “poured out,” meanwhile, which Matthew has added to the pericope (cf. Mark 2:22), recalls another meal scene, one in which Jesus uses the imagery of wine being poured out to interpret the **eschatological significance of his death**: “*this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out [ἐκχυννόμενον] for many for forgiveness of sins*” (26:28). Within the symbolic world of the gospel, the imagery of wine being poured out signifies the blood that will be poured out of Jesus’s body at his death, **the blood of a sacrifice that inaugurates a new covenant and a new era, one defined by the forgiveness of sins**. The relevance of this signification for the interpretation of 9:17 is increased by the fact that Jesus has just alluded to his death (9:15b), employed imagery suggesting the violence attending that death (9:16), and utters these words in the presence of “many” sinners (9:10). The imagery of 9:15b–17 serves as a reminder that the grace and redemption conveyed by Jesus’s act of dining with such people will be fully realized “for many” (26:28) only through his death.

Leon Morris: The two illustrations effectively make the point that **Jesus was not simply bringing in a revised and updated Judaism**, or even founding a new sect within Judaism. What he was teaching and doing were such that they could not be contained within the accepted Jewish system; to attempt to confine his followers within the limits of the old religion would be to invite disaster. This did not mean that he was rejecting the Old Testament; he came to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to reject them (5:17). What he repudiated was not Scripture, but the current religious practices allegedly based on Scripture. He did not even repudiate those practices all at once and call on his followers to forsake Judaism. But **he did repudiate the suggestion that they should remain confined within the accepted understanding of the old system**. His new approach could not be fitted into those old forms. His followers must find **new forms** or there would be religious disaster. Much the same point is, of course, made in the Fourth Gospel with its account of the changing of the water of Jewish purification into wine (**John 2**).

John Piper: **When the Bridegroom is Taken Away, They Will Fast – with New Wineskins**
John Calvin, in the 16th century, said,

Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous; while, on the other hand where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him. (*Institutes*, IV.12, 14, 15)

Martin Luther wrote,

Of fasting I say this: It is right to fast frequently in order to subdue and control the body. For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying, or studying, or for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God's Word cannot remain. But one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as by a good work. . .

But then Jesus said, "*But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*" This is the key sentence: "*Then they will fast.*" When is he referring to?

Some have suggested he was referring just to the several days between his death and resurrection. They would fast just for those days. But that is very unlikely. For several reasons. One is that the early church fasted after the resurrection, as we have seen in **Acts 13:1–3** (cf. **Acts 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27**). The other is that in **Matthew 25:1–13** Jesus pictures his second coming as the arrival of the bridegroom. In other words, the Bridegroom is taken away until the second coming of Christ. . .

The patch of unshrunk cloth and the new wine represent the **new reality** that has come with Jesus—**the kingdom of God is here**. The Bridegroom has come. **The Messiah is in our midst**. And that is not merely temporary. He is not merely here and then gone. The kingdom of God did not come in Jesus and then just vanish out of the world.

Jesus died for our sins once for all. He rose from the dead once for all. The Spirit was sent into the world as the real presence of Jesus among us. The kingdom is the reigning power of Christ in the world subduing hearts to the king and creating a people who believe him and serve him. The Spirit of the Bridegroom is gathering and purifying a bride for Christ. This is the new wine. . .

The new wine demands new fasting. Years ago I wrote in the margin of my Greek Testament beside this text, "The new fasting is based on the mystery that the Bridegroom *has* come, not just *will* come. The new wine of his presence calls for new fasting."

In other words the yearning and longing and ache of the old fasting was not based on the glorious truth that the Messiah had come. The mourning over sin and the yearning in danger was not based on the great finished work of the Redeemer and the great revelation of himself and his grace in history. But now the Bridegroom has come. In coming he struck the decisive blow against sin and against Satan and against death.

The great, central, decisive act of salvation for us today is past, not future. And on the basis of that past work of the Bridegroom, nothing can ever be the same again. The wine is new. The blood is shed. The Lamb is slain. The punishment of our sins is executed. Death is defeated. The Bridegroom is risen. The Spirit is sent. The wine is new. And the old fasting mindset is simply not adequate. . .

The newness of our fasting is this: its intensity comes not because we have never tasted the wine of Christ's presence, but because we have tasted it so wonderfully by his Spirit and cannot now be satisfied until the consummation of joy arrives. We must have all he promised. And as much now as possible.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/when-the-bridegroom-is-taken-away-they-will-fast-with-new-wineskins>

J. Ligon Duncan: You see, Jesus gives a **subtle rebuke to John's disciples**. John was a rigorous man. We know that he took Nazarite vows. He did not drink, he abstained from certain types of foods, he lived in the wilderness a very aesthetic kind of life, and he demanded a very rigorous spirituality of his disciples. But the Lord Jesus reminds John's disciples that there is no command for that in the Old Testament. You know the only fast commanded in the Old Testament is connected with the day of atonement in the Book of Leviticus. It's the only fast commanded. There is much fasting described in the Old Testament, but it was **left up to the liberty of the believer's conscience as to when and how to do it**. And so the Lord Jesus reminds John's disciples that though it may be a good idea to fast two days a week, I'm not going to bind my young disciples consciences to what you think is helpful. You see, **we must not impose our way of doing things on others when we have no biblical warrant**. No matter how useful and helpful a particular practice may be to us, if we have no biblical warrant where the bible is silent, we must not impose our conscience, and that's precisely what John's disciples were doing. **They were attempting to impose John's practices on Jesus' disciples**. And Jesus reminds them that you can't do that. The new wine that He is bringing, the new cloth and garment that He is bringing **cannot be constrained by the old man-made regulations and rituals, certainly of the Pharisees but not even John's disciples**. No man-made regulations can foster the spirituality that will be fostered by the work of the Holy Spirit in the message that the Lord Jesus is bringing.

David Thompson: When Jesus was here on earth, He was God and He came to save sinners. He came to transform lives. Of course the problem was that most of Israel refused to admit that they were sinners who needed saving. As soon as He started saving some sinners, He ran smack dab into a self-righteous religious world of Phariseeism with all of its legalistic laws and rituals. Jesus did not fit the system. He came to present real righteousness found in a relationship with Him and that rubbed the religious crowd the wrong way.

JESUS CHRIST DEMONSTRATES THAT THE REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS NOT DETERMINED BY RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OR JUDAISTIC LEGALISM; IT IS DETERMINED BY A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus Christ was not interested in appeasing the self-righteous religious crowd. . .

John's disciples question Christ's association to fasting. **9:14-17**

Fasting was a rigid, legalistic, religious feature of Judaism.

(Statement #1) - Fasting is not necessary when I am here in person on earth. 9:15

Jesus is the bridegroom come to Israel. Israel does not need to fast while He is on the scene. This is God in person. The point of fasting is to draw near to God. God is in the flesh.

(Statement #2) - I did not come to patch up an old religious legalistic system. 9:16

The old garment is law, Judaism and legal righteousness. Jesus Christ came to bring new clothing and a new system of grace, not to patch up the old stuff. He came to bring a new dispensation, a better righteousness that could take away sin. He did not come to patch up old religion.

(Statement #3) - I came to present a new system of grace . 9:17

The new wine is the Gospel of grace. The old skins include the Law and the Levitical institutions. A new system belongs in new skins. You do not put a new system of grace into an old skin of legalism.

Try to mix grace with law, grace with legalism and grace with Judaism and you ruin grace.

If a person wants a real relationship with God, it is found in a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

Stanley P. Saunders: In Jesus' day (and in many parts of the world today), people reckoned time not as an abstract, linear, measurable commodity, as North Americans do, but in terms of "**what kind of time**" (Gk: *kairos*) it was and what actions, behaviors, experiences, and relationships were expected or appropriate. The *kairos* when God's reign draws near is associated with perspectives and actions such as repentance. Jesus does not disagree with John or John's disciples about what kind of time it is, but he offers two analogies that suggest he understands the practical implications of the "time" differently than they do. First, **mourning in the presence of the bridegroom would be inexplicable**, a denial of the kind of time it is and the behavior appropriate to it. Fasting is appropriate when the bridegroom is gone. This image lends itself nicely to allegorization: Jesus is the bridegroom, his ministry is a time of celebration, but he will be "*taken away*" (crucified). The bridegroom image also foreshadows Jesus' parables about the "*wedding banquet*" (cf. **22:1–14**) and the age of watchfulness just before the bridegroom comes (**25:1–13**). But it is not necessary to allegorize the image for it to work. The analogy simply affirms that fasting is not appropriate for the *kairos* in which Jesus and his disciples now minister. God's reign is not only near, as it was during John's ministry, but already present in Jesus as light for those in darkness (cf. **4:12–25**). The greatest party ever has begun and everybody's invited—but no mourning or fasting allowed.

Two more sayings (**9:16–17**) affirm Jesus' line of reasoning. Sowing an unshrunk patch on an old garment would be silly, creating a worse tear when the patch shrinks. Likewise, putting new wine in old skins results in the loss of both. New wine must be put into new wineskins. Both sayings concern what fits a given container or setting. Jesus thus clarifies why he and his disciples do not fast. Between John and Jesus a corner has been turned: fasting that was appropriate for John's time is no longer fitting for Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry, in other words, does not fit the container that was John's mission, or the container that is the world of the Pharisees. It's a question of knowing what time it is and conforming one's behavior rightly.

David Thomas: The Principles of the This New Religion of Christ Require to Be kept Distinct from All Other Systems –

We make two remarks here, --

First: That there has ever been a tendency in man to connect some of his old forms with Christianity. These disciples of John now wished Christ to enjoin on His followers the rite of fasting. You see the tendency on the side, both of the Jew and the Pagan, in the first ages. The Jewish convert was anxious to bring as much of Judaism as possible into his new religion, and the Pagan convert sought to bring as much of heathenism as possible. From these two sources the corruptions of Christianity have come. The Greek and the Romish church are illustrations of this huge evil. In both you see new wine in old bottles; new cloth upon old garments. Indeed, Christianity has been dealt with in this fashion in every age. How often do we see men endeavouring to patch their old dogmas to some of its glorious doctrines, to put its new wine into the rotten bottles of their old institutions and creeds. Men do not like to take Christianity in its

naked simplicity. They are anxious to combine it with something else – some old notions, rites, or ceremonies.

Secondly: That against this tendency we must strive, as against a tremendous evil. The new wine is lost by putting it into old bottles. The new cloth which would clothe and adorn the spirit, becomes worthless by being cut into pieces, and attached to old worn-out garments. How its doctrines have been injured by being worked into old creeds and systems of theology!

TEXT: Matthew 9:18-34

TITLE: IMPRESSIVE HEALING MIRACLES EARN JESUS A MIXED REPUTATION

BIG IDEA:

WHILE JESUS DEMONSTRATES COMPASSION IN HEALING AND VALUES EVEN WEAK FAITH, THE RESPONSE TO HIM BEGINS TO REFLECT POLARIZATION

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: This final set of three miracles continues the emphases in the others on Jesus' authority and compassion for the marginalized in society (8:16–17; 9:2, 22) as well as on the faith of those healed (8:10, 13; 9:2, 22, 28–29). The contrast between Jesus' popularity with the crowds (8:1; 9:8, 26, 31, 33) and the opposition of the leaders is again noted (9:3, 11, 34), who for the first time attribute his exorcisms to Satan (9:34; cf. 12:22–32). The contrast between the simple faith of the ruler of the synagogue in 9:18 and the radical rejection of the Pharisees in 9:34 is stark.

David Thomas: We take these four cases together, because they contain so much that is common to one another, and the general meaning of each will gain power and prominence by the combination.

Craig Blomberg: Verse 33 contains the strongest statement to date of the crowds' **positive response** to Jesus' healing, but v. 34 immediately follows with the strongest statement to date of the Jewish leaders' **opposition**. A **polarization** is beginning which Matthew will develop more explicitly as his Gospel unfolds. And a progression may be discerned within these three passages—from a completely positive response in 9:26, to hints of possible trouble in 9:30-31, to overt hostility in 9:34.

Richard Gardner: In 9:18-34 Matthew concludes the collection of stories that began at 8:1. Like the first trilogy of stories (in 8:1-17), the three narratives included here focus on Jesus' power to heal: A chronic disease is finally cured. A dead child is raised up. The blind receive the gift of sight. A deaf mute begins to speak.

For the author, the deeds reported in these stories are significant at two levels.

- First, they anticipate the catalogue of miracles ascribed to Jesus in 11:1-5, illustrating some of the deeds for which we have not yet had examples.
- Second, they provide further evidence that the coming age of salvation is drawing near in Jesus' work. Together with the healing of the paralytic reported earlier, these deeds fulfill the promise of **Isaiah 35:5-6**: "*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*"

R. T. France: With this final triad of miracle stories Matthew brings to a close his comprehensive collage of the authoritative activity of the Messiah in **chapters 8–9**, both in his unquestioned power over a wide variety of threatening forces, natural and supernatural, and in the uncompromising demand which he makes on those who are called to follow him. But the overriding note is not one of hard power but of **deliverance** and **joy**, as people are **set free** from

danger, disease, demonic powers and death, and called to share with Jesus in enjoying the new wine of the kingdom of heaven.

William Barclay: People can come to Jesus from different motivations:

- Desperation drove the synagogue ruler (everything else had failed);
- Superstition (at least inadequate faith) drove the woman with the issue of blood;
- Blind men came to Jesus with a very inadequate conception of who he was;

Here is an astonishing thing. The ruler came to Jesus with an inadequate motive; the woman came to Jesus with an inadequate faith; the blind men came to Jesus with an inadequate conception of who he was, or, if we like to put it so, with an inadequate theology; and yet they found his love and power waiting for their needs. Here we see a tremendous thing. It does not matter how we come to Christ, if only we come. No matter how inadequately and how imperfectly we come, his love and his arms are open to receive us.

There is a double lesson here. It means that we do not wait to ask Christ's help until our motives, our faith and our theology are perfect; **we may come to him exactly as we are**. And it means that we have no right to criticize others whose motives we suspect, whose faith we question and whose theology we believe to be mistaken. It is not how we come to Christ that matters; it is that we should come at all, for he is willing to accept us as we are, and able to make us what we ought to be.

John Nolland: The present unit is the first of the three miracle episodes which Matthew gathers under the rubric: '*new wine into fresh wineskins*' (see at **9:14-17**). Jesus does not mourn the dead but raises them; he breaks the shackles of a perpetual menstrual uncleanness. . . The headline theme of the final set of three miracle stories: **the newness of that which comes with the presence of Jesus**.

Daniel Doriani: Their stories begin the third set of miracles described in **Matthew 8-9**. Each one breaks new ground.

- In the first three, Jesus healed diseases such as leprosy and a fever (**8:1-17**).
- In the next group, he exercised his power over nature by calming a storm, and he exercised his power over spirits by casting out demons (**8:18-9:8**).
- In the last set of miracles, Jesus addresses **new problems**: He raises the dead and heals the blind and the mute (**9:18-34**).

Matthew's lesson has two elements.

- First, Jesus' miracles are designed to lead people to genuine faith and discipleship.
- Second, Jesus is worthy of such faith; in the final miracles, he completes the signs of the Messiah described in **Isaiah 35:1-10**.
 - Restoring nature (**35:1-2**)
 - Giving strength to the weak and restoration to the lame (**35:3, 6**)
 - Giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute (**35:5-6**).

I. (:18-26) HEALING A WOMAN WITH CHRONIC BLOOD FLOW AND RAISING A YOUNG DAUGHTER OF A SYNAGOGUE OFFICIAL

Stanley Saunders: Matthew here tells a story within a story. Both episodes feature interactions with females, one a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years and the other a young girl who has died. In both stories the healing involves touch: first the woman touching the hem of Jesus' clothes (9:20), and then Jesus taking the little girl by the hand (9:25). Both situations suggest a risk of defilement, the woman because of her flow of blood and the girl because she is "dead." Jesus' willingness to touch and be touched by women demonstrates how God's power pushes back the barriers that divide male from female. The wineskin of God's empire includes women and men alike.

A. (:18-19) Urgent Crisis – Appeal to the One Who Has Power over Death

1. (:18) Desperate Appeal by the Synagogue Ruler

"While He was saying these things to them, behold, there came a synagogue official, and bowed down before Him, saying, 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.'"

Craig Blomberg: this influential religious leader believes that Jesus can miraculously reclaim his daughter's life. The faith to which Jesus will explicitly point in v. 22 is implicitly present here already. As before (8:7), Jesus and his troupe go at once to help.

2. (:19) Compassionate Response of Jesus

"And Jesus rose and began to follow him, and so did His disciples."

B. (:20-22) Intruding Crisis – Appeal to the One Who Can Heal and Cleanse

1. (:20-21) Desperate Approach by the Woman with Chronic Blood Flow

"And behold, a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; 21 for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His garment, I shall get well.'"

Robert Gundry: ("Hemorrhage" is too strong a term, for she couldn't have survived twelve years of suffering the amount of blood loss usually connoted by that term.)

D. A. Carson: Having heard of others who had been healed at Jesus' touch, this woman decided to touch even a tassel of Jesus' cloak (v.21). Moved in part by a superstitious view of Jesus, she struggled through the crowd, which, because of her "unclean" condition, she should have avoided.

Leon Morris: He speaks of a woman who had severe bleeding over a period of **twelve years** (the same span of time as the life of the ruler's little girl; Mark tells us that she was twelve years old, **Mark 5:42**). The woman's disability was not only a physical malady but one that had significant social implications; she would have been **ceremonially unclean** (**Lev. 15:25-27**), and therefore cut off from the ceremonial observances of the community. She could not join in worship, and her contact with other people would have been restricted because even a touch from her would make people unclean (Lev. 15:27). It was probably this that made her take the approach she did. She was convinced that one touch of Jesus would bring her healing, and she managed to effect this without drawing anyone's attention. With a crowd of people thronging around Jesus she was able to come up behind him and touch just the tassel of his cloak. . .

There seems to be an element of superstition mingled with the faith of the woman, but Jesus did not reject her; he responded to the faith that he discerned. She certainly had the deep conviction

that Jesus could cure her. If only she could get close enough to touch him, she would be free forever from her terrible disability.

Richard Gardner: In a bold and presumptuous act, she comes up behind Jesus and touches the fringe of his cloak.

William Barclay: These fringes were four tassels of hyacinth blue worn by a Jew on the corners of his outer garment. They were worn in obedience to the injunction of the law in **Numbers 15:37–41** and **Deuteronomy 22:12**. Matthew again refers to them in **14:36** and **23:5**. They consisted of four threads passing through the four corners of the garment and meeting in eight. one of the threads was longer than the others. It was twisted seven times round the others, and a double knot formed; then eight times, then eleven times, then thirteen times. The thread and the knots stood for the five books of the law.

The idea of the fringe was twofold.

- It was meant to identify a Jew as a Jew, and as a member of the chosen people, no matter where he was;
- and it was meant to remind a Jew every time he put on and took off his clothes that he belonged to God.

2. (:22) Compassionate Response of Jesus

“But Jesus turning and seeing her said, ‘Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.’ And at once the woman was made well.”

Craig Blomberg: The reader wonders if Jesus deliberately delays his journey to Jairus's home so as to be able to perform not just a healing but a restoration of life (as with Lazarus in **John 11:6**), but Matthew leaves no clues. Instead he shifts his focus immediately to this second woman, who also believes in Jesus' power to heal.

C. (:23-26) Dramatic Resurrection

1. (:23-24) Repudiation of the Dominion of Death

“And when Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 He began to say, ‘Depart; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.’ And they began laughing at Him.”

Donald Hagner: When Jesus comes to the ruler's house, he encounters a gathering of people readying themselves for the funeral that would take place the same day, as was the custom in that culture. τοὺς αὐλητάς, “*the flute players*,” were professional musicians (cf. for festive occasions, **11:17**; **Rev 18:22**) who were apparently hired to play at funerals. Matthew's ὄχλον θορυβούμενον, lit. “*crowd in an uproar*,” represents the loud wailing, typical in that culture, of those mourning the death of the girl (cf. **Jer 48:36**; **Mark 5:38**; Jos. J. W. 3.9.5 §437 and Str-B 1:521–23 [m. Ketub. 4.4; m. Šabb. 23.4]). All of this indicated that **the girl had died**. For Jesus, who is about to bring the girl back to life, the lamenting is inappropriate, and so the mourners are told to “*go away*.” They are not needed because the girl ἀλλὰ καθεύδει, “*is but sleeping*.” Death for Jesus is not the final word; the dead can be brought back to life. This expectation causes the Church ultimately to use the same verb, καθεύδω, for those who have died: they are but “*asleep*” (**1 Thess 5:10**; **Eph 5:14**; cf. κοιμᾶσθαι: **27:52**; **John 11:11–14**; **1 Cor 15:6, 20**; **1 Thess 4:13–18**; for OT background, see Dan 12:2). **Jesus does not deny the girl's death but rather the finality of that death.**

William Barclay: **The music of the flute was especially associated with death.** The Talmud lays it down: ‘The husband is bound to bury his dead wife, and to make lamentations and mourning for her, according to the custom of all countries. And also the very poorest among the Israelites will not allow her less than two flutes and one wailing woman; but, if he be rich, let all things be done according to his qualities.’ Even in Rome, the flute-players were a feature of days of grief. There were flute-players at the funeral of the Roman emperor Claudius, and Seneca tells us that they made such a shrilling that even Claudius himself, dead though he was, might have heard them. So insistent and so emotionally exciting was the wailing of the flute that Roman law limited the number of flute-players at any funeral to ten.

D. A. Carson: Jesus was about to reverse funeral symbolism of the finality of death. The “*noisy crowd*” was made up of friends mourning, not in the hushed whispers characteristic of our Western funerals, but in loud outbursts of grief and wailing augmented by cries of hired mourners. Jesus’ miracle not only brought a corpse to life (v.24) but hope to despair.

2. (:25) Raising of the Dead Girl

*“But when the crowd had been put out,
He entered and took her by the hand; and the girl arose.”*

Grant Osborne: The Authority of Jesus at a Climax --

Jesus progresses from healing a serious illness to raising the dead. Every kind of supernatural miracle has occurred in this section—nature miracle, exorcism, healing miracle, and now the ultimate occurs as a harbinger of the climax that becomes the center point of history, the resurrection of Christ himself. The one who has the power to raise a little girl has the power also to conquer death himself.

John MacArthur: The miracles of Jesus were the verification of His power to reverse the curse, the verification of His power to establish the kingdom. For He had said in John chapter 5, you remember, that He would someday raise from the dead all that were in the graves. And if He’s going to do that, He’s going to have to demonstrate that He has the power to do that. And so, miracle upon miracle did He do to **verify His power.**

3. (:26) Reputation of Jesus Spread Widely

“And this news went out into all that land.”

Robert Gundry: The anonymity of the land into which went the report of Jesus’ raising the girl foreshadows the proclamation of the gospel in “*the whole inhabited [earth]*” (24:14).

Richard Gardner: Together, the stories of the woman and the girl establish that

- (1) Jesus’ power to restore life is total, and
- (2) faith that reaches out to Jesus lets us receive that power.

II. (:27-31) HEALING TWO BLIND MEN

A. (:27) Pathetic Plight

“And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, and saying, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’”

Leon Morris: There are no miracles of the giving of sight in the Old Testament, nor in the New after the Gospels (the restoration of sight to Saul of Tarsus, **Acts 9:17-18**, is not of the same order). But in Jesus' ministry there are more miracles of the giving of sight than of any other single category. The giving of sight is a divine activity (**Exod. 4:11; Ps. 146:8**), and it has messianic significance (**Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7**). Matthew has a story very similar to this one in **20:29-34** (with parallels in **Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43**). In both of Matthew's stories the blind men cried out, "*Have mercy on us, Son of David,*" in both Jesus touched their eyes, and in both their eyes were opened. But this story is located in Galilee, while the later one takes place near Jericho; here the men follow Jesus whereas there they sit by the way. In the later story people told the blind men that Jesus was passing and then rebuked them for crying out, Jesus called the blind men to him (here they follow him into the house), he asked what they wanted (here he questions them about their faith), and the story ends with the blind men following him (here with them spreading the story throughout the region). It seems plain enough that Matthew regarded the two stories as distinct, and that it is the later one that is paralleled in the other Synoptists.

Craig Blomberg: Matthew's twin themes of Jesus' rejection by official Judaism and acceptance by outcasts reappear here and set the stage for an increasing polarization of response to Christ.

Charles Swindoll: As we recall the **packed itinerary** thus far in **Matthew 9**, I can imagine Jesus and His disciples were **exhausted**:

- the paralytic lying on the bed —healed (**9:2-8**)
- Matthew the tax collector —redeemed (**9:9-13**)
- the woman with incurable bleeding —cured (**9:20-22**)
- the daughter who had died —resurrected (**9:23-26**)

If anybody had earned a breather, it was Jesus. But as He made His way back to where He was staying —likely Peter's home —two blind men followed Him, crying out, "*Have mercy on us, Son of David!*" (**9:27**).

B. (:28) Focused Faith

"And after He had come into the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'"

R. T. France: **Faith** has been mentioned as a key factor in previous healings, but this is the first time (and the only time in Matthew; he does not have a parallel to **Mark 9:23-24**) when it is explicitly set before the suppliant as a **condition of healing**. The centurion voluntarily declared his faith in Jesus' authority to heal (**8:8-10**; so also the leper in **8:2**, the official in **9:18** and, secretly, the woman in **9:21**), but **these men are required to do so**. There is no obvious reason why this additional element should be present in this case, since it does not occur in the similar story of the healing of blind men in **20:29-34**. But the faith, once declared, is made the basis of their healing, as Jesus uses another third person imperative as a "performative utterance" (see on **8:13**, and cf. **15:28**).

John MacArthur: And I'm struck by the **utter lack of privacy** that our Lord had, the relentless pressure, the barrage of unrelenting people who dogged His footsteps. He went in the house, and they went right in the house after Him. I don't think any of us can even begin to fathom what it must have been like to have these tragic people just clinging to Him all through His ministry,

knowing no moments of privacy, unless late in the night He were to go away to some private place of prayer.

C. (:29-30a) Marvelous Miracle

*“Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘Be it done to you according to your faith.’
30 And their eyes were opened.”*

Grant Osborne: Faith is an appropriating force, not a meritorious deed. The blind men were healed not on the basis of the quality of their faith but **because they threw themselves on the mercy of Jesus**. By faith we enter into God’s sovereign deeds and experience them spiritually; faith turns an event into a relationship, as we experience God as well as his work.

John MacArthur: **Archbishop Trench** in 1902 wrote this. I think it’s a marvelous thing. He was writing on this very same account in Matthew, and he said this, “The faith which in itself is nothing is yet the organ for receiving everything.” Now listen to this. “It is the conducting link between man’s emptiness and God’s fullness, and herein lies all the value faith has.” Now listen – “Faith is the bucket let down into the fountain of God’s grace without which the man could never draw water of life from the wells of salvation. For the wells are deep and of himself man has nothing to draw with. Faith is the purse which cannot of itself make its owner rich, and yet effectually enriches by the wealth which it contains.” That’s a great statement about faith. Faith is the bucket that dips into the wells of salvation. Faith is the purse which in itself is not the riches, but contains the riches. **It is that by which we receive what God graciously gives.** And He says your purse is big enough to receive all that I have to give. Your bucket is big enough to gather the waters of the wells of salvation. “‘According to your faith, be it unto you.’ *And their eyes were opened.*” What an incredible thing.

D. (:30b-21) Wasted Warning

*“And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, ‘See here, let no one know about this!’
31 But they went out, and spread the news about Him in all that land.”*

Grant Osborne: The “messianic secret” is better known in Mark than in Matthew but appears here often as well (see on **8:4**, cf. also **12:16**; **16:20**; **17:9**). Jesus did not want his messianic nature bandied about because the Jewish people expected only a messianic king but not a **suffering Servant** (Jesus’ disciples made the same mistake). The language here is particularly strong, with ἐνεβριμήθη (meaning “filled with anger” in **John 11:33, 38**) a stern admonition here, almost a rebuke. Jesus could not be more direct; **he wanted no one to know.** . .

The emphasis is on Jesus’ desire to avoid publicity and the impossibility of remaining silent when touched by Jesus. So as in **9:26**, the news spreads throughout Galilee.

III. (:32-34) EXORCIZING A DEMON FROM A DUMB MAN

Donald Hagner: Again Jesus performs a messianic sign that points to his identity and his power and authority. The crowd marvels, for nothing like this had been seen in Israel. This reaction points to the newness of what Jesus represents. The direct, unmediated healing of the man’s inability to speak symbolizes the fulfillment and joy of the kingdom announced by Jesus. The image of the mute being given the gift of speech is itself again suggestive of the gospel. The readers of Matthew know that they participate in the good experienced by the mute demoniac.

And those who have been healed in the most fundamental sense of the word—who have experienced salvation—are now themselves liberated to speak the good news of the kingdom. The response to that proclamation will be mixed, as it was to the ministry and message of Jesus. While some will respond positively, others like the Pharisees will be all too ready to find only evil in Jesus and his disciples (cf. **10:25**).

A. (:32) Subjugation

“And as they were going out, behold, a dumb man, demon-possessed, was brought to Him.”

B. (:33a) Transformation

“And after the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke;”

C. (:33b-34) Polarization

1. (:33b) Reaction of the Multitudes

“and the multitudes marveled, saying, ‘Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel.’”

2. (:34) Reaction of the Pharisees

“But the Pharisees were saying, ‘He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.’”

Stanley Saunders: The Pharisees also recognize Jesus’ power, but offer an alternative appraisal of the source of Jesus’ power: “He casts out demons by the prince of demons” (9:34; cf. 12:24). They are more willing to admit the reality of demonic power in the world than God’s power, even when the results are liberative. We are left wondering who is really deaf and dumb.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we treat inconvenient interruptions as divine appointments?
- 2) How were these specific miracles confirmation of the messianic claims of Jesus?
- 3) How does Jesus demonstrate His compassion today to those who are in desperate situations?
- 4) How can witnessing the same display of compassion and power evoke such opposite responses?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: In a real way these miracle narratives point beyond themselves to realities at the heart of the Church’s confession and experience. The raising of the dead to life is a basic symbolism of the gospel (e.g., **Rom 4:17; Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13**). What Jesus did for the dead girl he has done for all in the Church who have experienced **new life**. There is too, beyond this life, the Church’s confidence that Jesus will literally raise the dead (cf. **1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor**

15:22–23). In a similar way in the healing of the hemorrhaging woman, the repeated use of σώζειν (lit. “save”) for her healing points beyond itself to the greatest healing experienced by the Church, the “healing” of salvation. For the Church is saved primarily not from the experience of limited ills here and now but from the deadliest enemy of all, **the curse of sin**. Thus while enjoying the stories of what Jesus did in his ministry and rejoicing in the power and authority of Jesus displayed in these miraculous deeds, the Church at the same time—Matthew’s readers together with Christians from every era—sees in these narratives something of its own personal history and hopes, something of the power of the risen Jesus in their lives here and now. Thus these narratives concern not simply past history but present experience. The present faith of the Church thus receives considerable encouragement in this passage.

Richard Gardner: What is unique in the Gospel accounts is not so much the deeds they report as the way these deeds are understood. For Matthew and the other evangelists, Jesus’ miracles find their meaning in the acts and promises of God in the story of Israel. There God is revealed as one who intervenes to deliver those in need. One strand of this story is Israel’s witness to the exodus, where God works signs and wonders through Moses and Aaron (cf. **Deut. 26:8; 34:10-12; Ps. 105:26-27**).

Another facet of the story, to which we have already referred, is the promise of salvation linked to Israel’s return from exile (cf. **Isa. 35:5-6; 65:17-19**). Both the earth and its people will one day be restored to the wholeness God intends. All of this is in the background as Jesus travels through Galilee and performs his mighty works. To those who behold these deeds with eyes of faith, he demonstrates the rule of God which frees creation from sin and suffering (cf. **Matt. 12:28**) and makes the healing of the age to come a reality here and now (cf. **11:2-6; 8:17**).

A striking feature of miracle stories is the way they address the **theme of boundaries** (cf. **Theissen**, 1983:75-80; 129-152). In accounts of healing, the **fundamental boundary is sickness** or suffering. It is a barrier that stands between wholeness and the one who is ill. As a typical story unfolds, **other obstacles emerge** (boundary-stressing motifs) which further compound the problem. Thus in the stories of **Matthew 8–9**, we find obstacles such as ritual uncleanness, being a Gentile, sin, skepticism, unholy ground, religious objections, demon possession, and even death. To overcome such boundaries seems difficult if not impossible. But that is precisely what happens in the boundary-crossing actions described in the stories.

On the part of those in need, these actions include touch, worship, cries for help, and, above all, faith. On Jesus’ part, there are words of assurance, reasoned argument, a healing touch, and decisive commands. In each case these actions lead to healing, a crossing of the boundary of suffering in which the power of God prevails.

In the context of Matthew’s narrative, miracle stories play a double role. Their function within the story line of the Gospel is to **highlight Jesus’ messianic authority**. It is not that Jesus’ miracles correspond to a traditional view of what the Messiah would do. What they do, however (together with Jesus’ preaching), is **fulfill the promise of God to transform life in the age to come**. For this reason, Jesus’ deeds may be called the deeds of the Messiah (**11:2**; cf. **12:23**), even though the power displayed is therapeutic rather than military.

The second function of the miracle stories relates to their hearing in Matthew’s community. In addition to reminding the church of what Jesus did in Israel, the stories serve as paradigms or **parables of salvation** (cf. **Kingsbury**, 1978:568-573). They invite members of the church to

approach Jesus with petitions for help in the face of their own crises. And they assure those who do so that Jesus' power can deliver all who reach out in faith (cf. **14:28-33!**). For a community facing boundary situations of its own, whether distress within the church or persecution from the outside, the miracle stories offer a **resource for strengthening faith and hope**.

Charles Swindoll: If you had been standing in the crowd of onlookers in Capernaum during that nonstop day of miracles, you would have been presented with an intellectual dilemma that would call for a decision of your will. Whatever choice you made that day would have a lasting impact on your life. The choice facing first-century eyewitnesses of the Lord's words and works has been classically summed up by **C. S. Lewis's** "trilemma." **Eric Metaxas** puts it this way:

C. S. Lewis rather famously said that when it came to deciding who Jesus Christ was, we really only had three choices.

- First, we could say he was a liar, that all of the things he said were simply lies.
- Second, we could say he was not a liar but a lunatic, so he couldn't be held responsible for saying the things he said.
- And third, we could say he was actually who he said he was, the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

If they had their heads on straight, every Jacob, Reuben, Miriam, or Sarah standing anywhere near Jesus that day could have come to the rational conclusion. Jesus couldn't have been insane or a deceiver—how could a madman or a mesmerizer perform those miracles? They weren't simple sleights of hand or entertaining parlor tricks. Jesus wasn't pulling coins out of children's ears or making handkerchiefs disappear. He was healing paralytics, restoring sight to the blind, conquering conditions that medical doctors had only made worse, casting out demons, and raising the dead! All the while, He was claiming to have authority to forgive sins, was demonstrating an ability to see into people's hearts and minds, and was answering to the messianic titles "*Son of David*" and "*Son of God*."

But these facts didn't stop the hardheaded and hard-hearted Pharisees from claiming that Jesus' ability to do miracles came directly from Satan himself. This was a **spiritual problem**, not an intellectual problem. And it's a problem people still have today. **In spite of the evidence, people deny the existence of God**. And in spite of the compelling claims of Christ, they willfully reject Him as their Savior and Lord. The solution to this **spiritual blindness**, then, is not another book that presents the evidence or another verbal bludgeoning that tries to argue people into the kingdom. The only One who can soften hearts and break down wills is the Holy Spirit.

William Barclay: There are few passages which show better than this the impossibility of an attitude of neutrality towards Jesus. Here we have the picture of two reactions to him. The attitude of the crowds was amazed wonder; the attitude of the Pharisees was virulent hatred. It must always remain true that what the eye sees depends upon what the heart feels.

The crowds looked on Jesus with wonder, because they were simple people with a crying sense of need; and they saw that in Jesus their need could be supplied in the most astonishing way. Jesus will always appear wonderful to those with a sense of need; and the deeper the sense of need, the more wonderful Jesus will appear to be.

The Pharisees saw Jesus as one who was in league with all the powers of evil. They did not deny his wondrous powers; but they attributed them to his complicity with the prince of the devils. This verdict of the Pharisees was due to certain attitudes of mind.

(1) They were too set in their ways to change. As we have seen, as far as they were concerned not one word could be added to or subtracted from the law. To them, all the great things belonged to the past. To them, to change a tradition or a convention was a deadly sin. Anything that was new was wrong. And when Jesus came with a new interpretation of what real religion was, they hated him, as they had hated the prophets long ago.

(2) They were too proud in their self-satisfaction to submit. If Jesus was right, they were wrong. The Pharisees were so well satisfied with themselves that they saw no need to change; and they hated anyone who wished to change them. Repentance is the gate whereby we all must enter the kingdom; and repentance means the recognition of the error of our ways, the realization that in Christ alone there is life, and the surrender to him and to his will and power, whereby alone we can be changed.

(3) They were too prejudiced to see. Their eyes were so blinded by their own ideas that they could not see in Jesus Christ the truth and the power of God.

Those who have a sense of need will always see wonders in Jesus Christ. People who are so set in their ways that they will not change, people who are so proud in their self-righteousness that they cannot submit, people who are so blinded by their prejudices that they cannot see, will always resent and hate and seek to eliminate him.

E. William Green: These three stories stress several points in common. Yes, the new has come, but it is **accessible only to faith**. That is the clear burden of all three of these miracles. In each one, **faith is the hand that grasps the astonishing new thing presented in Jesus**. Faith is what brings us into contact with Jesus. It was so with the woman in the crowd, and with the father of the little girl: both touched, and so experienced, his power. It was the same, too, with the demonized man who could not speak. It was when he was brought face to face with Jesus that he was set free. Faith is not an intellectual construct: it is a primary means of cognition, like touch.

Even if it is full of error and inadequacy, faith can avail, so long as it is located in Jesus. As a matter of fact, the evangelist draws attention to the imperfect faith of all three people in these stories. . .

However, the power of Jesus is not displayed in the **climate of unbelief**. The crowd round the woman did not believe, and they received nothing. The professional mourners round the girl did not believe, and they were ejected (**24–25**). The Pharisees did not believe (**34**) and, like the crowd they despised, they too received nothing. It is possible to jostle Jesus in the crowd and still remain utterly unchanged. It is possible to see miracle after miracle and ascribe them to the devil's activity. It is not the case, as people sometimes say, that 'If only I'd been there I would have believed.' No, there were plenty of people there who did not believe although unimpeachable evidence was spread repeatedly before their eyes. The human heart is capable of profound resistance and deep self-deception. It is only when we trust that we find salvation. The faith may be a last resort, it may be superstitious, it may be theologically deficient, but if it is placed in Jesus, it binds the sinner and the Saviour together. And that is what he came to bring about.

David Thompson: While Jesus Christ was here on earth presenting Himself as King of the Jews, He did **spectacular things**. There never had been anyone or anything like Him in Israel's history (9:33). The purpose of the miracles was to **authenticate that He was Israel's Messiah**. He was Immanuel— **God with us**. He was the Son of God and He was God. Christ's primary purpose, however, was not physical healing but spiritual healing. He came to give Israel the righteousness she needed to get into the kingdom. But the religious leaders did everything they could to keep Israel from understanding this. Faith in Jesus Christ could give a sinner the righteousness one needed to gain entrance into the kingdom, so the religious leaders tried to keep people from believing on Him.

JESUS CHRIST PERFORMED MANY SUPERNATURAL HEALING MIRACLES, WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN IN ISRAEL, TO ESTABLISH THAT HE WAS THE MESSIAH AND SAVIOR; BUT THE PHARISEES WERE DOING EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO DISCREDIT HIM AND KEEP ISRAEL FROM FOLLOWING HIM.

Grant Osborne: This miracle closes the important section of **8:1 – 9:34**, and it is time to provide a **general summary of the themes** covered in it. This final triad of miracles functions as a conclusion to the section and contains all of the themes:

1. Jesus Has Authority as the Healing Royal Messiah --

The primary motif throughout is the authority of the Lord Messiah. Every type of miracle is found here—power over nature, healing, exorcism, raising the dead. Never before had anything like this been seen, both in the quantity and the quality of the miracles. Jesus cast out demons with just a word, and he healed with a touch. Gone are the lengthy incantations and the elaborate ritual. He is indeed the Son of David, the Messiah who heals the ills of the nation. As in **John 5:36; 10:25; 14:11**, Jesus' miracles are witnesses to the reality that he is indeed "*God with us*" (**Matt 1:23**).

2. Jesus Calls for Faith in Those He Heals --

Faith is not a necessary ingredient in Jesus' healing, but it turns "*healing*" (θεραπέω) into "*salvation*" (σώζω) and brings the person into the process. Faith that in the OT was in Yahweh is now in Jesus as the divine agent of God. God has now decisively intervened in salvation history and brought salvation and spiritual (as well as physical) healing to the world.

3. In Jesus the OT Promises Have Been Decisively Fulfilled --

In the last two miracles of this section **Isa 35:5–6** has come to fruition (preparing for **11:5**) and further demonstrates Matthew's theme of OT fulfillment (see **1:1–17; 22–23; 2:15, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16; 8:17**). Christ is the Messiah who completes the OT promises and relieves the experiences of Israel. For Matthew the OT looked forward to Christ and prepared the way for him. As **Davies and Allison** write:

So while the OT gives meaning to Matthew's story of Jesus, it is not less true that Matthew's story of Jesus gives meaning to the OT. The Matthean perspective can be illustrated and put this way: when reading **9:27–34** one should think of **Isa 35:5–6**, and when reading **Isa 35:5–6** one should think of **Matt 9:27–34**.

4. No Neutrality When Encountering Christ --

The crowds increasingly hold Jesus in awe, while the leaders increasingly reject and oppose him.

It is common to think that “seekers” are neutral, interested yet not ready to make a commitment. This is somewhat true, but we must remember that every service or Christian activity they attend, they leave having rejected Christ again. As such they grow increasingly hardened to the gospel, gradually shifting from a crowdlike attitude to a leaderlike attitude. **Neutrality is not an option!**

5. Miracles Are Deeds as Well as Transparent Parables of Jesus’ Relationship with Humanity –

Luz speaks of two ways this transparency works out.

- (1) These stories are indirectly transparent as the “church’s foundation story,” since the events relate to the way God has established the kingdom community as the new Israel.
- (2) They are directly transparent as “the basis of personal experience,” since the church is also given authority to perform miracles (**10:1, 8**).

So the work of Jesus in these chapters is constitutive of the church’s new walk with God and power to perform great works for God.

TEXT: Matthew 9:35 – 10:4

TITLE: MISSION OF JESUS DELEGATED TO THE APOSTLES

BIG IDEA:

THE MISSION OF JESUS REPRODUCES ITSELF BY THE VISION CASTING, AND THE CALLING AND COMMISSIONING OF GOSPEL WORKERS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Matthew's editorial brilliance continues in this section. The opening verse (9:35) parallels 4:23 and frames chs. 5–9 with a summary of Jesus' missionary activity and healing power. It also parallels 11:1 and establishes a two-step process that draws the section together around Jesus' authority and compassion in his mission.

E. Michael Green: (9:35 – 10:42) -- It is difficult to miss the skill in Matthew's writing and arrangement. Just as the first section of his Gospel had found its climax in the Sermon on the Mount, informing us what the kingdom of heaven is about, so now the second section finishes with the **mission charge**, informing us that disciples must spread the good news of the kingdom. This section needs to be read at two levels.

- It primarily describes the historical mission of the Twelve in the time of Jesus. He did not merely preach, teach and heal by himself, or even by taking his disciples out with him. He also sent them out to further his mission.
- But there can be little doubt that this material was also cherished by Matthew and other Christian leaders because of what it had to say about the continuing mission of the church in Matthew's own day.

Richard Gardner: Throughout the major section that begins at 4:17, Jesus is preparing for others to share in his mission. The direction is set in the call stories, in which Jesus invites persons to follow him as disciples (4:18-22; 8:18-22; 9:9). As followers, these persons receive instruction from Jesus (5:1-2), behold Jesus' power and authority (8:23-27), and learn the meaning of Jesus' mission as they sit at Jesus' table (9:10-17).

The vocation of the disciples to which all of this is leading is spelled out in 9:35 - 10:42. Here Jesus commissions his twelve disciples in a formal way and gives them a discourse on mission as he sends them out. What is impressive in this presentation is the extent to which **Jesus' mission and that of the disciples are one and the same**. As Jesus' emissaries, the twelve will go forth with his authority, adopt his itinerant style, preach the message he preaches, perform the deeds that he performs, and share the fate that awaits him too.

Daniel Doriani: In our study of the life of Christ, we have thus far met Jesus (Matt. 1–4), heard his teaching on discipleship (Matt. 5–7), and seen the mighty deeds that demonstrate his power as he heals the sick, expels demons, and raises the dead (Matt. 8–9). So far, all attention has fallen upon Jesus. But like a great player who then becomes a coach, **Jesus trains others in his skill**. Like an entrepreneur whose business is growing, it is time to add workers to his team. In **Matthew 10**, the work of Jesus expands. He begins to train and commission his team. He

prepares them to take his message, his power, and his cause to the world. He tells them—and us—to **fulfill the mission** God gives in the way Jesus shows.

Charles Swindoll: It's also easy to forget that the Twelve were often nearby, partly because their presence isn't always obvious in Matthew's narrative. They were by Jesus' side throughout His earthly ministry, always watching, frequently learning, occasionally responding. Their training remained at the forefront of His agenda, even though He didn't frequently call attention to it. At times, however, He paused to address them and pass along specific information they were expected not only to remember but also to put into practice after He left them.

The time had come for the disciples to step up and move out into the real world, to face settings similar to those Jesus had been facing and to engage in a ministry similar to that of their Master. Like baby birds being coaxed out of their nest, it was time for the Twelve to spread their wings and face their own struggles in ministry. Next we'll see Jesus delegate authority and empower His handpicked ministry team (**10:1-4**). He'll prepare them with vital information before sending them out and set forth specific instructions regarding what they could expect and how to accomplish their mission (**10:5-15**). Though the authority and specific mission of the Twelve was unique and is distinct from ours in the twenty-first century, we can still gain some important principles and insights regarding our own calling and mission today.

I. (9:35-38) THE CALL FOR WORKERS – HELP WANTED FOR THE MISSION

Grant Osborne: **Matthew 9:35–38** functions as a theological primer to the Mission Discourse. Jesus begins by telling his disciples that the mission is a part of his ministry (**9:35**) and a result of his compassion (v. **36**). . .

The disciples' mission continues Jesus "*teaching*" and "*preaching*" the gospel (**9:35**); moreover, by repeating the themes of **4:23**, it shows that this mission is the very one Jesus has been doing all along. Through his teaching (**chs. 5–7**) and miraculous deeds (**chs. 8–9**), the harvest has been readied, and it is time to get to work. So the disciples are called on to intercede with God for more workers and then commissioned to become those very workers.

R. T. France: This **transitional paragraph** serves both as a summary of the ministry in word and deed which has been depicted in **chs. 5–9** and as an introduction to the theme of mission which follows. Its first verse closely echoes the language of **4:23** which introduced the Galilean ministry, thus forming a framework around the anthology of words and deeds which Matthew has put together. Its closing verses provide the basis for the sending out of the Twelve as "*workers in the harvest.*" The paragraph as a whole could thus with equal appropriateness be bracketed either with what precedes it or with what follows, but I have chosen the latter because it provides the necessary justification for the sending out of the Twelve, and thus together with that pericope (**10:1–4**) provides the setting and the audience for the discourse that follows, in much the same way that **4:23 – 5:2** introduces the first discourse. Note too the repetition in the following discourse of the imagery of sheep (**9:36; 10:6, 16**) and of workers (**9:37–38; 10:10**).

John MacArthur: Now the text marks a **transition point** in Matthew's planning. Systematically, Matthew has moved through the writing of this gospel to present all of the salient elements of the **Kingship of Jesus Christ**. He began with the ancestry of the King, the genealogy in chapter 1; then the arrival of the King, the virgin birth; then the anticipation of the King, the fulfillment of

all of those Old Testament prophecies; then came the announcer of the King, John the Baptist; and then the approval of the King in His baptism, as the Father said, “*This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased;*” then the attack on the King as Satan met Him in temptation; then the affirmations of the King as He taught in chapter 5, 6, and 7 and affirmed the authority of the Word of God. And then most recently we’ve been looking at the attestations of the King. The miracles in chapters 8 and 9 that attest to His deity.

And now, as we look at chapter 10, we meet the **associates of the King**, as He calls into service the twelve and sends them out with the message of the kingdom. But between the attestation and the miracles and the section on the disciples is this very small transition taking us out of His miracle ministry and into His discipling ministry, away from the multitudes and toward the individual discipling of His apostles. And that transition is very important. **Jesus sees the vastness of the task and realizes that He has to have some help.** And so in **chapter 10**, we begin an entire section on the discipleship process; and we’ll be getting to that in our next study. But for now, we look at this most significant section in the transition.

We see three things as we look at the Lord here.

1. First of all, His ministry in verse 35.
2. Then His motives, verse 36 and the first part of verse 37.
3. And then His method, the last of verse 37 and through the first verse in chapter 10.

A. (:35) The Pattern for Mission Outreach – The Threefold Ministry of Jesus

“And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages,”

1. Teaching Ministry

“teaching in their synagogues,”

2. Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom

“and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,”

3. Healing Ministry

“and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”

B. (:36-38) The Prayer for Mission Workers – Vision Casting

1. (:36) The Need for Shepherding

“And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.”

Grant Osborne: As Jesus ministered to the “crowds,” he “*had compassion*” (ἐσπλαγγίσθη), a strong verb that literally refers to “visceral emotions” and here connotes “filled with compassion” for a person’s plight. The reason for Jesus’ great pity is that the people were essentially rudderless because their “*shepherds*,” the leaders of Israel, had failed them. Two verbs describe their position: ἐσκυλμένοι, meaning to be “harassed, weary, beaten, troubled,” and ἐρριμμένοι, meaning to be “thrown down, helpless, confused.”

R. T. France: Jesus sees the ordinary people of Israel as similarly in need of direction and leadership. **Chapter 23** will make explicit the criticism of their current leadership which this implies. Cf. the similar implication in Jesus’ offer of relief to those who are “*toiling and heavily loaded*” in **11:28–30**.

His response is described by the strongly emotional Greek verb *splanchnizomai*, which speaks of a warm, compassionate response to need. No single English term does justice to it: compassion, pity, sympathy, fellow-feeling all convey part of it, but “*his heart went out*” perhaps represents more fully the emotional force of the underlying metaphor of a “gut response.” A further feature of this verb appears through a comparison with its other uses in Matthew (**14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34**): in each case there is not only **sympathy** with a person’s need, but also a **practical response** which meets that need; emotion results in caring and effective action, in this case the action of sending out his disciples among the people. It is a verb which describes the Jesus of the gospel stories in a nutshell.

Craig Blomberg: Despite Jesus' extensive ministry, many in Israel, no doubt even in Galilee, remain unreached with his message. Jesus' human emotions reflect a deep, gut-level “*compassion*” (a reasonable, idiomatic English equivalent for a term [from Greek *splanchnos*] that could refer to bowels and kidneys) for this sea of humanity. His compassion increases because **Israel lacks adequate leadership**, despite the many who would claim to guide it. The Twelve begin to fill that vacuum, foreshadowing the institution of the church. The language of “*sheep without a shepherd*” echoes **Num 27:17** and **Ezek 34:5**, in which the shepherd is most likely messianic (cf. **Ezek 34:23**). Similar sentiments will well up in Jesus again at the feeding of the five thousand (**Mark 6:34**). As in the days of the prophets, the rightful leadership of Israel had abdicated its responsibility, as demonstrated by its inability or unwillingness to recognize God's true spokesmen. “*Harassed and helpless*” literally means torn and thrown down (cf. **Berkeley**, “mangled and thrown to the ground”). Predators, and possibly even unscrupulous shepherds (**Zech 10:2-3; 11:16**) have ravaged the sheep. Verse 36 provides a stinging rebuke to the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees.

2. (:37-38) The Deployment of Workers

- a. (:37) Crop is Vast and Ready to be Harvested, but the Workers Are Few
“*Then He said to His disciples,
‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’*”

Craig Blomberg: Shifting the metaphor from flock to field, Jesus now envisions a vast crop of ripe grain in need of harvesters. The unreached people of his world need more preachers and ministers of the gospel. Jesus can personally encounter only a small number, so he will commission his followers to begin to reach the rest. Even then many more will be needed (cf. his sending of the seventy-two in **Luke 10:1-12**). **Verses 37-38** have rightfully led Christians in all ages to pray for, call, and send men and women into all kinds of ministries. The need remains as urgent as ever, with billions who have not heard the gospel or seen it implemented holistically. “*Send out*” (from *ekball* —recall under **9:25**) could also be translated *thrust out*, and it could even refer to workers already in the field who “need to have a fire lit under them to thrust them out of their comforts into the world of need.”

- b. (:38) Calling Must Come from the Lord
“*Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest
to send out workers into His harvest.*”

John Nolland: In the present imagery God has become the owner-manager of the farmland who employs farm workers to harvest the crop. There is an urgent need for sufficient workers to be able to harvest the crop before it spoils. No specific identity should be given to the ‘few’

existing workers: the focus is on the need for additional resources. The coming commissioning and direction of the Twelve will indicate something of what is involved in ‘harvesting’ (but we have also been seeing Jesus do it). The challenge to prayer, however, implies the need to call others beyond the Twelve into this task as well.

Richard Gardner: At least two things are noteworthy in this picture.

1. First, an event usually linked with the final judgment is beginning to happen in the present hour.
2. Second, God is entrusting to human laborers the task of harvesting traditionally reserved for himself or assigned to angels (cf. **3:12; 13:30, 41-43**)!

The mission for which Jesus invites the disciples to prayer, therefore, is indeed an **awesome one**.

II. (10:1-4) THE COMMISSIONING OF THE TWELVE – KEY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS FILLED

Grant Osborne: The mission movement anticipated in **4:19** and **9:38** now comes to fruition as Jesus commissions his followers as “*apostles*” (agents “*sent*” from God) and gives them authority over demons and illness. They now become “*the Twelve*” (the first time this term is used in Matthew), the righteous remnant who represent the twelve tribes in the new Israel, the church.

John MacArthur: Three elements of the commissioning of the twelve,

1. first their **initiation**, and we'll talk a lot about that,
2. then their **impact**, and we'll talk briefly about that,
3. and then their **identity**, and we'll talk about that next time.

But we see their initiation in **verse 1**, their impact in **verse 1**, and then their identity is given in **verses 2 through 4** as He names all twelve of them.

A. (:1) Delegation of Authority to the Twelve Apostles for the Mission

“And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”

John Nolland: Up to this point all that has come of Jesus’ declared intention ‘*I will make of you those who fish for people*’ (**4:19**) has been the disciples’ witnessing of Jesus’ own practice of ‘fishing’. Jesus’ own authority is introduced as a motif in **7:29**; now Jesus gives the Twelve the possibility of a share in his own authority.

Warren Wiersbe: A “*disciple*” is a learner, one who follows a teacher and learns his wisdom. Jesus had many disciples, some of whom were merely “hangers-on,” and some who were truly converted (**John 6:66**). From this large group of followers, Jesus selected a smaller group of twelve men, and these He called “*apostles*.” This word comes from the Greek word *apostello*, which means “*to send forth with a commission*.” It was used by the Greeks for the personal representatives of the king, ambassadors who functioned with the king’s authority. To make light of the king’s envoys was to be in danger of insubordination.

A man had to meet certain qualifications to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. He must have seen the risen Christ (**1 Cor. 9:1**) and fellowshiped with Him (**Acts 1:21–22**). He had to be chosen by the Lord (**Eph. 4:11**). The apostles laid the foundation of the church (**Eph. 2:20**) and then passed

from the scene. While all believers are sent forth to represent the King (**John 17:18; 20:21**), no believer today can honestly claim to be an apostle, for none of us has seen the risen Christ (**1 Peter 1:8**).

These apostles were given special power and authority from Christ to perform miracles. These miracles were a part of their “official credentials” (**Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1–4**). They healed the sick (and note that this included all kinds of diseases), cleansed the lepers, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. These four ministries paralleled the miracles that Jesus performed in Matthew 8 and 9. In a definite way, the apostles represented the King and extended His work.

Christ’s commission to these twelve men is not our commission today. He sent them only to the people of Israel. “*To the Jew first*” is the historic pattern, for “*salvation is of the Jews*” (**John 4:22**). These twelve ambassadors announced the coming of the kingdom just as John the Baptist had done (**Matt. 3:2**) and Jesus Himself (**Matt. 4:17**). Sad to say, the nation rejected both Christ and His ambassadors, and the kingdom was taken from them (**Matt. 21:43**).

E. Michael Green: It is noteworthy that Jesus passes on to them the authority he has wielded so powerfully in word and deed since **chapter 5**. Their ministry is carefully presented as parallel to his own. The words of **4:23**, describing Jesus’ mission as one of teaching, preaching and healing, are almost repeated of his disciples in **10:7–8**. They are to go and preach, to heal every disease. The evangelist is making it plain that the disciples of Jesus share his calling, his authority and his mission. They are to do and to preach what Jesus did and preached.

B. (:2-4) Designation of the Twelve Apostles

“Now the names of the twelve apostles are these:”

D. A. Carson: In the NT, the term can mean merely “*messenger*” (**Jn 13:16**) or refer to Jesus (“*the apostle and high priest whom we confess*,” **Heb 3:1**) or elsewhere (esp. in Paul) denote “*missionaries*” or “*representatives*”—i.e., a group larger than the Twelve and Paul (**Ro 16:7; 2Co 8:23**). Nevertheless, the most natural reading of **1 Corinthians 9:1–5; 15:7; Galatians 1:17, 19** et al. is that even Paul could use the term in a narrow sense to refer to the Twelve plus himself (by special dispensation, **1Co 15:8–10**).

R. T. France: The listing of their names is clearly a matter of some importance since both Mark and Luke also do so in their gospels (**Mark 3:16–16; Luke 6:14–16**), and Luke again in **Acts 1:13**. With the exception of Thaddeus the names are the same in all these lists, though the order of the names and the descriptions of the individuals vary a little. Matthew’s list has two distinctive features: it is **arranged in pairs** (perhaps reflecting the tradition that they were sent out in pairs, **Mark 6:7** cf. **Luke 10:1**), the first two being pairs of brothers, the others apparently arbitrarily grouped for literary effect; and Simon (Peter), who comes first in all the lists and whose leading role among the twelve is clear in all the gospels, is explicitly designated in Matthew as “*first*,” even though no further numbering follows. This is consistent with Matthew’s emphasis on the special importance of Peter, **16:16–19**.

William Barclay: There are two facts about the Twelve which are bound to strike us at once.

- (1) They were very **ordinary men**. They had no wealth; they had no academic background; they
- (2) They were the most **extraordinary mixture**.

1. (:2a) Peter and Andrew

“The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother;”

D. A. Carson: Impulsive and ardent, Peter’s great strengths were his great weaknesses. . . . James was probably the older (he almost always appears first). But as he became the first apostolic martyr (Ac 12:2), he never achieved his brother’s prominence. The brothers were sons of Zebedee the fisherman, whose business was successful enough to employ others (**Mk 1:20**) while his wife was able to support Jesus’ ministry (**Mt 27:55–56**). His wealth may help account for the family’s link with the house of the high priest (**Jn 18:15–16**), as well as for the fact that he alone of the Twelve stood by the cross. The brothers’ mother was probably Salome (cf. **Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40; 16:1**), and her motives were not unmixed. Perhaps the sons inherited something of her aggressive nature; whatever its source, the nickname “*sons of thunder*” (**Mk 3:17**; cf. also **Mk 9:38–41, Lk 9:54–56**) reveals something of their temperament. John may have been a disciple of John the Baptist (**Jn 1:35–41**). Of James we know nothing until **Matthew 4:21–22**. John was undoubtedly a special friend of Peter (**Lk 22:8; Jn 18:15; 20:2–8; Ac 3:1–4:21; 8:14; Gal 2:9**). Reasonably reliable tradition places him after the fall of Jerusalem in Ephesus, where he ministered long and usefully into old age, taking a hand in the nurture of leaders like Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius.

Craig Blomberg: “*Andrew*” comes from the Greek for **manliness**. Like Peter, his brother, Andrew was originally a fisherman from Bethsaida (**John 1:44**). He was the first-known disciple of John the Baptist to begin to follow Christ (**John 1:40**).

2. (:2b) James and John

“and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;”

Craig Blomberg: “*James*” comes from the Hebrew Jacob, meaning **he who grasps the heel** (see **Gen 25:26**). Another Galilean fisherman and son of Zebedee (**4:21–22**), he was executed by Herod Agrippa I not later than A.D. 44 (**Acts 12:2**). He is therefore to be distinguished from the James who wrote the epistle of that name and who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem after Peter’s departure.

“*John*” in Hebrew means **the Lord is gracious**. He was James’s brother. Like Peter and James, he formed part of the inner circle of the three disciples closest to Jesus (see comments under **4:21–22**). The Fourth Gospel, three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation are all attributed to him, the last of these while he was exiled for his faith on the island of Patmos, probably under the emperor Domitian in the mid-90s. Strong, early church tradition associates his ministry with Ephesus, combating the Gnostic teacher Cerinthus. Reasonably strong, though sometimes conflicting tradition maintains that he was the only one of the Twelve not to die a martyr’s death for his faith. He would thus have lived to quite an old age—at least into his eighties or nineties.

3. (:3a) Philip and Bartholomew

“Philip and Bartholomew;”

D. A. Carson: **Philip**. Like Peter and Andrew, Philip’s home was Bethsaida (**Jn 1:44**). He too left the Baptist to follow Jesus. For incidents about him, see **John 6:5–7; 12:21–22; 14:8–14**. In the lists he invariably appears first in the second group of four. Polycrates, a second-century bishop, says Philip ministered in the Roman province of Asia and was buried at Hierapolis.

Bartholomew. The name means “*son of Tolmai*” or “*son of Tholami*” (cf. Jos 15:14 LXX) or “*son of Tholomaeus*” (cf. Josephus, Ant. 20.5 [1.1]). Many have identified him with Nathanael on the grounds that

- (1) the latter is apparently associated with the Twelve (**Jn 21:2**; cf. **1:43–51**),
- (2) Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus (**Jn 1:43–46**), and
- (3) Philip and Bartholomew are always associated in the lists of apostles.

The evidence is not strong, but if it is solid, we also know he came from Cana (**Jn 21:2**). He is remembered for Jesus’ tribute to him (**Jn 1:47**).

Craig Blomberg: “*Philip*” comes from the Greek for **horse lover**. With Simon and Andrew, he was one of Jesus’ earliest disciples. He too was from Bethsaida (**John 1:43–48**) and is to be distinguished from Philip the “*deacon*” of **Acts 6:5** and **8:26–40**.

“*Bartholomew*” comes from the Hebrew for **son of Talmi**. Probably he is the same person as **Nathanael**, Philip’s companion in **John 1:45–49**. His home would then have been Cana (**John 21:2**). Matthew likewise groups Philip and Bartholomew together.

4. (:3b) Thomas and Matthew

“*Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer*;”

D. A. Carson: Thomas. Also named “*Didymus*” (**Jn 11:16**; **21:2**), which in Aramaic means “Twin,” Thomas appears in gospel narratives only in **John 11:16**; **14:5**; **20:24–29**. Known for his doubt, he should also be known for his courage (**Jn 11:16**) and his profound confession (**Jn 20:28**). Some traditions claim he went to India as a missionary and was martyred there; others place his later ministry in Persia.

5. (:3c) James and Thaddaeus

“*James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus*;”

Craig Blomberg: James, son of Alphaeus, is also called *ho mikros* in **Mark 15:40** (**the small one** or “*the younger*”), presumably to distinguish him in age or size from James, son of Zebedee. Little else is known for sure about him.

Thaddaeus is also called Lebbaeus in some textual variants and Judas son of James in Luke 6:16. The first two are probably nicknames of devotion or endearment, coming from the Hebrew *taday* (*breast*) and *leb* (*heart*).

6. (:4) Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot

“*Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him*.”

R. T. France: Judas’ betrayal of Jesus will be fully narrated later (**26:14–16**, **21–25**, **47–50**; **27:3–10**); here it is mentioned only because it is the one thing about him every Christian would remember. He comes, appropriately, at the end of all the gospel lists (just as Peter comes first in all of them)—and is of course absent from the list in **Acts 1:13**. His second name, “*Iscariot*,” is usually included, partly to distinguish him from the other Judas of **John 14:22**, but also because his notoriety made his full name familiar. Many derivations of “*Iscariot*” have been proposed, including the suggestion that it is a corruption of *sicarios*, a member of the most notorious of the revolutionary groups (which would make for an interesting collocation with Simon the “*zealot*”), but perhaps more likely is the traditional notion that it derives from ’iš-qerîyôt, “man of

Kerioth;” if so, this raises the interesting possibility that Judas was the one non-Galilean among the Twelve, since the only two towns called Kerioth that we know of are in Moab and in southern Judea. But that too is speculation, and since Hebrew *qiryâ* (“town”) occurs in several other place names it cannot be relied on.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you moved to **compassion** as you contemplate the plight of the unreached and the magnitude of the task of reaching the harvest?
- 2) Do you find that the church emphasizes **prayer** that the Lord initiate the calling and sending of gospel workers or does the church rely more on emotional pleas for people to volunteer for service?
- 3) What do you find **ordinary** and what do you find **extraordinary** about this collection of twelve apostles?
- 4) Why did Jesus send out the apostles in **teams of two**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Gardner: Matthew’s purpose in this composition is basically twofold. At one level he is writing as the narrator of a story of God’s faithfulness to Israel. Jesus’ mission is first and foremost a **mission to Israel** (cf. **Rom. 1:16**), and that task must be completed before the mission can be broadened. So it is that twelve disciples are chosen and sent out, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel in earlier days. Thus also, until a greater commission is given later (cf. **28:19**), these twelve will restrict their work to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

At another level Matthew is writing as the member of a community that is itself called to mission. Although the words limiting mission to Israel no longer apply, **the church inherits the commission Jesus gives to the twelve**. It represents Jesus in the world, faces rejection and persecution, and needs encouragement for its task. Accordingly, **Matthew 10** includes sayings on Christian witness before Gentile rulers. And everything that Jesus says to warn and strengthen the twelve warns and strengthens their successors. . .

The emphasis in the text before us is not on apostolic stability but **apostolic mobility**! To be a follower of Jesus is to be **sent out** as a representative of Jesus. . . In keeping with this emphasis, Christian movements stressing faithful discipleship have frequently assigned high priority to **mission** and **evangelism**. Such was the case with a number of groups in the left wing of the Reformation, including the early Anabaptists, Quakers, and Pietists (cf. **Durnbaugh**, 1968:226-241). For us, the commissioning of the twelve is a reminder that our own calling as disciples cannot be a closet affair. Whatever form our sending may take, we are called to be part of a centrifugal community, **moving outward as Christ’s witnesses** and demonstrating his power in the world.

Daniel Doriani: Christian leaders must perennially consider **how to motivate people to kingdom service**. One day I was speaking to some church leaders on this very topic. I said we should never seek to motivate people to serve Jesus through guilt. We should not say, “If you don’t go, if you won’t serve, no one will. If you don’t volunteer as an usher, as a bus driver, a nursery worker, we may have to close the ministry down.” We should not say, “If you don’t share the gospel with family, friends, and neighbors, no one will. If you don’t, they will call your name on the last day, as they plunge to eternal doom, crying, ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’” As I finished my point, someone from the front row blurted out a question: “Don’t motivate by guilt? What else is there?” Immediately, a voice came from the back of the room, “Fear!”

Jesus uses neither guilt nor fear. He motivates three ways:

1. He describes the situation: the flock of God is torn and thrown down (**9:36**).
2. He asks God to send laborers out into his harvest (**9:37–38**).
3. He calls disciples and grants them authority to act on his behalf.

Jesus described, then prayed, then acted. Luke says Jesus prayed all night the day before he called the twelve disciples (**Luke 6:12**). There were more than twelve candidates. Others had known Jesus and witnessed his work from the beginning (**Acts 1:21–23**). The process of prayer led some to seek the Lord even as he sought them. After he prayed, “*He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness*” (Matt. 10:1).

He gave them **authority**. Authority is rightful power, the power that is justified by a public position bestowed on those who have the right experience and character for it. Jesus granted the disciples experience, godliness, and an official position so they had the right to act, to lead, on his behalf.

Stanley Saunders: **Mission** emerges from Jesus’ authoritative call, from the perception of need, and from prayer for God to send forth workers for the mission. The mission is also rooted in the perception that the time for harvest has arrived, the eschatological time and space embodied already in Jesus’ own ministry. The disciples’ mission clearly continues Jesus’ own, manifesting the same powers to heal and to cast out demonic powers, as well as to teach and proclaim the good news. For congregations at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the sense of God’s eschatological presence and power may have grown dim or dull. Are we “seeing” the crowds, as Jesus did? Are we praying for discernment of God’s call and power? Have we lost touch with the reality of God’s presence and power in our midst? Do we embody the kind of diversity present among Jesus’ own disciples?

Here, as throughout the Gospel, Matthew carefully juxtaposes and interweaves images of God’s **mercy** and God’s judgment. How do we make sense of the singular image of Jesus as both merciful shepherd and eschatological judge? How does the church itself continue faithfully to embody this dual identity and calling? What kind of leadership—what kind of church—is required in order to realize at once both mercy and judgment? Another way to ask this question is to focus on the **nature of Jesus’ own leadership**, especially his embodiment of what it means to be “king,” which stands in marked contrast to the kind of leadership provided by the Roman and Jewish authorities of his day. The leadership patterns we take for granted in our day, even in the church, also stand in contrast to the kind of power—and its effects—that Jesus demonstrates and here shares with his disciples. How do we best nurture “disciple” leaders for God’s empire

and mission? How do such leaders faithfully demonstrate God's mercy for the "harassed" and "tormented" while also announcing God's judgment against those who wield self-serving power, in their own interests?

J. Ligon Duncan: The Lord Jesus never sends anyone into the field of ministry that He does not first, in some measure, **equip** and **prepare** for that ministry, and it is one of the tragedies of the church today, that so many are sent into the fields of labor with no preparation, tangible or experiential. The Lord prepares these men in two ways.

1. First, by taking them to be with Him,
2. and secondly, by teaching them.

There were many who heard the Lord Jesus' teaching, and these men heard that public teaching as well, but the Lord Jesus also offered them private opportunities for teaching. He taught them, they learned from Him. Before you can be a teacher, you first have to sit at the feet of a master. Before you can be a teacher, you first must be a learner. And so these men had learned at the feet of the Master. But more important than the teaching, even, was the very presence that they had with Christ, the fellowship they had with Christ. **Matthew Henry** once said, "The best preparation for the work of the ministry, is acquaintance and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ." Later, in the Gospel of John, people would say of these men, "*They perceived that these men had been with Jesus.*" What greater compliment could be given to ministers of the word, that people perceive that they had been with Jesus. . .

Jesus vested His apostles with His own authority

He transfers that power to His representatives and tells them to minister in that power, and it was so vital that He give them that kind of authority and power. There are many reasons, but three of them immediately come to mind why it was so vital that the Lord Jesus give these disciples this power.

First of all, these disciples were called to bear witness to a message that was going to be very hard for Israel to swallow.

There's another reason why it was so vital for the Lord to give them this authority. These men lacked earthly credentials.

There's a third reason why they needed this power from the Lord Jesus Christ, this authority, because the establishment of God's kingdom always entails the destruction of Satan's kingdom. When the kingdom of God is built up, correspondingly the kingdom of Satan must be torn down. In their manifestation of miracles, and in the casting out of demons and in the healing of sicknesses, these men manifested the kingdom of God has come with power, and that the kingdom of Satan and the results of the Fall are going to be defeated and reversed. The establishment of Christ's kingdom means the tearing down of Satan's kingdom, and so their power, given to them by Christ, is leveled against Satan himself. In all these ways, we see the reasons why Christ gave them **power** and **authority**.

TEXT: Matthew 10:5-15

TITLE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE JEWISH PRIORITIZED MISSION

BIG IDEA:

FAITHFULNESS TO THE PATTERN OF CHRIST, DEPENDENCE ON GOD AND PROPER RESPONSE TO REJECTION OR RECEPTION MUST CHARACTERIZE EVANGELICAL MISSIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Gardner: The instruction of the disciples that begins in **10:5** and continues through **10:42** makes up the second of the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew. Linked as it is to the sending out of the twelve, it is frequently called the **mission discourse**. The first part of this discourse contains Jesus' charge to the twelve and describes their mission (**10:5-15**). In the sayings that follow (**10:16-42**), Jesus offers counsel on the opposition his messengers will encounter, underscoring the cost (and reward) of discipleship.

Outline:

1. Restricted to Israel, **10:5-6**
2. Rules for the Road, **10:7-10**
3. Reception and Rejection, **10:11-15**

R. T. France: The pericope covers three aspects of their mission:

1. to whom they are to go (vv. **5-6**);
2. the nature of their mission in both word and deed (vv. **7-8**);
3. and how they are to be fed and housed (vv. **9-15**, developing the principle of v. **8b**, "*Give without cost*").

The last section, which raises the possibility of rejection as well as a hospitable welcome, leads naturally into the consideration of hostility to Jesus' messengers which will follow in vv. **16-39**.

Stanley Saunders: Jesus' preparation of his disciples for mission now focuses on the recipients, the content, and the manner of engagement. The mission is not to "*go out into the way of the nations*" (or "*Gentiles*"), nor to any city of the Samaritans (**10:5**). At the end of the Gospel the call to go to the nations (**28:18-20**) will supercede the mission that is here so carefully limited. The focus on "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" corresponds with Jesus' identity as the one who "*will save his people from their sins*" (**1:21**). Popular Jewish expectation for the last days anticipated the restoration of Israel prior to the gathering of the nations. Matthew's presentation of Jesus' mission here follows that scenario: first Israel will be restored, then the nations (Gentiles) will gather. At this stage in the Gospel, the mission of Jesus and his disciples is clearly focused on the realization of God's faithfulness to the "*house of Israel*," the "*lost sheep*."

The disciples' primary task is to proclaim and demonstrate that God's empire has drawn near (**10:7-8**; cf. **3:2**; **4:17**). The kingdom's proximity is sometimes given a primarily temporal cast, as if the hour of its coming is near, but it is not yet present. Jesus may, rather, be saying that the empire of the heavens is spatially within grasp of the audience, having already drawn near (past tense, suggesting something already accomplished), alongside the disciples and those to whom they will preach, jostling with and displacing the reality they have known. The four imperatives

that follow in quick succession—heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons—link the disciples’ mission with that of Jesus (4:23–24; 8:1–4; 8:16; 8:28–34; 9:32–34). The power he has demonstrated so far, even power to raise the dead, is also available to the disciples.

The disciples should pursue their mission expecting nothing in return except hospitality (10:8b, 11). Like laborers, the disciples deserve to be fed (10:10), but they will be dependent on others for sustenance. . . . Their mission is to be conducted in **complete dependence on God** to provide them with security, food, and other needs for each day. This lifestyle is an integral element of their proclamation of God’s faithfulness (cf. **Matt. 6:25–34**). The means and message of the kingdom are one. The disciples’ poverty, defenselessness, and utter dependence on God are “prophetic-symbolic actions,” enactments of the empire of heaven that challenge the existing order, point toward God’s power and presence, and subvert the presuppositions and values associated with imperial systems of power.

I. (:5-10) INSTRUCTIONS ON PERFORMING THE MISSION AFTER THE PATTERN OF CHRIST

“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying,”

A. (:5-6) Target Jews

1. (:5) Not Gentiles or Samaritans

a. Not Gentiles

“Do not go in the way of the Gentiles,”

b. Not Samaritans

“and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;”

John Nolland: The separate mention of the Samaritans has no independent significance: these people considered to be of doubtful Israelite extraction are introduced only as a way of insisting with considerable tightness of definition on a restriction of mission to ethnic Israel.

John Broadus: SAMARIA was the district lying between Judea and Galilee. The dislike between the Jews and the Samaritans had its beginnings as far back as the earliest times of Israel in the jealousy existing between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim, which finally led to the division into two kingdoms. When the people of the Northern Kingdom (who came to be called Samaritans from the capital city, Samaria, **1 Kings 16:24**), were carried into captivity by the Assyrians, the country was partly occupied by Mesopotamian colonists, who were idolaters. These gradually coalesced with the dregs of the Israelites who had been left in the land, and with the fugitives who returned from surrounding countries, into a half-heathen nation, attempting to unite idolatry with the worship of Jehovah. When the people of the Southern Kingdom, the Jews, returned from their captivity in Babylon, and undertook to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, the Samaritans proffered to help them; and being repulsed, as not of pure Israelitish descent, they then did all in their power to hinder the building of the temple, and the fortification of the city. A brother of the Jewish high-priest, having married a Samaritan woman, and being unwilling to put her away as required, went over to the Samaritans, and was made priest in a temple built for him on Mount Gerizim (Jos. “Ant.,” 11, 8, 2), which the Samaritans from that time began to contend was the proper place for the worship of Jehovah, rather than Jerusalem. (**John 4:20.**) These causes naturally led to bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans, and they were constantly attempting

to injure and insult each other, while under the dominion of the Greek kings of Syria. John Hyrcanus conquered the Samaritans, destroying their temple and capital (about B. C. 125). Pompey established their independence (B. C. 63). At the time of our Lord's public ministry, Judea and Samaria were governed by the same Roman procurator, but as distinct administrative districts; and the hatred between the two nations, cherished through centuries, and combining all the elements of race jealousy, religious rivalry, political hostility, and numerous old grudges, had become so intense that the world has probably never seen its parallel. The theory of some writers that the Samaritans were of purely heathen origin, would suppose that the entire population of the Northern people was deported by the Assyrians—a thing extremely improbable; would render the frequent claim of the Samaritans to be Jews an absurdity; and would make it difficult to account for the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Samaritan expectation of Messiah. For the Samaritans, like the Jews, expected the Messiah (**John 4:25, 29**), and something like a year before this mission of the Twelve our Lord's preaching among them at Sychar was warmly received, and many believed on him. (**John 4:39–42**.) Some time after this mission he also went twice through Samaria, and spoke and acted kindly towards them. (**Luke 9:51 ff.; 17:11 ff.**) Why, then, might not the Twelve go into their cities? It is enough to reply that the Twelve had not then such feelings towards that people as would qualify them to do good there. The proposal of James and John to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village (**Luke 9:52 ff.**) shows that there would have been bitter controversies, with the old national hate ever ready to burst out (Comp. **Bruce**, "Training of the Twelve.") In **Acts 1:8**, Samaria is expressly included in the field of their appointed labors after the ascension. (Comp. **Acts 8:5**.)

2. (:6) Lost Jews

"but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Grant Osborne: The sent disciples are not to follow the road north or east to the Gentile areas, nor are they to go south to the land of the Samaritans. So on this mission they are restricted to Galilee and to the Jewish people there.

D. A. Carson: The most important consideration, however, was not pragmatic but **theological**. Jesus stood at the nexus in salvation history where as a Jew and the Son of David he came in fulfillment of his people's history as **their King and Redeemer**. Yet his personal claims would offend so many of his own people that he would be rejected by all but a faithful remnant. Why increase their opposition by devoting time to Gentile ministry? His mission, as predicted, was worldwide in its ultimate aims (see comments at **1:1; 2:1; 3:9–10; 4:15–16; 5:13–16; 8:1–13; 10:18; 21:43; 24:14; 28:16–20**), and all along he had warned that being a Jew was not enough. But his own people must not be excluded because premature offense could be taken at such broad perspectives. Therefore, Jesus restricted his own ministry primarily (**15:24**), though not exclusively (**8:1–13; 15:21–39**), to Jews. He himself was sent as **their Messiah**. The messianic people of God developed out of the Jewish remnant and expanded to include Gentiles. The restriction of **vv.5–6**, therefore, depends on a particular understanding of salvation history (cf. **Meier**, *Law and History*, 27–30) that ultimately goes back to Jesus. Paul well understood that both salvation and judgment were for the Jew first, then for the Gentile (**Ro 1:16**), and this conviction governed his own early missionary efforts (e.g., **Ac 13:5, 44–48; 14:1**).

B. (:7-8) Testify to the Coming Kingdom

1. (:7) Ministry of Authoritative Preaching

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Richard Gardner: They go as **representatives of the Messiah**. Verses 7–8 carefully repeat both the message and the activity of Jesus as we have been told of them in **chapters 5–9**; the disciples are to say and do what he has already said and done. At the end of the discourse (**vv. 40–42**) it will be made clear that how people respond to them reveals also their response to Jesus the Messiah. That is why the welcome or lack of it which they will encounter in the villages of Galilee is so strongly emphasized in **vv. 11–15**; the villagers will be welcoming or rejecting their Messiah. The “*peace*” which will rest on the “*worthy*” is not just a social formality, but a real mark of God’s blessing or judgment. This is a moment of spiritual decision, however little some of the people of Galilee may yet recognize it as such.

Charles Swindoll: We shouldn’t be surprised that the essence of their message was the same as Jesus’ —“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This was probably shorthand for a fuller message similar to what Jesus had been teaching in greater detail, perhaps including the call to repent in anticipation of the coming messianic age and to respond with water baptism (see **John 3:22; 4:1**). The disciples were to present a true extension of Jesus’ own preaching ministry, repeating His message and not coming up with their own.

John Nolland: The nearness of the kingdom of heaven will become visible in the accompanying acts which manifest the powers of the kingdom of heaven.

Grant Osborne: As stated in those passages, this meant that the longed-for final kingdom of God (for “*kingdom of heaven*,” see on **3:2**) is both imminent and has indeed arrived in Jesus. In Jesus, God’s future kingdom is already active and present in this world. Gnilyka says it well: their preaching concerned “the universal, worldwide liberating and saving reign that comes from God to us, a rule that is in its essence and in its completion a reality of the future, indeed the future itself, but a reign that can already be experienced in the present as it is proclaimed and pronounced.”

2. (:8a) Ministry of Confirmatory Healing

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons;”

Charles Swindoll: By virtue of His own divine authority, Jesus gave them power to do the kinds of miracles that He had been doing up until that point. They were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons —freely, without the thought of charging for their miraculous acts of mercy. These signs and wonders would be proof that their message was true —the kingdom of the Messiah was imminent!

3. (:8b) Ministry Performed without Financial Compensation

“freely you received, freely give.”

Richard Gardner: Paul makes a point of not having charged for his missionary labors (*dōrean*, **2 Cor 11:7**), in contrast with the common practice of itinerant philosophers and teachers who expected not just board and lodging but fees as well; Paul himself refused even free board (*dōrean*, **2 Thess 3:8**; cf **1 Cor 9:3–18**). So Jesus’ disciples, having received the message of the kingdom of God “*free of charge*” through Jesus himself, are to offer their services in both teaching and healing **without expecting any material reward**. The following verses show, however, that unlike Paul they are to accept board and lodging, since they are to take no money with them to pay for it, and “the worker earns his keep.”

D. A. Carson: Jesus expected the Twelve to be supported by those to whom they were to minister (cf. **vv.9–13; 1Co 9:14**), but they needed to understand that what they had received—the good news of the kingdom, Jesus’ authority, and this commission—they had received “*freely*” (not “in large bounty”—though that was true—but gratis). Therefore it would have been mercenary to charge others (NEB: “*You have received without cost; give without charge*”; cf. Did. 11–13; Pirke Avot 1:13). The **danger of profiteering** is still among us (cf. **Mic 3:11**).

Grant Osborne: The disciples were not to profit from their ministry but use it the same way Jesus did—to help others. Salvation is a free gift of grace; ministry should reflect the same selfless concerns. This is a principle that deserves more discussion among Christian leaders today. Perhaps it is so convicting that the only alternative is to act as if Jesus never said it.

C. (:9-10) Travel Lightly

1. (:9-10a) Reject Security – Total Reliance on God

*“Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts,
10 or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff;”*

Bruce Hurt: Did Jesus command that the disciples take a staff or not?

PROBLEM: In Matthew, Jesus seems to say that the disciples should not take a staff, but in Mark it appears that He allows them to have one.

SOLUTION: A closer examination reveals that the account in Mark (**6:8**) declares that the disciples are to take nothing except a staff, which a traveler would normally have. Whereas the account in Matthew states that they are not to acquire another staff. There is no discrepancy between these texts. Mark’s account is saying that they may take the staff that they have, while Matthew is saying that they should not take an extra staff or tunic. The text reads “*Provide neither ... two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs*” (plural: **vv. 9–10**). It does not say that they should not take a staff (singular). So there is no contradiction.

2. (:10b) Expect Provision from the Lord

“for the worker is worthy of his support.”

Van Parunak: *for the workman is worthy of his meat.*—Paul quotes Luke’s version (**10:7**) of this saying as “*scripture*” in **1 Tim 5:18**, giving evidence for the early existence of the gospels.

The word “*for*” is important. The Lord tells them not to make extensive provision for their trip, because the one for whom they work will provide for them. **The question is: for who are they working?**

It is commonly supposed (e.g., **Gill**’s comment on this verse) that this verse addresses the responsibility of those who receive ministry to pay for it. But this sense would be in tension with **v. 8**, “*Freely ye have received, freely give*”. **More likely he is reminding them who their true master is.** Those who are worthy workmen for the Lord need not fear for his provision. They need not be preoccupied about their purse, or their store of food. **They know that he will provide.** Conversely, those who insist on elaborate logistical preparations for their ministry are showing that they do not really trust in the Lord. The restrictions he imposes force them to rely on the Lord, and filter out those who would seek to minister, not out of devotion and obedience to him, but to advance themselves.

D. A. Carson: What is clear is that the Twelve must travel unencumbered, relying on hospitality and God's providence. The details ensure that the instructions were for that mission alone (cf. **Lk 22:35–38**) and confirm Matthew's consciousness of the historicity of this part of the discourse.

Grant Osborne: The point seems to be that they are to depend on God through the hospitality of others. Rather than earning a wage, they accept hospitality and so express full dependence on God. Their trust must be in God, and their purpose must not be worldly profit but heavenly reward (**6:19–21**).

Donald Hagner: Subsistence, but not profit, was the rightful expectation of those who preached the gospel (cf. **1 Cor 9:18**), a point that needs reemphasis for some mass-media evangelists of the late twentieth century for whom preaching the gospel has become a business (cf. **1 Tim 6:6–10; Titus 1:11; 1 Pet 5:2**).

II. (:11-15) INSTRUCTIONS ON SEEKING HOSPITALITY AND RESPONDING TO RECEPTION OR REJECTION

Richard Gardner: Building on the final phrase in **verse 10**, **verses 11–15** focus on the issue of **hospitality**. Hospitality to visitors was an important part of Semitic culture, all the more so when visitors came as messengers from God (cf. **Gen. 18:1–15; Heb. 13:2**). The worthy home that Jesus' messenger is urged to seek out, then, is a receptive home, one ready to hear the word of the kingdom and offer hospitality.

Finding such a home, the messenger is to greet it, to proclaim God's blessing of peace upon it (cf. **Luke 10:5**). The greeting reflects the Hebrew *shalom*, which here signifies the peace of the kingdom, the wholeness of life that comes with God's reign. So closely is God identified with this word of peace that blessing occurs as blessing is pronounced (cf. **Isa. 55:11**), though only where it is welcomed.

If rejected, the blessing returns to Jesus' messenger, who must then communicate a message of judgment. The graphic act by which this is done is shaking the dust from one's feet as one leaves (cf. **Acts 13:51**), a gesture saying in effect that God is abandoning this house or town. Such a town, Jesus says, is in a worse position than Sodom or Gomorrah, cities that epitomized evil and judgment (cf. **Isa. 1:9–10; Jer. 23:14; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7**). Behind this unfavorable comparison lies the inhospitable behavior of Sodom toward the messengers who visited Lot in **Genesis 19:1–11**. As **John Meier** puts it: "Sodom and Gomorrah showed disrespect to the angels, the Old Testament messengers of Yahweh; worse still is the disrespect shown to the apostles, the New Testament messengers of Christ" (1980:108).

A. (:11) Seek Optimal Hospitality (Room and Board)

"And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away."

Craig Blomberg: The disciples must remain with such worthy people to avoid accusations of favoritism or the jealousies of competition among potential hosts.

B. (:12-13) Strategically Extend or Retract Your Greeting

1. (:12) Unconditional Initial Extension of Greeting

“And as you enter the house, give it your greeting.”

2. (:13) Conditional Continuation of the Greeting

a. Situation Where the House Is Found Worthy

“And if the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it;”

John MacArthur: The implication is that truly receptive listeners were to be ministered to in the fullest way. Their open hearts to the Lord's work earned them God's richest blessing. *“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet,”* Jesus explained a short while later, *“shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward”* **Matt. 10:41.**

b. Situation Where the House Is Found Unworthy

“but if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you.”

C. (:14-15) Symbolically Prophecy Judgment against Opponents

1. (:14) Depart and Shake the Dust Off Your Feet

“And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.”

D. A. Carson: What was true for the home applied equally to the **town**. A pious Jew, on leaving Gentile territory, might remove from his feet and clothes all the dust of the pagan land now being left behind (Str-B, 1:571), thus dissociating himself from the pollution of those lands and the judgment in store for them. For the disciples to do this to Jewish homes and towns would be a symbolic way of saying that the emissaries of Messiah now view those places as pagan, polluted, and liable to judgment (cf. **Ac 13:51; 18:6**). The actions, while outrageously shocking, accord with **8:11–12; 11:20–24**.

Grant Osborne: Note that the response is twofold: rejection and refusal to listen. There is the welcome into the home and there is the openness to the message; it is these that define the “worthy” individual. The response of the rejected missionary is also twofold: leave that place and shake the dust off the feet. Both are prophetic parables of rejection in turn. When Jesus “withdrew” from a place, it often was a sign that God had rejected them (**15:21; 19:1**).

2. (:15) Degrees of Punishment

“Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

Donald Hagner: In a **judgment oracle** strengthened by ἀμήν, “*verily, truly,*” Jesus asserts that the culpability of those who reject the gospel of the kingdom will be greater on the day of judgment than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious, and the cities suffered destruction for their sins (**Gen 19:24–28**). Accordingly they became symbolic of catastrophic judgment (see **Rom 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7**). ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως, “*in the day of judgment,*” refers to the day of eschatological judgment (cf. the same phrase in **11:22, 24; 12:36**). The final penalty will be greater for those who have refused the gospel. The same analogy, but mentioning Sodom only, is made later in reference to the unbelief of Capernaum (**11:23–24**). The gravity of refusing the message and mission of Jesus could hardly be made more emphatic.

Bruce Hurt: Jesus is clearly teaching that there will be **degrees of punishment** in Gehenna (Lake of fire, Hell, but not "*hades*") even as He teaches there are greater rewards in heaven (**Rev 22:12**). In other words Hell will be more horrible and "hotter" (in some way) for some than others! **Sodom and Gomorrah** were indescribably wicked (**Jude 1:7**) and yet less overtly evil cities of Israel would be more culpable because they rejected greater light of the Gospel presented by the Savior Himself! The principle is **rejection of greater spiritual light results in greater eternal punishment!** The writer of Hebrews rightly says "*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" (**Heb 10:31+**)

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Matthew choose to break out the Samaritan group separately?
- 2) What value are these instructions to us today – given that they applied to a very specific temporal mission?
- 3) What is the justification for treating a town in a certain way based on the reaction to the gospel from a smaller select group?
- 4) What principles inform our perspective on what type of financial remuneration a Christian minister should expect to receive?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: From Jesus' instructions throughout **Matthew 10**, we learn some **important principles** we can apply to our own callings and ministries today. However, not everything Jesus said to His disciples applies to us. Two significant differences between the first-century context of the original disciples and our twenty-first-century context need to be underscored.

First, those original disciples had **unique apostolic authority (10:1)**. Jesus gave them special power over unclean spirits and the ability to heal diseases, to raise the dead, and to cleanse lepers (**10:8**). The Gospel of Luke tells us that at the same time Jesus also extended this same kind of authority to seventy others (**Luke 10:1-20**). The apostle Paul indicated that he was the "*last*" and "*least*" of the apostles (**1 Cor. 15:8-9**), given special authority to perform "*the signs of a true apostle . . . by signs and wonders and miracles*" (**2 Cor. 12:12**).

Second, the mission of those original disciples had a **unique scope**. They were given a temporary itinerant ministry specifically and exclusively to Jews, not to Samaritans or Gentiles (**Matt. 10:5-6**). The itinerant nature and limited scope of their mission thus involved elements that appear extreme to us today. They went out with nothing —no planning, no preparation, no supplies, no money (**10:9-10**). But after Jesus' death and resurrection, the scope of the mission changed for the disciples. Immediately prior to His ascension, Jesus said, "*You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

So, although we can gain some principles from Jesus' instructions to those original, first-century disciples, we need to recognize that He wasn't speaking directly to us. We must carefully think through the implications and applications of this passage for our twenty-first-century context. . .

How do we apply the very specific sending in **Matthew 10** to our own twenty-first-century context?

First, remember that we have similar motives and methods. Like Jesus and the disciples, we are to be moved by compassion for the lost and to pray to the Lord of the harvest (**9:36-38**). At the same time, we need to recognize that, like the disciples, we may become the answers to those prayers. When we realize this, we get motivated to step out and reach out to others.

Second, remember that the reaping of the harvest is done by all believers. There are those who are called to be "goers" and those who are called to be "givers" The goers need the givers. If you're not called to be one of the workers of the field in the form of vocational Christian service, then you can give of your resources, just like those unnamed supporters of the disciples' ministry who contributed to the cause (**10:9-12**).

Third, remember what we're to model – the character and commitment of Christ. We need to reflect His authenticity, simplicity, and integrity. We're to be real, not phony – free from hypocrisy, suffering hardship without complaining, and serving with pure motives. That's authenticity. Beyond this, we should live simple lives. We shouldn't engage in ministry for the money or the fame or the pride. We shouldn't pursue an agenda. Finally, we should be men and women of integrity as we're going and serving. Trustworthiness, unselfishness, morality and ethics – these are the things of integrity.

May we be moved by compassion to pray that the Lord will send people into the harvest. May we constantly seek His will for how He wants us to be involved in the project – either as a goer or a giver. And may we always emulate Jesus in authenticity, simplicity, and integrity in everything we do for the advancement of His kingdom.

Daniel Doriani: The principle is that **we should organize ministry in the best way to advance the gospel**. If a task or journey is short and relatively safe, we should not plan long at all. Jesus' word is "Trust God and get going." But if a journey is long and dangerous, we take money, supplies, a staff, even a sword.

The pattern of Paul's ministry verifies this principle. Paul generally supported himself as he traveled and preached. He made and sold tents part of the day; he taught and preached the rest of the day. In this way, he avoided the impression that he preached for personal gain. But he insisted that the apostles and other ministers had the right to be paid for their work: "*Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel*" (**1 Cor. 9:14**). Sometimes Paul did accept money—when he was in jail, for example (**Phil. 4:10-19**). These gifts gave him a modicum of peace, even in prison, and gave him freedom to continue his ministry by writing letters. Paul would use any legitimate method if it advanced the gospel.

Taking money grants freedom to minister full-time. It also makes the preacher accountable to his supporters. Refusing money grants independence and avoids any doubts about the preacher's motives. Each method is legitimate. Each has advantages and weaknesses. Those who receive

payment may lose their boldness and tailor their message to suit their benefactors. Those who take nothing may shun accountability and become too independent. **Paul uses whatever advances the mission.** The principle remains: we organize ministry in the way that will best advance the gospel.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Ambassadors of the Kingdom, Go and Preach

In **Matthew 10:5-15**, Christ gives explicit instructions to His disciples about this specific mission on which He is about to send them. I want to remind you that this is not the same commission that He gives to them when He sends them out into the world. Their work here will have to do specifically with bearing witness to Israel and will specifically be contained over a short period of time. The Lord Jesus' instructions have some particulars in them that are very specific for the situation. **They are not universally transferable.** There are instructions here that are not to be applied to every missionary that has ever gone out. This is not a prohibition, for instance, about missionaries raising support. Jesus' words cannot be interpreted that way. He's speaking to a specific situation. There is no universal prohibition on missionaries taking a little extra clothing with them when they go to the mission field, even though the Lord Jesus makes the most Spartan restrictions upon His own disciples here. And remembering that will keep us from misapplying the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even though there are some things that are specific for the apostles as He sent them out in this first mission, **there are many principles in this passage that are equally applicable to us today.** There is much that we learn about the kingdom of heaven and our service in it from this passage, and I'd like to direct your attention to a few of those things.

I. The Messiah has come in search of His lost sheep! (:5-6)

The Messiah came for the sake of establishing the remnant of Israel in righteousness. The promises of God had been given in the Old Testament to Abraham and His descendants. The children of Israel had strayed. They had been sent into exile, and in the midst of their misery God through the prophets promised them that one day He would send a Messiah to them who would call them back to God, who would reunite them in faith and in fellowship with the living God and the Lord Jesus Christ by sending His disciples out to the Jewish people of Judea is fulfilling the promises of God in the Old Testament to Israel. It will not be all Israel who will respond to these disciples as they preach the gospel of the kingdom. The Lord Jesus is aware of that. That's why in **verses 11-15** of this passage, He makes it clear that they are going to be some who reject the message and there are going to be some who accept the message. But it will be to those lost sheep of the house of Israel that the disciples will be sent.

And there are at least two good reasons why Jesus' ministry would be done this way. One of them is theological and the other is practical. It's nice how those go together. The **theological reason** is because God had made His covenant of grace and His promises to Abraham to the descendants of Abraham and so the Lord Jesus Christ sends His disciples to Israel because of the special place that Israel has in God's plan. Christ has a particular love and concern for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They are beloved as Paul says in **Romans 11:28**. For their Father's sake, because of the covenant which God has made with Abraham and because of that special role that Israel plays in the plan of God, God sends His apostles, the Lord Jesus sends His disciples to the Jews first.

There's a **practical reason** as well. We know from the gospels, especially Luke, that there were many godly people in Israel who were waiting for the Messiah to come. Simeon and Anna are just two examples of godly Jewish folk who believe the Old Testament and they were waiting for

the Messiah to come. What better place to send the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ in order to make the foundation for the Christian Church, which will break across national and ethnic lines, which will go to the ends of the earth. What better place to build a core group of followers of the Lord Jesus Christ than those who already embraced the word of God in the Old Testament and who already embraced the promises that the Messiah was coming. **And so the Lord Jesus Christ sends the disciples out first to the Jewish people. . .**

II. The Messiah's ministers go forth to bring good news (:7-8)

Note the difference in emphasis of that message. Compare that message to Jonah's message. Jonah goes to Nineveh, and what is his message: Ruin is near, but there is a chance of salvation if you'll repent. There is a different thrust in Jesus' message: Salvation is near. Do not be ruined by rejecting that salvation.

The positive thrust of the message of salvation preached by the disciples is apparent, and I would mention that this is the same message that was preached by John and it's the same message that was preached by the Lord Jesus at the beginning of His ministry which He is now giving to the disciples to preach. Good truth, good truth always ought to be repeated in preaching, because we need to be reminded of those truths that we have once learned before. And so the apostles go out preaching that message. They are sent out confirming that message with miracles to do good. They are sent out as public blessings to show the love and the goodness that are of the gospel and so they take that message out as a fulfillment of prophecy again. . .

III. The Messiah's ministers must learn to trust in Him (:9-10)

Notice also in verses nine and ten that we see the providence of God, that the disciples are to trust and the Messiah's ministers must learn to trust in Him in their mission. He says, "*Do not acquire gold or silver or copper coins for your money belts.*" The disciples are not to prepare in that way for this particular mission. They are not to take a bag for their journey or even two coats or sandals or a staff. The Lord Jesus Christ, because of the shortness of the journey, but probably more important because of the **urgency** of the mission that He is sending His disciples out on, tells them, 'Don't take time, don't encumber yourself with trying to collect all these other things. You just trust that the Lord will provide for you on this particular mission.' The disciples are told to **travel light**, and that forces them to trust in God's provision, and it forces them to trust in Jesus' promise that God would provide. And they learn a great lesson in that. . .

IV. The Messiah's minister's message is of eternal significance (:11-15)

And now He gives them the **procedures** that they are to follow in **verses 11-15**. And there He makes it clear that the message they are going to take to Israel is of **eternal significance**. . .

The disciples are called upon to display in this mission an extraordinary **balance of generosity and discernment**. They are to be generous in the sense that everywhere they go, if they are received, they are to pronounce their blessing on that place. They are to pronounce the peace of God upon those who receive them into their homes. But they are also to be discerning because those who reject their message are to be rejected. In fact, He tells them, 'You shake the dust off your feet.' That was a symbol from ancient Israel. When one was outside the land of Israel one was on Gentile territory, pagan land. And when you came back, before you came back into Israel, you shook the dust off your feet so that you would not bring pagan soil into the holy land. And the Lord Jesus is saying, "If someone rejects the message of the kingdom, you shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them, that you're not going to bring that pagan soil back into the holy land."

We must recognize the **gravity of the message** that Christ entrusted the disciples. It divides the world, doesn't it, into those who accept Him and those who reject Him.

Van Parunak: Who?

*Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6
But go rather to the lost sheep³ of the house of Israel.*

This command is **puzzling**. Later the Lord will tell them to “*make disciples of all nations*” (28:19). Even this chapter anticipates their testimony to the Gentiles:

Mat 10:18 *And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.*

How should we understand this constraint? Here are some approaches that have been taken. The question is important, because it determines whether we understand this chapter as relevant to us or not.

Temporal: some suggest that the restriction applies only during the Lord's earthly ministry. But the description of persecution in **vv. 16-23** does not apply to the disciples during the Lord's earthly ministry, and fits the book of Acts better.

Dispensational: some claim that the methods are appropriate to the life of Christ and again the tribulation, but not the church age. But:

- The apostles in fact follow the instructions of this chapter in Acts.
- Isaiah anticipates a Jewish outreach to the nations, not just to other Jews:

Isa 66:19 *And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.*

- Even in the tribulation, the ministry of the two witnesses (**Rev 11:10**) extends beyond Israel to “*them that dwelt on the earth.*”

Personal: The focus of the twelve is to be on the Jews. Others will take care of the Gentiles. There is some truth to this: God raised up Paul to lead the Gentile mission, while Peter focused on the Jews:

Gal 2:7 *the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; 8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)*

But the charge to go to “*all nations*” (28:19) was given to these men; Peter initiated the Gentile outreach with Cornelius; and there is a strong tradition that Thomas evangelized India.

Priority: The Lord's words describe the starting point of their ministry, but are not intended to

limit its development. At this point they are to focus on Jews, but it is clearly understood that he will later expand their scope. Thus understood, they are reflected in our Lord's command upon his ascension.

Act 1:8 *ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

They also may lie at the root of Paul's policy of going first to the Jew, and then to the Gentiles, in each town that he visits:

Rom 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

TEXT: Matthew 10:16-23

TITLE: PERSECUTION IN THE EVANGELISTIC MISSION – WOLVES, SHEEP, SNAKES & DOVES

BIG IDEA:

IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL EXPECT PERSECUTION THAT WILL INTENSIFY IN THE END TIMES (FROM WOLVES OF FALSE RELIGION, GOVERNMENT, FAMILY AND SOCIETY) – SO AS SHEEP BE SNAKES AND DOVES

INTRODUCTION:

Stanley Saunders: Jesus has earlier described the people of Israel as sheep without a shepherd (9:36; 10:6), but now it is the disciples of Jesus who are like sheep surrounded by wolves (10:16). For Jesus, “wolves” denotes primarily the leaders of Israel and the Gentiles (10:17–18), but in the time of mission even one’s family members may reveal lupine tendencies (10:21). Jesus’ advice to his disciple-sheep is paradoxical: they are to combine the cunning of serpents with the purity and innocence of doves. Subtlety, prudence, clear thinking, and practical wisdom here join with purity, vulnerability, and transparency. The goal is not merely to elude opposition, but to nurture faithful, creative, enduring witness in the face of inevitable opposition.

Grant Osborne: On their mission, which will begin with Israel but extend to the Gentile lands, the disciples should expect arrest, persecution, and even death. Yet their response must not be in kind; they are to be shrewdly “innocent” and trust the Lord to give them the proper response when hauled before the courts. Moreover, the entire mission of the church, from the Jewish mission of the disciples (v. 17) to the later Gentile mission of the church (v. 18), stems from the commissioning and sending of Jesus.

David Thompson: Disciples of Jesus Christ must exist in a hostile environment among those who are out to persecute them and harm them, and they must constantly be on guard concerning what they do and say.

Brian Evans: So, there is this **evil, satanic resistance to Jesus and His message** and our Lord tells His early disciples and us that He is sending His people right into the middle of that resistance.

Our Lord explains something else that is very important to see as we begin. The resistance and persecution does not take place because of social, economical, racial or any other reason no, the persecution Jesus tells us is *and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake*. You will be hated not because you’re a Steelers fan or live on the wrong side of the tracks, you will be hated because of Jesus. In that verse, Jesus gives us the scope of the hatred, doesn’t He? He tells us the truth when He declares all will hate us. Make no mistake when push comes to shove the lost hate Christians because of Jesus. We cannot believe otherwise. Jesus tells us the truth, the lost world hates believers. You can talk about anything under the sun but don’t mention Jesus because then there’s trouble. That’s how it works in this world. That’s how it’s always worked.

John MacArthur: There is a **telescoping effect**. If you look at **verse 23**, you will notice that it ends with the **coming of the Son of Man**. That is an **eschatological term** used by Matthew to refer to the return of Christ. And so, what He teaches her as immediate import for the Twelve as

they go out, such as the statement of **verse 6** in chapter 10, “*Go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” That is a very **dispensational statement** related to a very specific time in which they lived. But it begins from there to telescope, and it touches the time in which they will fully be sent, and it touches all of those who were ever sent by our Lord, even those who will be sent against the terrible opposition of the great tribulation prior to the return of Christ.

And so, what we see here is a span and a sweep of all of the history of God’s people, from Jesus the first time He came, to Jesus the second time He comes. He sees the Twelve on this first mission. But with His marvelous, omniscient, prophetic eye, He sees the Twelve again in their full mission. And then He sees all those who represent Him. And then He finally sees those who will be in the great holocaust known as the **great tribulation** and the **terrible opposition** they will face. . .

Very commonly, in the prophetic literature, predictions have an **immediate fulfillment** and a **future fulfillment**, and that is what our Lord is doing. He is predicting the role and the place of the apostles, and has in mind the ultimate sense that this will sweep clear through history to the time of the great tribulation.

Richard Gardner: Jesus’ witnesses should be shrewd enough to avoid their persecutors where possible (*wise as serpents*; cf. **v. 23a**). At the same time, they should live in such a way that their conduct testifies in their favor if they are apprehended (*innocent as doves*; cf. **Romans 16:19; 1 Peter 3:14-16**). As noted earlier, warning is coupled with encouragement in the sayings we find here. Jesus’ messengers are assured that judicial hearings provide an opportunity to bear witness (v. 18), that the Holy Spirit will guide them in their testimony (**vv. 19-20**), and that those who endure suffering now will enjoy salvation at the end (**v. 22**).

Walter Wilson: The body of the unit is comprised of two parallel sequences (**10:17–20, 21–23a**), in which Jesus warns the Twelve of the persecutions they will face (**10:17–18, 21–22**) and then instructs them about how to respond (**10:19–20, 23a**). As the concluding prediction implies (**10:23b**), these tribulations will end only with the *parousia*. Persecution, then, will be not only **unavoidable** but also **unending**. Introducing the segment is the sending announcement in **10:16**, which both corresponds functionally to the opening verses of the first unit (**10:5–6**) and functions as a heading for what follows. The people are like wolves when they initiate such persecutory actions against the envoys, and the envoys are like sheep as they endure them.

Donald Hagner: The end of the preceding passage makes it clear that some will reject the message of the kingdom. There the focus was on the plight of those who reject the message. Now the discourse moves to the effect of rejection and hostility upon the messengers. Rejection of the message will entail hostility and persecution directed against those who proclaim it.

John Nolland: The focus in the mission charge now moves from a concern with the nature of the mission initiatives to be taken by the disciples to the negative response to be expected, and how to deal with that. It pictures hostility as moving to an **eschatological crescendo** leading to the coming of the Son of Man.

I. (:16) RESPOND WISELY TO DANGEROUS PERSECUTION

A. Missions = Danger Zone

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves;”

R. T. France: The rejection of the Twelve at this stage in Galilee is unlikely to have been sufficiently violent to justify the vivid simile of sheep among wolves. It acts rather as a pointer to the eventually more serious vulnerability of disciples confronting a hostile world. For sheep threatened by wolves see **7:15**, but here there is no pretense: the threat is real and open. As in **John 10:12; Acts 20:29**, the sheep are helpless in the face of an attack by wolves. It is an image of the Christian presence in the world which sits uncomfortably alongside much of the subsequent history of the church, as a power structure and itself often the agent of persecution.

B. Methodology = Wisdom

1. Shrewdness

“therefore be shrewd as serpents,”

2. Innocence / Purity

“and innocent as doves.”

Daniel Doriani: We must show craft, cunning, and guile, as snakes do. Snakes know they are not beloved, therefore they hide themselves. Like snakes, we must use our heads and avoid unnecessary danger. We do not overestimate the kindness of wolves. Yet Jesus introduces a second image, to limit the first: a disciple must be as innocent as a dove. Doves are famous for their naïve fearlessness. They are the last bird to flee when humans approach.

Grant Osborne: As **Wilkins** says, “Without innocence the keenness of the snake is crafty, a devious menace; without keenness the innocence of a dove is naïve, helpless gullibility.” So the Christian is to interact with outsiders with a practical wisdom and a behavioral innocence so the kingdom truths go out with divine power without hindrance. If persecution comes, it must be unearned. Yet come it will, as we will see.

R. T. France: Disciples under threat are not to be helpless and gullible, but must maintain the initiative. Cf. the shrewd self-preservation of the steward in **Luke 16:1–8**, also described as *phronimos*. But in popular thought snakes are feared rather than admired (cf. **3:7; 7:10**), and it is as a threat to God’s people that they appear more often in biblical literature. So Jesus here offsets that more obvious connotation of snakes by a balancing animal image, the **harmlessness of doves**; the disciples’ cunning is to be directed not to harming their opponents, but to their own survival and the commendation of the gospel. They need the cunning of snakes without the venom. Cf. Paul’s instructions not to repay evil with evil and to overcome evil with good (**Rom 12:17–21**; and cf. Rom 16:19 for a close parallel to this saying).

Charles Swindoll:

SHREWD AS SERPENTS	INNOCENT AS DOVES
Alert	Gentle
Sharp-minded	Pure
Relevant	Honest
Cautious	Winsome
Discerning	Peaceful

John Nolland: The **wisdom** called for from the disciples will involve anticipating danger and avoiding it wherever possible, but not in such a way as to undercut their mission priorities. The **innocence** called for will involve a consistent integrity that is prepared to suffer rather than compromise and which is careful to give no grounds for legitimate legal objection to the action of the disciples.

II. (:17-22a) REALMS OF PERSECUTION

A. (:17) False Religion

“But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues;”

Grant Osborne: Most local “sanhedrins” or councils had a court of three judges that tried cases, and the law said that for a first offense the person was to be warned and released, but at the second offense they should be beaten (see **Acts 4:18–21; 5:40**). That is the situation Jesus is envisaging. Paul says in **2 Cor 11:25** that he had been beaten with rods three times (cf. **Acts 16:22**); while *μαστιγῶω* often means a “*scourging*” like Jesus suffered, the beating here likely refers to the flogging decreed in Deut 25:1–3.

R. T. France: We have no evidence of such judicial proceedings against Jesus’ disciples before his death. Jesus’ words here are **looking further into the future**.

Craig Blomberg: With **v. 17** Jesus shifts to predictions that were not fulfilled in the immediate mission of the Twelve. The events of **vv. 17-22** took place only during the postresurrection ministry of the disciples.

John MacArthur: We want to keep a balance, but realize that the enemy’s going to attack you **through human agencies**. Don’t be surprised, then, when you’re criticized. Don’t be surprised, then, when you’re fired for articulating your faith. Don’t be surprised when people won’t invite you to the parties or the activities. Don’t be surprised when some girl dumps you, or some guy dumps you because of your faith. Don’t be surprised, because **human agents represent the kingdom of darkness. . .**

Who are the wolves? And if you notice **verse 17**, it says, “*Beware of men.*” And if you notice **verse 22**, it says, “*You’ll be hated of all men.*” The wolves are our own kind. Though it is true that we wrestle against spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, principalities, and power, rulers of the darkness, it is true that we wrestle against demonic enemies, they find their form in the world through human agencies so that men become the dupes and the pawns, and the agents of demons so that we will find our enemy attacking us through the human system. **The wolves then are men. . .**

Now, what he’s saying is that one thing is for sure, **false religious systems** have made themselves drunk on the blood of the saints. And that has been true; that is true; and that will ultimately be true as they slaughter and massacre the believers even in the time of the tribulation. We shouldn’t be surprised, in **Matthew 7:15**, our Lord said that there would be wolves dressed as shepherds. And they would be ravenous wolves coming in the name of **religion**.

B. (:18-20) Oppressive Governments

1. (:18) Opportunity to Testify in Tense Situations

“and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.”

Grant Osborne: Jesus appeared before the Roman governor Pilate, and Paul appeared before Sergius Paulus (**Acts 13**), Felix (**Acts 24**), Festus (**Acts 25**), and the emperor Nero himself. This was a reality, not just a mere possibility. But this will be done *“for my sake”* (ἐνεκεν ἐμοῦ), and the authority of Christ will be evident throughout, as seen in the fact that this dangerous situation will be *“as a witness to them”* (εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς), which means that Christ will turn the situation around as an opportunity for the gospel (cf. esp. **Acts 24:124–16; 26:19–23, 28–29**). This does not mean *“a witness against them”* (dative of disadvantage) but a positive *“witness to them”* (dative of advantage). In fact, not only the rulers but also all *“the Gentiles”* would receive the witness of such events, as exemplified in Paul’s reflections on his own Roman trial in **Phil 1:12–14**. This is part of the *“Gentile mission”* theme in Matthew (cf. **1:5–6; 2:1–12; 4:14–16, 25; 8:5–13**).

John Nolland: The Roman justice system and the local Jewish justice system sat side by side. Submission to the Jewish authority was a choice (but a necessary concomitant of membership in the Jewish community); submission to the Roman authority was mandatory. More severe penalties, including the death penalty, were available through Roman justice than through the Jewish legal system. So the stakes are now raised.

R. T. France: The local opposition which the Twelve can expect in Galilee is thus a **foreshadowing** of the more serious and official hostility which Jesus’ followers will meet in the wider world.

2. (:19-20) Promise of Empowerment by the Holy Spirit

“But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. 20 For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

Walter Wilson: With **10:19**, Jesus moves from warning to **reassurance**. Whereas the appeal not to *“worry”* in **6:25–34** addressed anxieties over **material needs**, here attention is fixed on the **performance anxiety** disciples may experience over what to say when they are handed over.

Stanley Saunders: But here Jesus mixes a hint of opportunity into his warning: being dragged before governors and kings—as Jesus himself will be—provides an occasion for testimony. Opposition and persecution are inevitable, but they also provide new opportunities for faithful witness. Just as the disciples are to be defenseless against attacks and dependent on God’s care (**10:9–10**), when they stand before the legal authorities they are not to worry about what to say. *“The Spirit of your Father”* will provide the words at the very moment they are needed (**10:19–20**). God’s presence is powerful, especially in times of conflict and threat.

Daniel Doriani: This is not a promise for public speakers who fail to prepare. Rather it promises aid to witnesses who cannot prepare. When preparation is impossible, then God himself will empower his witnesses for their defense of themselves and their gospel. As the book of Acts abundantly shows, the Lord was good to his word (**Acts 4:7–14; 5:27–32**).

John MacArthur: In the **Olivet Discourse**, He says it's especially how it's going to be during the time of the tribulation. The time of the tribulation is going to see the revealing of the same thing. We're to be persecuted. The world reacts. Religion reacts, because it's generated by Satan. Government reacts because it's in the control of the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world. And families react because they cannot tolerate a righteous individual in the midst of their unrighteousness. The wolves are going to do all they can to slaughter the sheep.

C. (:21) Hostile Family Members

1. Brother Betraying Brother

“And brother will deliver up brother to death,”

2. Father Betraying Child

“and a father his child;”

3. Children Betraying Parents

“and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death.”

John Nolland: This verse expands on the theme introduced in **v. 17** and represents an **intensification**: among those who will seek to use the legal system to stop the missionary witness will be members of one's own family; and the legal redress will go all the way to capital punishment.

D. (:22a) Society in General

“And you will be hated by all on account of My name,”

III. (:22b-23) REMEMBER THE END POINT OF PERSECUTION

A. (:23b) Persevere to the End

“but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”

John Nolland: Where practical wisdom might suggest that to abandon one's profession in the time of persecution is the way to secure one's future, quite the opposite is insisted on here. The end point for the need of endurance will be the coming of the Son of Man, and this will be the subject of **v. 23**.

B. (:23) Proclaim the Gospel by Strategically Advancing (While Retreating) until the End

1. Keep Moving On

“But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next;”

Daniel Doriani: Flight is not cowardice; it is fidelity to the mission. If necessary, we will die rather than renounce the faith. But it is better to withdraw to fight—by preaching—another day.

2. Anticipate the Return of Christ

“for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes.”

Walter Wilson: As the following verse (**10:23**) makes plain, the promised reward does not entail rescuing the envoys from persecution. Indeed, endurance is required because they will continue to be persecuted until “*the end*,” that is, until the **appearance of the Son of Man** (cf. **16:27–28**;

24:29–31). The envoys are not to retaliate (cf. **5:38–48**) or seek martyrdom but to evade danger in one city (cf. **23:34**) by fleeing to the next (cf. **10:11+14–15**), not unlike Jesus himself, who in **12:15** and **14:13** evades potential threats to his life by withdrawing from the scene (cf. **2:13–14**). In so doing, they also honor Jesus’s original charge that they should “go” to Israel (**10:6–7**). Efforts intended to eradicate the movement, then, have the effect of spreading the gospel (cf. **Acts 8:2–4**), though, as the second part of the logion indicates, this work will be ongoing, the mission to Israel being a determinant of the apostles’ experience until the parousia (cf. **Matt 16:28** || **Mark 9:1**). In other words, it is neither the missionaries nor their persecutors whose agency will usher in the new age but that of Jesus himself. Presumably, “finishing” (τελέω) the cities of Israel in **10:23** includes both exhausting them as (temporary) sanctuaries from persecution and completing the task of evangelism. The reassurance conveyed at this juncture to the missionaries includes the expectation that the Son of Man will return specifically to avenge himself and the disciples for their suffering (cf. **16:27**).

John Nolland: ‘*Son of Man*’ has been established as a mode of self-reference for Jesus at **8:20**; **9:6**. The link of the present statement to **Dn. 7:13** is evident. What is odd, however, about the present statement is its talk about a coming of the Son of Man, set on the lips of Jesus at a point where there is nothing to signal that he contemplates a departure that would make such a coming necessary. This feature points strongly to the drawing of this material from a **Mk. 13**–like context, where, with the Passion imminent, just such a departure is readily implied. In fact, the Son of Man saying in **Mk. 13:26** plays a quite similar role in its context to that of **Mt. 10:23**. Matthew does not notice the anticipation of a coming in v. **23** when there has been no departure in sight as a difficulty because, though he is reporting mission instructions to the Twelve, he very much has in mind the mission of the early church in the **post-Passion context**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why should we not be surprised at either the scope or intensity of persecution against Christians involved in proclaiming the gospel?
- 2) How have we prepared ourselves to be both shrewd and innocent?
- 3) What type of opposition (or hard times) have you experienced from false religion? From oppressive government? From hostile family members? From society in general?
- 4) What features in this passage give indication that the events of the tribulation right before the return of Christ might be in view?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stanley Saunders: Jesus’ teaching here raises a host of questions. Is it possible to pursue mission without the risk of opposition and persecution? Do we understand suffering as an essential component of the missionary experience? What has God’s mission to do with our notions—so pervasive in the current context—of success and prosperity? How can we nourish the complete

trust and dependence on God that attends Matthew's sense of mission? How do disciples learn not to flinch at the prospect of suffering and death, yet know when to flee to the next town? What does God's mission, finally, have to do with the growth and success of the church, or with the preservation of its institutional structures? What are we to make of mission in a culture where the gospel message increasingly seems to generate indifference rather than opposition?

Warren Wiersbe: The "atmosphere" of this section is different from that in the previous section. Here the Lord spoke of persecution, but we have no record that the Twelve suffered during their tour. Jesus also spoke of a ministry to the Gentiles (**Matt. 10:18**). The Holy Spirit had not been given, yet Jesus talked about the Spirit speaking in them (**Matt. 10:20**). **Matthew 10:22** seems to indicate a worldwide persecution, yet the apostles were ministering only in their own land. Finally, **Matthew 10:23** speaks about the return of the Lord, which certainly moves these events into the future. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that these instructions apply to witnesses at some future time.

But what time? To some degree, some of these events took place in the book of Acts, yet Jesus Christ did not return at that time. And the ministry in Acts was not limited to "*the cities of Israel*" (**Matt. 10:23**). It seems that the period described in this section closely parallels the time of tribulation that Jesus described in His "Olivet Discourse" (**Matt. 24—25**). In fact, the statement "*He that endureth to the end shall be saved*" (**Matt. 10:22**) is definitely a part of our Lord's prophetic discourse (**Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13**). It does not refer to a person keeping himself saved, but rather enduring persecution and being faithful.

If, then, these instructions apply to that future time of tribulation, we can easily understand why Jesus said so much about hatred and persecution. The tribulation period will be a time of **opposition**. God's servants will be like sheep in the midst of wolves. They will need to be "tough-minded but tenderhearted." This opposition will come from organized religion (**Matt. 10:17**), government (**Matt. 10:18**), and even the family (**Matt. 10:21**). . .

But the tribulation period will also be a time of **opportunity**. The believers will be able to witness to governors and kings (**Matt. 10:18**). Their enemies will try to trip them up, but the Spirit of God will teach the witnesses what to say. Believers today must not use **Matthew 10:19–20** as an excuse not to study the Word in preparation for witnessing, teaching, or preaching. These verses describe an emergency situation; they are not God's regular pattern for ministry today. Even during the days of the apostles, the Spirit gave them their messages when they faced their enemies (**Acts 4:8**). This unusual ministry of the Spirit will be evident during the tribulation period.

The tribulation will be a time of opposition and opportunity, but it will also be a time of **obligation**. The ambassadors of the King must "*endureth to the end*" (**Matt. 10:22**) and faithfully perform their ministry, even if it costs them their fore leaders, the servants must remain true to their Lord. Their witness will be used by Golives. In spite of scourging, rejection by their families, persecution from city to city, and trials bed to win others. **Revelation 7:1–8** indicates that 144,000 Jewish witnesses will carry God's Word throughout the world during the tribulation, and as a result, great multitudes will come to Christ (**Rev. 7:9ff.**).

No doubt these words in **Matthew 10** will become very precious and meaningful to witnesses during that time. We, today, can learn from these words, even though their primary interpretation and application are for God's servants at a future time. No matter how difficult our

circumstances may be, we can turn opposition into opportunities for witness. We can trust the Spirit of God to help us remember what the Lord has taught us (**John 14:26**). Instead of fleeing and looking for an easier place, we can “*endureth to the end*,” knowing that God will help us and see us through.

John MacArthur: 6 Responses to Persecution by False Religion, Government and Families:

1) Be wise (:16)

The ancients saw a serpent as wise, keen mind, cunning, smart, prudent, always, using great skill and caution to avoid danger. The idea speaks of shrewdness, cautiousness, wariness, having a circumspect perspective.

2) Be harmless as doves (:16) – gentleness, purity, innocence

3) Beware (:17); Be alert; Be on your guard. Be watchful. Be Perceptive.

4) Be calm (:19).

Now, in addition, when you’re arrested, to feeling shame and other emotions, you immediately would worry about your defense. How am I going to defend myself? So, He says to the apostles - now listen very carefully to what I say – He says to them, “You just go about your business ministering. You don’t worry about what’s going to happen. You be wise and be harmless and beware and minister. And if it comes to the point where you’re hauled before the councils, I’ll take care of that. So, you’re free. You don’t have to have your hip pocket defense all ready. You just relax and be calm.

5) Be real (:22). endurance through persecution is the hallmark of genuine salvation.

So, He says, “If you’re going to get in the heat, be real. Be genuine. Be a true Christian. And you’ll endure to the end and be delivered. Hang on.” You almost could say this is “be patient.” Be patient, because in the end, you’re going to be delivered. The word “saved” means delivered. Just to go through it and you’ll be delivered.

6) Keep moving (:23). Just keep moving till He gets here.

Ross Layne: Hostility in the Harvest

If Jesus wants us to know that living life as a follower of Christ in general is challenging, he certainly wants us to know that obeying his charge to carry the gospel to the nations is difficult as well. In fact, the endeavor to which Christ calls his followers can involve incredible pain and suffering flowing from a world that is outright hostile. This becomes quite clear in the text we are studying this morning. Jesus had painted a picture of the lost world as a plentiful harvest. He then called to himself the twelve, and he sent them out into that harvest. . .

Wolves are predators. Sheep are prey. Sheep eat grass. Wolves eat sheep. Wolves are fast and stealthy and vicious. Sheep are dumb, clumsy, slow, and defenseless. About the only defense a sheep has is to run away, but they cannot even run fast. Jesus is telling his disciples that as they go out into the world to preach the gospel and gather in new believers, they are going to encounter people who will look at them as wolves eye-ball their next meal. They will want to consume them. They will see themselves as superior. They will be their mortal enemy. And as sheep, the disciples will be vulnerable to attack. They will not be able to escape. They will not have the strength or the wits to be able to do so. Not only will the enemy hunger for the death of the sheep, they will attack. Sheep will be at best wounded and in some cases brought to death. . .

And so the power displayed when people do embrace the gospel and come into the kingdom is not the power of the preachers or the witnesses or the ones who share, but it is **the power of God**. The Apostle Paul spoke directly to this fact. In his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 4 he explained: *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” . . .*

I. From Where the Hostility Will Come.

II. In What Form the Hostility Will Come

III. How to Handle the Hostility in the Harvest.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/34191255177.pdf>

John Piper: Sheep, Wolves, Snakes, and Doves

Go among wolves and be vulnerable as you preach the gospel, but when they lunge at you, step aside. When they open their mouths, don’t jump in. And not only that, be as innocent as doves. That is, don’t give them any legitimate reason to accuse you of injustice or immorality. Keep your reputation as clean as you can.

So both the snake-intelligence and the dove-innocence are both designed to keep the sheep out of trouble. Jesus does not mean for us to get ourselves into as much difficulty as possible. He means: Risk your lives as vulnerable, non-combative, sheep-like, courageous witnesses, but try to find ways to give your witness in a way that does not bring down unnecessary persecution.

Jacob Whitaker: Persecution is part and parcel to the Christian life, and Jesus doesn’t want us to be caught unaware of that reality, he cares for his disciples. It’s one of the many things that I love about Jesus, that he’s upfront about what it’ll mean for us to follow him. It’s why he tells the crowds in Luke’s Gospel to count the cost before following him. He doesn’t spring anything on us after we’ve committed our lives to him like some kind of dishonest salesman. He offers us the good news of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sin through his work on the cross, but tells us that while the reward of eternal life far surpasses anything we could ever hope for, that it’ll cost us our lives, that we’ll have to lose our lives to gain eternal life, which includes among other things, persecution. There’s a cost associated with following Jesus, but it’s worth it.

<https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/342847-matthew-10:16-23>

Scott Harris: Sheep among Wolves

Why does Jesus, the Good Shepherd, send defenseless sheep out into this ungodly world among the wolves? Because that is where He can use them best in their service for Him. They will have to trust Him as they go. The Shepherd knows what He is doing and the purpose He has for each sheep. In **John 10** Jesus specifically claims that no one can take away any of the sheep the Father has given Him.

This promise does not mean the sheep will not be persecuted, tormented and even killed, but it does mean that Jesus will gather each one to Himself in heaven and give to them eternal life. The

sheep are subject to persecution, torment and martyrdom because the Shepherd, who is also the “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” was persecuted, tormented and martyred by the world. The Scriptures are clear that those who live godly lives will be persecuted. Jesus said it many times (**Matthew 5:10-12; 23:24; 24:9; John 16:33**). Paul stated this directly in **2 Timothy 3:12**, and it is a theme in both of Peter’s epistles. The world hated Jesus and so it will hate His followers (**John 15:18-21**).

Jesus warns the Apostles that they will face serious opposition. They will be sheep among wolves. Jesus warning here is specific to the apostles, but it is clear that it also applies to us since the principle is repeated in so many other places as a general truth to all Christians. Yet, this truth is very seldom included when people are told the gospel, and it is very seldom mentioned from the pulpits across our nation. . .

We are to be uncompromising in proclaiming God’s truth, but that does not mean being abrasive, inconsiderate, belligerent, hostile, or rude. Wise and innocent, cunning and gentle, perceptive and pure – these describe discretion. . .

We need to beware of wolves in religion, in government, in our families and in society in general. “*And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*” This does not mean that every person will hate you, but that all people in general will hate you. There are people from every nationality, every class, and every walk of life that hate God and anyone that reflects Him. That can add up to a lot of pressure on a believer to become like them, but the true mark of Christianity is conformity to Christ and not the world (**Romans 12:1-2**).

<https://www.gracebible.org/sheep-among-wolves-matthew-1016-23>

Donald Hagner: [Argues for the position that the end in view in vs. 23 is the destruction of Jerusalem]

A final possibility, and the best one, is that the phrase refers to the coming of the Son of Man in judgment in the **destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70**. Three important points argue in favor of this conclusion:

- (1) the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows and is typologically related to the final judgment and hence can also be seen as the work of the Son of Man (cf. **24:27–31**);
- (2) the destruction of Jerusalem symbolizes the rejection of the gospel by the Jews and thus the shift of salvation-history from the Jews to the Gentiles, the former losing their priority; and
- (3) the abundant evidence of Jewish persecution of Christians prior to (as well as after) A.D. 70.

According to this interpretation, the meaning of **v 23b** becomes the following: this exclusive mission of the twelve to Israel, which reflects their salvation-historical priority over the Gentiles, will not reach its completion before it is interrupted by the coming of the Son of Man in judgment upon Jerusalem, thereby symbolizing the time frame shift wherein the Gentiles, rather than the Jews, assume priority in the purpose of God. This mission to the Jews, reflecting their place in salvation-history, thus has a time limitation, the end of which (but not the end of Jewish evangelism) will be marked by the coming of the Son of Man in judgment upon Israel.

TEXT: Matthew 10:24-31

TITLE: REASSURANCE REGARDING PERSECUTION

BIG IDEA:
PERSECUTION SHOULD BE EXPECTED BUT NOT FEARED

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: How easy it would have been for the disciples to just opt out at this point. Persecution? Suffering? Rejection? Scourging? Death? No way! Knowing the human tendency toward fear rather than faith, Jesus ministered to His disciples with encouraging words. Three times He told them, “*Do not fear*” (10:26, 28, 31). Why not fear in this mission of being sheep among wolves? Jesus gave three main reasons.

1. First, God wants His message revealed, not concealed (10:26-27). Therefore, He would see to it that they were protected and that His word would be proclaimed.
2. Second, even if the enemies of the gospel succeeded at putting His witnesses to death, they would continue on to eternal life (10:28). It is the persecutors who should be afraid – of God’s eternal judgment!
3. Third, God never ceases to love and care for His disciples even in the midst of great trials and tribulations. God is sovereign and providentially cares for even the sparrows (10:29). God is omniscient and knows even the number of hairs on a person’s head (10:30). Because of God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and benevolence, the disciples could have confidence that He will never abandon or forsake His own (10:31).

Grant Osborne: There are four reasons why one need not fear in the face of universal persecution.

1. As disciples, they are to be like their Master and so should expect persecution and not be surprised by it (vv. 24–25).
2. The time is coming when everything will be disclosed, so God’s servants must boldly proclaim what Jesus has taught them (vv. 26–27).
3. Those who can only kill the body are not worth fear; that must be reserved for the one who is Judge at the final judgment (v. 28).
4. God knows every part of his creation, and human beings are at the apex of that creation, so he will watch out for us (vv. 29–31).

Stanley Saunders: **Fear is a primary cause for the failure of discipleship.** Fear is also the primary motivation for our obeisance to human powers and our conformity to the structures and assumptions of a fallen world. Faithful proclamation of the gospel puts disciples on a collision course with the very powers that foment this fear. The primary tools at the disciples’ disposal include knowledge of God’s loving and merciful presence in the world, recognition of the facades of human power that are rooted in fear of death, awareness that the gospel produces division, and ongoing practices of hospitality and welcoming, especially with those at the margins of this world. These constitute both the mission itself and the means of persevering in mission.

I. (:24-25) RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHER AND DISCIPLE CREATES REALISTIC EXPECTATION OF PERSECUTION

A. (:24) Disciples Are Not above Their Teacher

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.”

Craig Blomberg: Even as they do not seek persecution and in fact actively shun it, all Christians can at times expect it. Promises of exemption from persecution offer false hope. People who have never experienced it probably have not sufficiently witnessed to their faith. But Jesus' words here must be balanced with the principles of **1 Tim 3:7** and **1 Pet 2:12; 3:15-16**. To the extent that it is possible, Christians and their leaders should try to get along with and gain the respect of unbelievers in their communities.

Donald Hagner: Teacher and disciple, master and servant, stand together because of their respective responsibility and allegiance. Jesus and his chosen disciples stand preeminently together. In the present discourse Jesus is instructing them to extend his ministry to Israel with the same words and deeds that characterized his own ministry, that is, with the good news of the fulfillment and the dawning of the kingdom. But if Jesus suffers hostility and rejection, so must his disciples be prepared for the same. Thus, almost by definition, with discipleship to Jesus and the witness of the gospel comes an **unavoidable suffering**. A large incongruity exists between the content of the message and the current experience of Jesus and the disciples; no doubt the latter had trouble assimilating the announcement of Jesus at this point, although they probably connected them with the messianic woes preceding the eschatological age itself. Nevertheless, though these words are ominous, the disciples can be **comforted** that Jesus will have preceded them in the experience of suffering and rejection and in turn can sustain them in the midst of it. This has been the testimony of the Church throughout the ages.

B. (:25a) Disciples Must Emulate Their Teacher

“It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master.”

William Barclay: In this saying of Jesus, there are two things:

1. There is a warning. There is the warning that, as Christ had to carry a cross, so also the individual Christian must carry a cross. The word that is used for members of a household is the one Greek word *oikiakoi*. This word has a technical use: it means the members of the household of a government official, that is to say, the official's staff. It is as if Jesus said: 'If I, the leader and commander, must suffer, you who are the members of my staff cannot escape.' Jesus calls us not only to share his glory but to share his warfare and his agony; and we do not deserve to share the fruits of victory if we refuse to share the struggle of which these fruits are the result.
2. There is the statement of a privilege. To suffer for Christ is to share the work of Christ; to have to sacrifice for the faith is to share the sacrifice of Christ. When Christianity is hard, we can say to ourselves not only: 'We are treading where the saints have trod'; we can also say: 'We are treading where the feet of Christ have trod.'

C. (:25b) Disciples Will Be Vilified Like Their Teacher

“If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!”

Grant Osborne: The point here is that if the teacher is maligned, why should the student expect to be accepted? I tell my students regularly to read **2 Cor 11:16–33** every six months and ask, “**Am I better than Paul?** Should I expect everything always to go well in my ministry?” Christian leaders today do not know how to handle adversity!

The meaning has been disputed. It has been common (even in the NIV, but corrected in TNIV) to label this “*Beelzebub*” (“lord of the flies”), an ancient insult to the Canaanite deity; but the Greek has “*Beelzebul*,” which could mean “lord of the dung” (bā ‘ēl zibbûl), but is better “lord of the heights”—in fact a play on words with the “lord of the house” in **v. 25a**. He was the chief God of Ekron (**2 Kgs 1:2**) but here is the “prince of demons,” Satan (**9:34; 12:24**), a being who had several other names in Jewish circles—Azazel, Belial, Beliar, the Dragon, Mastema. The leaders are accusing Jesus of gaining control over demons by allying himself with Satan. The disciples should expect at least as much.

Richard Gardner: Since the name itself means “*head of the house*” or “*lord of the dwelling*,” Jesus is actually making a pun in **10:25b**. If persons call the head of (God’s) house the head of (Satan’s) house, how much more will they discredit the rest of the household?

John MacArthur: **We are to be like our Teacher.** We are to be like our Master and our Lord and our King. That is our commitment. We are called to be like Him. That’s what it means to have His values, to have His commitments, to have His priorities, to be given utterly over to His will and His purposes and His kingdom. We are to be like Him.

Now, we said last time that if we are like Him, we will be also **treated like him**.

II. (:26-31) 3 REASONS NOT TO FEAR PERSECUTION

Walter Wilson: In addition to creating a frame around the next unit (**10:26–31**), the parallel formulations μή οὐν φοβηθήτε (**10:26a**) and μή οὐν φοβεῖσθε (**10:31a**) express its main theme, with καὶ μή φοβεῖσθε in **10:28** bringing the number of “*fear not*” imperatives up to three. Despite the prominence of this feature, in terms of its rhetorical posture, **10:26–31** is better described as **encouragement** than exhortation, with Jesus offering the Twelve arguments meant to **reassure** them—even in the midst of suffering and persecution—of their place in God’s plan.

Donald Hagner: Wherever the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed there will be **opposition**. When that opposition escalates into **open hostility**, the messengers of the good news are not to be afraid. The message must be proclaimed, and God will surely look after the ultimate welfare of his servants. Even death itself is not to be feared, for the person is more than the body. Life after death is assumed here as a fact, as is the reality of judgment. In short, God, the “Father,” who watches over the sparrows and knows the number of hairs on a person’s head, will care for his disciples through all that they may have to experience in the service of the gospel. In difficult times the disciples and the witnessing Church of every age have been able to take courage from these words (cf. **8:31**).

A. (:26-27) Because God Has a Vested Interest in Open Proclamation of Kingdom Truth

1. (:26) Goal of Disclosure of God’s Truth

“Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

William Barclay: The meaning of that is that **the truth will triumph**. ‘Great is the truth,’ ran the Latin proverb, ‘and the truth will prevail.’ When James VI threatened to hang or exile the reformer Andrew Melville, Melville’s answer was: ‘You cannot hang or exile the truth.’ When Christians are involved in suffering and sacrifice and even martyrdom for their faith, they must remember that the day will come when things will be seen as they really are; and then the power of the persecutor and the heroism of Christian witness will be seen at their true value, and each will have its true reward.

John MacArthur: Your enemies cannot prevent your **vindication**. That’s what He’s saying. Look, people. Look. You’ve got to live with an eternal perspective. You see? That’s what He’s saying. If you’re stuck on worrying about what the world is going to say, you’re looking at the wrong thing. What you want to be looking at is what God’s going to say in the end. Right?

2. (:27) Goal of Dissemination of God’s Truth

*“What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light;
and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.”*

Walter Wilson: The relevance of the proverbial assertion in **10:26** to the argument is then clarified by the command in **10:27**, which has the effect of reinforcing the correlation motif. Through their ministry, the disciples reveal what Jesus has revealed to them (cf. **13:11, 52**), which in turn reflects what the Father has revealed to him (**11:25, 27**; cf. **16:17**). By extension, the disciples’ ministry constitutes a revelatory action of God and as such can be assigned eschatological significance (cf. **24:14**). The new epoch of revelation inaugurated by the birth of the Messiah continues in the time of the church (cf. **17:9; 28:19–20**), culminating in the final disclosure that takes place at the last judgment (cf. **10:28, 32–33, 39, 41–42**). From this perspective, even the experience of persecution is properly understood as an occasion for disclosure and dissemination, tasks whose execution is understood to be guided by divine necessity (cf. **10:19–20**).

Grant Osborne: The time of “*darkness*” when Jesus’ teaching was “whispered in your ears” refers to his private instruction of the disciples. But they in a sense have graduated, with **10:1–4** being their ordination service, so now they must proclaim these truths “*in the light ... from the rooftops*.” In the first century important public announcements were given from the flat rooftops. So Jesus is saying this mission is to be one of **fearless proclamation**, public and powerful in its intensity.

William Barclay: Christian preachers and teachers are men and women who listen with reverence and who speak with courage, because they know that, whether they listen or speak, they are in the presence of God.

D. A. Carson: **The truth must emerge.** The gospel and its outworkings in the disciples may not now be visible to all, but nothing will remain hidden forever. And if the truth will emerge at the end, how wise to declare it fully and boldly now. Flat rooftops of Palestinian houses provided excellent places for speakers (cf. **Josephus**, J.W. 2.611 [21.5]). In a sense, the apostles were to have more of a public ministry than Jesus himself. He told them things in private, some of which they did not even understand until after the resurrection (see Reflections, p. 252; cf. **Jn 14:26; 16:12–15**). But they were to **teach them fully and publicly**.

B. (:28) Because Physical Death Does Not Determine Your Ultimate Destiny

1. Negative Description – Don't Fear Those Whose Power Is Limited

“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul;”

Grant Osborne: Jesus is not drawing an absolute distinction between the two parts of a human being, body and soul, as if we are a dualistic being rather than a whole person. Still, he is saying that if all a person can do is destroy your mortal body, that is nothing to fear. The most important part of a person, the soul, will live on. Moreover, we all look forward to a new “*spiritual body*” (1 Cor 15:44) anyway, to be received at the *parousia*.

Warren Wiersbe: **Martin Luther** caught this truth when he wrote,

*Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.*

R. T. France: Fear of God is balanced by trust in God as the disciple's heavenly Father; the God who can destroy in hell is also the God who cares for the smallest bird. Within his fatherly care, there is nothing to fear from human hostility.

2. Positive Description – Only Fear God Who Controls Ultimate Destiny

“but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

John Nolland: The ultimacy of death is relativized by the image of a more fearful ‘death’ experience. Talk of killing ‘the body’ already implies that there is more to a person than the body, but the presence of the body again in the post-death state warns against a division along the lines of mortal body and immortal soul. . . . There is no better word with which to render it with here than ‘soul’, but it means more the essential person than an ontologically separable component of a person. Matthew's point is not that the soul is deathless, but that only God has power over it. Death is a dreadful reversal, but not the most extreme one possible. Fear of God is to displace fear of death-dealing persecutors. The stakes are higher with God.

C. (:29-31) Because Your Heavenly Father Values You

1. (:29) Have Confidence in God's Omnipotence

“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent?”

And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.”

John MacArthur: Thirdly, finally, the third reason we need not fear is because of what I call **valuation**. Vindication, veneration, and valuation.

Grant Osborne: Sparrows were by far the **cheapest food** (considered food for the poor), as a “*penny*” (ἀσσαπίου, genitive of price, cf. BDF §179) was the smallest coin in the Roman world, worth one-sixteenth of a denarius, so less than an hour's wage.

D. A. Carson: The third reason for not being afraid is an *a fortiori* argument: If God's providence is so all-embracing that not even a sparrow drops from the sky apart from the will of God, cannot that same God be trusted to extend his providence over Jesus' disciples?

2. (:30) Have Confidence in God's Omniscience

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Daniel Doriani: Jesus says God even numbers the hairs on our heads. Experts say humans typically have 100,000 to 500,000 hairs. These numbers do not necessarily follow our wishes. For many men, hairs disappear from the forehead and crown while they multiply on the ear, the nose, and eyebrow, where we do not want them. God numbers even the erratically proliferating hairs on our head. We should not fear because he cares about the details of life more than we do.

3. (:31) Have Confidence in God's Great Love

"Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Walter Wilson: The image of God the destroyer (**10:28**) is then juxtaposed with the image of God the Father (**10:29–31**), a claim regarding divine sovereignty over the future segueing into a claim regarding divine sovereignty over the present. In terms of its logic and structure, the unit exhibits features of sapiential argumentation, the rhetorical question in **10:29a** drawing an example from everyday experience, while **10:29b** appeals to the concept of God's solicitude for the world's creatures, and **10:30** has the appearance of a proverb.

William Barclay: Matthew says that two sparrows are sold for a penny and yet not one of them falls to the ground without the knowledge of God. Luke gives us that saying of Jesus in a slightly different form: *'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight'* (**Luke 12:6**). The point is this – two sparrows were sold for one penny. (The coin is the assarion, which was one-sixteenth of a denarius; a denarius was the average day's pay for a working man.) But if the purchaser was prepared to spend two pennies, he got not four sparrows but five. **The extra one was thrown into the bargain as having no value at all.** God cares even for the sparrow which is thrown into the bargain, and which by human reckoning has no value at all. Even the forgotten sparrow is dear to God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of situations stir up in us the fear of man?
- 2) Why does emulating the character and behavior of Jesus necessarily involve sharing in His rejection and suffering?
- 3) How can we increase our boldness to opening proclaim God's truth?
- 4) How secure are you in God's knowledge of what you are facing and His love and power to take care of you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: This is a remarkable passage and shows two things: God is sovereign over all human affairs, and the believer need never worry. Regarding whatever happens we can *"cast all*

[our] anxiety on him because he cares for [us]" (1 Pet 5:7). Within this framework, there are several issues worth discussing further:

1. The Believer to Emulate Christ in Every Area
2. The Time of Intense Disclosure of Eternal Truths
3. A Deep Faith in God's Providential Care
4. God's Care for His Own

Daniel Doriani: Publicity is a blessing for all that is good and true. Schemers and evildoers love darkness. The truth loves the light. God makes the truth known and so should we. To do so, we must listen to God as he speaks in the Bible. We must also test our thoughts lest we wrongly think they are God's. And if an idea passes the test, we must be brave enough to speak it.

Hugh Latimer was a leader of the English Reformation. On one occasion, he had the daunting privilege of preaching before the sometimes violent King Henry VIII. Latimer was about to say something the king might dislike and fell into an audible dialogue with himself as he stood in the pulpit: "Latimer, Latimer! Be careful what you say. The king is here." Then he paused and said, "Latimer, Latimer! **Be careful what you say. The King of Kings is here.**" Another Reformer, John Knox, was even more famous than Latimer for boldness in the face of danger. When he died, they said, "Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man."

This knowledge is the **source of boldness**, both for preachers and for ordinary men and women. If Jesus says it, even at a whisper, we should shout it from the rooftops. If we have amplifiers, we should crank up the volume.

Brian Evans: The Key to Enduring to the End – Fear God Not Man

The main thrust of this entire section, last week and today, is that we would stand strong when faced with persecution for the name of Jesus. Our Lord is concerned with our endurance through trying times of hardship resulting from our faithfulness to Jesus. He knows that as we follow Him in obedience the lost world will hate us and persecute us as a result of our commitment to Jesus and because we are not committed to the things they are. When you don't worship the same idols they do you will be hated. . .

It's important here that we see that even in times of non-persecution **the fear of man** is one of our great enemies. Because of our sin nature we have misappropriated fear of God to the fear of man. Jesus knows this and is here to help us overcome the sin of the fear of man. . .

Vs. 26 -- We do not need to fear man because **God is fully aware of the truth**. When lost people slander us and speak to us like we are stupid for believing what we do it's okay because God knows. When we are maligned and treated badly God knows and He will make all things right in the end. . .

Does the fact that as His people, He knows us intimately, will never forget about us, cares for us and has even our deaths in His hands give you confidence to endure to the end and be saved even if that end means our death?

As hard as these sayings of Jesus are for us to hear and think through they should bring us confidence, God has everything in control.

So, the question of whom to fear really becomes very clear as Christians. **Fear God not man because God has control over all things.** God alone has power over your soul. Men can only kill us they cannot touch our souls.

Scott Harris: Confidence for Disciples (:24-33)

The grammar of Jesus' instruction changes from being mostly specific to the apostles to more general statements that apply to believers of every age. He begins to use the indefinite third person (a disciple, a slave, everyone, whoever, etc.) along with the second person (you, your) which clearly indicates that He is speaking about every true believer and not just the apostles. What we will examine this morning applies directly to us!

We have already seen in the past weeks that **persecution will come** to those that live righteously. The world hates Jesus and therefore anyone else that is truly reflective of Him. Jesus will point that out again in this morning's text, but at the same time He also points out the great hope that is given to His followers. The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ can be confident. We do not need to fear the future regardless of the strength and intensity of any persecution that may come upon us because God has given us eternity. There is no cause for us to worry about our Savior's love, for God is personally and intimately involved with us. His love for us is infinite in keeping with His own character.

Those who are true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ can have confidence in five areas:

1. Confidence in the purpose of their life,
2. Confidence in being used by the Lord,
3. Confidence in the midst of persecution,
4. Confidence in God's intimate care for them, and
5. Confidence when they stand before God.

TEXT: Matthew 10:32 – 11:1

TITLE: COST AND COMPENSATION OF DISCIPLESHIP

BIG IDEA:

DISCIPLESHIP INVOLVES CONFESSION, CONFLICT, COST BUT ALSO REWARD

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus finalizes his Mission Discourse by demanding **fearless confession** in the midst of conflict. As such it acts as a **concluding summary** of the themes in the rest of this passage. Confessing Jesus is not an option; every believer who refuses to acknowledge Jesus before the world will be disowned by Christ, with judgment the result (vv. **32–33**). Since the presence of the final kingdom in Christ will drive a sword even between family relationships (vv. **34–36**), the only solution is to place Christ even above family in your life and to lose all for him (vv. **37–39**). But at the same time, you are now identified completely with Christ, and whatever people do to you they are doing to Christ (vv. **40–42**).

Matthew McCraw: One fishing trip that I've really enjoyed is an inshore fishing trip I went on near the 10,000 islands off the coast of Collier County, Florida. I went on that fishing trip with a friend of mine from a previous church in order to catch some species of fish that I had not caught that were the prized fish for inshore fishing. On that trip, we caught trout, sharks, tarpon, snook, and redfish. It was a great trip.

I said to my friend, that I wish I could find and catch fish like he did. He said that it was easy to do so. All you had to do was be a third generation Collier County fisherman, purchase a \$60,000 boat, and fish there your whole life, and then you could fish like he did.

You see, my friend was **committed** to being a great fisherman. He had put in the work, he was passionate, and he had spent the money. He had really given himself to that work.

All the greats in this world are committed to whatever it is that makes them great. Great athletes practice thousands of hours in order to achieve a high level in their sport. Great doctors have done hundreds of surgeries and seen thousands of patients. They've studied and consulted hours upon hours. To be the best at something, that something has to have priority in your life.

Today, we're going to learn that if we want to be great at faithfully following the Father, **Jesus must have absolute priority in our lives.**

John Heil: Like the disciples, the members of the audience are to publicly confess Jesus before people, including in their communal worship, so that Jesus will confess them before his Father in heaven in the final judgment (**10:32–33**). They must endure opposition to Jesus even in their families, and be more devoted to Jesus than to their family members (**10:34–37**). They are to follow Jesus to the point of performing the ethical self-sacrificial worship of taking up their cross and losing their lives for his sake in order to find them (**10:38–39**). Those who receive and extend merciful care ("*a cup of cold water,*" **10:42**) for them as disciples, who are to be like prophets and righteous people, are actually receiving Jesus and the God who sent him. This adds another dimension to the way that Jesus is present and an object of worship as "*God with us*"

(1:23). Those who extend merciful care to disciples of Jesus are thus performing ethical worship (“*I desire mercy, not [simply] sacrifice*” [9:13; cf. **Hos 6:6**]) for which they will receive a heavenly reward (10:40–42).

I. (:32-38) DISCIPLESHIP INVOLVES CONFESSION, CONFLICT AND COST

A. (:32-33) Confessing the Messiah as Lord

1. (:32) Confession

*“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men,
I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.”*

John Nolland: Perhaps the basis for vv. 32-33 is to be found in the **prospect of persecution** of v. 25 coupled with the calls not to fear it in vv. 26-31.

Grant Osborne: The term “*confesses*” (ὁμολογέω) is used of confessing Jesus as Messiah (**John 9:22**) or Lord (**Rom 10:9**) and here has the idea of public proclamation of allegiance to Jesus.

Charles Swindoll: Loyal disciples openly acknowledge Christ before the world.

R. T. France: The context of **judgment before God** gives added urgency to the **choice** which this saying demands, between the short-term advantage of preserving human approval and the humanly risky but ultimately sound course of maintaining a prior loyalty to Jesus in the face of human opposition. The use of the broad term “*people*” (see on v. 17) here has the effect of **contrasting human with divine approval**. The issue is not merely obedience to Jesus’ teaching, but the explicit “*acknowledgement*” of him as Lord before a hostile world. The saying, which Matthew introduces with an inferential “*So,*” thus appropriately follows on not only from vv. 26–31 about fearing God rather than people, but also from vv. 17–22 about the need to maintain a faithful witness to Jesus even when it means suffering “*because of me.*” It provides the ultimate basis for the disciple’s willingness to proclaim Jesus from the rooftops (v. 27). What ultimately decides a person’s destiny is what Jesus himself will have to say about them “*before my Father who is in heaven.*” Cf. 7:21–23 for a similar statement of Jesus’ personal role in final judgment; the christological implications are as startling here as there. His verdict will be on a **reciprocal basis**: acknowledgement or denial depending on whether they have acknowledged or denied him. The later experience of Peter (26:69–75) is an object-lesson in denying Jesus under the pressure of public opinion, but Peter’s subsequent rehabilitation adds a reassuring suggestion that the stark verdict of this saying may be understood to refer to a settled course of acknowledgment or denial rather than to every temporary lapse under pressure.

2. (:33) Denial

*“But whoever shall deny Me before men,
I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”*

Grant Osborne: It is clear that our status before God is completely tied to our relationship with Christ. Our eternal destiny depends on our acceptance or renunciation of Christ. Further, he along with God will be the Judge at the final judgment (cf. 7:21–23), and his witness about us will be the determining factor in where we spend eternity. At the same time, this is not just speaking of the apostate but also of the weak Christian who tries to remain anonymous, i.e., refuses to stand up for Christ at school or in the workplace. Such a one is, in effect, “*ashamed*” of

Christ, and in another saying of Jesus on this same topic, he will be “*ashamed*” of that person (**Mark 8:38**) on the day of judgment.

Donald Hagner: Jesus stands at the center of the message of the kingdom, not only announcing it but bringing it through his ministry of word and deed. In the final analysis, therefore, **one’s relation to Jesus is all important.** Relation to God is only possible through relation to him, and to reject him is in effect to reject God (cf. v 40). The importance of Christology for Matthew is plainly evident in this passage. Jesus is both the object of commitment and the sole mediating subject on behalf of others to the Father. No middle ground or “neutrality” is envisioned here. One is either for Jesus or against him. The boundaries of Judaism are broken here, for no prophet, teacher, or rabbi is capable of such words. Matthew continually keeps before us the uniqueness of Jesus.

William Barclay: It is still possible to deny Jesus Christ.

(1) We may deny him with our words.

As Christians, we can never escape the duty of being different from the world. It is not our duty to conform to the world; it is our duty to be transformed out of it.

(2) We can deny him by our silence.

There can be a menace of things unsaid in the Christian life. Again and again, life brings us the opportunity to speak some word for Christ, to utter some protest against evil, to take some stand, and to show what side we are on. Again and again on such occasions, it is easier to keep silence than to speak. But such a silence is a denial of Jesus Christ. It is probably true that far more people deny Jesus Christ by cowardly silence than by deliberate words.

(3) We can deny him by our actions.

We can live in such a way that our life is a continuous denial of the faith which we profess. Those who have given their allegiance to the gospel of purity may be guilty of all kinds of small-scale dishonesties and breaches of strict honour. Those who have undertaken to follow the Master who bade us take up a cross can live a life which is dominated by attention to their own ease and comfort. Those who have entered the service of him who himself forgave and who bade his followers to forgive can live a life of bitterness and resentment and variance with others. Those whose eyes are meant to be on that Christ who died for love of men and women can live a life in which the idea of Christian service and Christian charity and Christian generosity are conspicuous by their absence.

John MacArthur: The **negative side** of Jesus' warning is sobering: *But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.* This warning applies to a person who makes an outward profession of Christianity but turns away when hard testing comes. It is possible to deny Christ before men by silence, by failing to witness for Him and trying to be an unnoticed Christian—whose friends and neighbors, and perhaps even family, would never suspect of being a believer. It is also possible to deny Christ by actions, living like the rest of the world lives, with no higher standards or values. It is possible to deny Christ by words, using the world's profanity, vulgarity, and blasphemy. It is possible to deny Christ in many ways that are short of verbally and publicly renouncing Him. The future tenses in **verses 32-33** tell us that Jesus is speaking of future judgment. In that day, those who confess Him, He will also confess, and those who deny Him, He will also deny. **The difference between true and false discipleship is a much-repeated theme in Matthew.** Near the beginning of the

Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Later during the sermon He distinguished between false disciples, who go in the wide gate and travel the broad way, and true disciples, who enter by the narrow gate and walk in the narrow way (7:13-14). He spoke of those who bear good fruit and those who bear bad fruit (7:16-20) and then said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (vv. 21-23). Immediately after that He distinguished between the person who builds his religious house on the sand of man's wisdom and is destroyed and the person who builds on the rock of His Word and is saved (vv. 24-27).

B. (:34-36) Considering the Conflict in Family Relationships

1. (:34) Principle

*"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth;
I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."*

Donald Hagner: The form of the statement not to expect Jesus to bring peace (μὴ νομίσητε, "do not imagine"; cf. 5:17) suggests that this would have been the natural inclination of the disciples. Was not the gospel a message of peace (cf. 5:9; 10:13)? Would not the age of the kingdom of God bring peace (εἰρήνη) with it (cf. Luke 1:79b; Isa 9:6; 11:9)? The answer must clearly be yes in its final realization and even in some sense in the present (cf. John 14:27). But in the peculiar and unexpected **interim period** of the proclamation of the kingdom, as has already been shown, strange things may be expected by the disciples and later messengers of the kingdom. The **hostility** now in view—that between otherwise close family members—is described with the metaphor of a "sword" (μάχαιραν; cf. Luke's διαμερισμόν, "division").

Norman Geisler: We must distinguish between the purpose of Christ's coming to earth and the result of it. His design was to bring peace—peace with God for unbelievers (Rom. 5:1) and eventually, the peace of God for believers (Phil. 4:7). However, the immediate consequence of Christ's coming was to divide those who were for Him and those who were against Him—the children of God from the children of this world. But, just as the goal of an amputation is to relieve pain, so the immediate effect is to inflict pain. Likewise, Christ's ultimate mission is to bring peace, both to the human heart and to earth. Nonetheless, the immediate effect of His message was to divide those in the kingdom of God from those in the kingdom of Satan.

R. T. France: Already in 5:11–12 Jesus has made it clear that the good life will indeed result in **hostility** and **persecution**, and now he is in no mood to compromise. These are not just some unfortunate side-effects of a basically acceptable mission. The very **purpose** of Jesus' coming is "not peace but a sword," because the message of God's kingship is one which always has and always will lead to **violent response** from those who are threatened by it (11:12). As 5:11–12 has already reminded them, this has been true in the experience of God's prophets even before Jesus came, and a sobering quotation from Micah 7:6 underlines the point. To represent Jesus is to accept their share in the way he is treated by a hostile world (vv. 24–25), and now the lethal nature of that opposition is made explicit by the first reference in this gospel to the "cross." And it comes on the scene, startlingly, not only as his eventual fate, but as theirs. To follow Jesus is to embrace **martyrdom**. . .

The “**mission statement**” here is meant to **shock**. Not only is peace a basic human aspiration, but it was understood to be the purpose of the Messiah’s coming (e.g. **Isa 9:6–7; Zech 9:10**) and the defining characteristic of God’s eschatological rule (e.g. **Isa 11:6–9**). Matthew will draw attention in **21:4–5** to how Jesus presented himself as the messianic king who brings peace, and his non-confrontational style will be commented on in **12:15–21** and demonstrated in **chs. 26–27** in the story of his quiet acceptance of unjust accusation and condemnation. His coming was proclaimed as the dawn of “*peace on earth*” (**Luke 2:14**), and it is “*peace*” which the disciples are being sent out to offer (**v. 13**). **Peace-making** is an essential part of the good life (**5:9**). But the way to peace is not the way of avoidance of conflict, and Jesus will be continuously engaged in robust controversy especially in **chs. 21–23**, while his whole experience will be the opposite of a “peaceful” way of life. His followers can expect no less, and their mission to establish God’s peaceful rule can be accomplished only by sharing his experience of conflict. The “*sword*” can hardly be understood literally, as the literal use of the sword is explicitly forbidden in **26:51–52**; it is a **metaphor for conflict and suffering**, as in **Luke 2:35**.

John Nolland: The ‘*sword*’ stands as an **image of destructive hostility**. Though the sword is quite a common image for divine judgment, that does not appear to be how it is used here.

2. (:35-36) Particulars

a. (:35) Specific Examples

*“For I came to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;”*

Charles Swindoll: Loyal disciples willingly accept rejection, even from their own families. When we openly acknowledge our identity as Christ followers through words and actions (**10:32–33**), we shouldn’t be surprised when social conflict ensues. When Christ returns and sets everything right, peace will reign across the globe. All nations will acknowledge the kingship of Jesus. But until then, our expressed commitment to Christ will not result in increasing peace and harmony. Instead, it will bring division, disharmony, misunderstanding, and the harshest kinds of rejection and persecution. In His first coming, Christ did not come to immediately usher in the messianic age of peace and prosperity (**10:34**). Rather, during His time on earth – and during the subsequent age of the church – spiritual warfare would ensue, manifested in godless cultures and in conflict among those in even the closest relationships.

b. (:36) Summary

“and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.”

William Barclay: He offers a **choice**; and **we have to choose sometimes between the closest ties of earth and loyalty to Jesus Christ**.

John Bunyan knew all about that choice. The thing which troubled him most about his imprisonment was the effect it would have upon his wife and children. What was to happen to them, bereft of his support? ‘The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. O the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart

to pieces ... But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; O I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it.'

Once again, this terrible choice will come very seldom, in God's mercy to many of us it may never come; but the fact remains that **all loyalties must give place to loyalty to God.**

C. (:37-39) Counting the Cost of Following Jesus

1. (:37) In Terms of Relationships

a. Parents

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;"

b. Children

"and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Charles Swindoll: Loyal disciples sacrificially choose their essential priorities. Fidelity to Christ will be neither easy nor popular. In Matthew 10:37-39, we see that it calls for a complete reversal of the world's priorities, passions, and pursuits. The world tells us to be concerned about ourselves, our own lives, our own interests, our own identities, our own families, our own peace and security, and our own possessions.

Grant Osborne: In one sense the family disowns the believer (vv. 35–36) and in another sense the believer sets aside allegiance to the family (v. 37). The key term is "worthy" (ἄξιος, discussed in 10:10–11); one is "worthy" or "deserving" of Jesus only if he is placed ahead of all earthly attachments, even family ties. The use of "loves" (φιλεῖν) points to both affection and loyalty. Jesus, of course, recognizes the deep love between parents and children (15:4–6; 19:19), but he demands the **deeper commitment**. This is the core of discipleship; if Jesus is not first, we do not "deserve" to be his disciple.

2. (:38) In Terms of Life Itself

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

Grant Osborne: True discipleship involves both a death to self and a willingness to die for Jesus (cf. also **Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23, 14:27; John 12:26**).

Donald Hagner: The radical statement of v 37, with its stress on uncompromising loyalty to Jesus, is now exceeded by two remarkable descriptions of the nature of discipleship in absolute terms. The attachment and loyalty to Jesus referred to in the preceding verse are now seen to involve even greater demands: absolute obedience and thus self-denial. . .

Taking up one's cross refers not to the personal problems or difficulties of life that one must bear, as it is sometimes used in common parlance, but to a radical obedience that entails self-denial and, indeed, a dying to self. To take up one's cross is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who is the model of such radical obedience and self-denial (cf. 4:1–11). Thus in a real sense v 39 is a kind of exegesis of v 38.

John MacArthur: Committing your life to follow Jesus Christ means you would not only forsake your family, if need be, the people closest to you that you love the most; you'd lose your life.

That's the mark of genuineness. And you're never to be intimidated by the world; you'd confess Christ in the most hostile environment. It's the mark of your genuineness.

And they understood that He meant death. They understood that to take up the cross means abandoning myself to the lordship of Christ if it means I pay with my life. You see, the love of Christ has to overrule the normality of family love. And the love of Christ has to overrule the instinct of self-preservation.

Bruce Barton: Death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for dangerous criminals. A prisoner carried his own cross to the place of execution, signifying submission to Rome's power. Following Jesus, therefore, meant identifying with Jesus and his followers, facing social and political oppression and ostracism, and no turning back. Christians follow their Lord by imitating his life and obeying his commands. To take up the cross meant to carry your own cross to the place where you would be killed. Many Galileans had been killed that way by the Romans. Applied to the disciples, to take up the cross meant to identify completely with Christ's message, even if death were to result. We must deny our selfish desires to use our time and money our own way and to choose our own direction in life without regard to Christ. Following Christ is costly now, but we are promised true victory and eternal rewards.

Adrian Rogers: Somebody asked **Tozer**, "**What does it mean to take up your cross?**" and **Tozer** told a story of an old man, and here's what he said. "One time, a young man came to an old saint who taught the deeper life, the crucified life, and said, 'Father, what does it mean to be crucified?' The old man thought for a moment and said, 'Well, to be crucified means three things.'" Now, listen to this, folks. Here's what it means to take up a cross. "First, the man who is crucified is facing only one direction." That's good. When you're crucified, you're only facing one direction. "The old man scratched his scraggly head and said, 'One thing more, son, about the man on the cross. He is not going back. He has said his final goodbyes. Thirdly, he said, the man on the cross has no further plans of his own.'" Did you get that? **He's facing one direction. He's not going back. He said goodbye. And he has no further plans of his own.**

3. (:39) In Terms of Self-Actualization

*"He who has found his life shall lose it,
and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."*

Donald Hagner: **The way of the world**—well illustrated in the incessant quest for “self-actualization” in contemporary pop psychology—leads only to a shallow and temporary fulfillment. The seeking of “life” at this level has left many in frustration and disappointment. On the other hand, and strangely, those who give up this useless quest, who instead yield themselves fully to the service of God and the kingdom—who willingly follow in the steps of Jesus—these are the ones who paradoxically find life, i.e., fulfillment and deep, abiding joy. And though the best of this fulfillment awaits the eschaton, it is already experienced proleptically in the present. Thus those who do not seek self-actualization as understood by the world, who love Jesus and the kingdom more than themselves (and in that sense alone “*hate*” their own life [Luke 14:26]), are alone the ones who realize true and lasting self-actualization and obtain personal fulfillment and the goal of their existence.

William Barclay: There is no place for a policy of safety first in the Christian life. Those who seek first ease and comfort and security and the fulfilment of personal ambition may well get all these things – but they will not be happy; for we were sent into this world to serve God and one

another. It is possible to hoard life if we wish to do so. But that way, we will lose all that makes life valuable to others and worth living for ourselves. The way to serve others, the way to fulfil God's purpose for us, the way to true happiness is to spend life selflessly, for only thus will we find life, here and hereafter.

William Hendriksen: Christ's words may be paraphrased as follows: "The person who, when the issue is between me and what he considers his own interests, chooses the latter, thinking that by so doing he is going to 'find' himself, that is, secure a firmer hold on the full life, will be bitterly disappointed. He will lose rather than gain. His happiness and usefulness will shrink and shrivel rather than increase. At last he will perish everlastingly. On the other hand, the one who, confronted with the choice, give himself away, that is, denies himself out of loyalty to me, being willing if need be to pay the supreme sacrifice, will attain to complete self-realization. He will have life and will have it more abundantly until at last he will share with me the glory of my return and of the new heaven and earth." Among the passages in which the same or at least a similar thought is expressed, and which shed light on the meaning of **Matt. 10:39**, are (in addition to **Luke 9:23, 24**): **Matt. 16:26**; **Mark 8:34-38**; **Luke 17:32, 33**; and **John 12:25, 26**.

II. (:40-42) DISCIPLESHIP ALSO INVOLVES REWARD

William Barclay: The Jews always felt that to receive a person's envoy or messenger was the same as to receive that person. To pay respect to an ambassador was the same as to pay respect to the king who had sent him. To welcome with love the messenger of a friend was the same as to welcome the friend. The Jews always felt that to honour a person's representative was the same as to honour the person who had sent the representative. This was particularly so in regard to wise men and to those who taught God's truth. The Rabbis said: "He who shows hospitality to the wise is as if he brought the first fruits of his produce unto God." "He who greets the learned is as if he greeted God." If people are truly of God, to receive them is to receive the God who sent them.

Charles Swindoll: Loyal disciples experience the blessing of union with Christ.

Stanley Saunders: Jesus began this sermon by sending the disciples out, vulnerable and dependent on hospitality, which he equated with "*worthiness*" (**10:11-15**). He closes by returning to the theme of "welcoming." Welcoming others in the name of Jesus is both the foundational practice of discipleship and a primary means of discovering and maintaining familial bonds with the members of God's household (**10:40-42**).

William Hendriksen: "*He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet...*" The meaning, then, is this: He who welcomes a prophet—not necessarily one of The Twelve but anyone who has the right to proclaim God's truth—and does this not merely out of considerations of politeness or cordiality but very definitely because he regards this messenger to be a prophet indeed, and therefore in welcoming him wishes to welcome his Sender, **shall receive the same reward** as if he, the welcomer, were himself a prophet. Lest there be any misunderstanding, as if the reward of grace and glory would be granted only to those who welcomed a specially commissioned messenger, Jesus adds, and he who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person shall receive a righteous person's reward. Here again for "*because he is*" the original has "*in the name of*." The explanation is similar. The reward is promised because in the man who knocks at his door the welcomer recognizes "*a righteous person*," that is, one who

practices the true religion. The man who devotes his life to the performance of the urgently necessary and eminently noble task of providing lodging for, cooperating with, and encouraging God's traveling children is **promised the same reward** as are those whom he befriends.

Homer Kent: To conclude this charge Jesus shows that those who risk persecution shall be appropriately rewarded.

A. (:40) General Principle of Representation Based on Union of Ambassador with Sender

*“He who receives you receives Me,
and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”*

Look at how close the connection is between the Father and the Son (whom He has sent). Then consider how close the connection is between Christ and His disciples (whom He has sent).

R. T. France: Underlying such sayings, with their repeated reference to being “sent”, is the principle later enshrined in the Jewish legal institution of the *šāliḥ*, the “one sent,” an ambassador or representative who was understood to have the full authority of the one who sent them. It is those who recognize such authority in the disciples who will welcome them, just as it is those who recognize Jesus as God's representative who will welcome him. The unspoken corollary (but spelled out in **Luke 10:16**) is that those who reject the disciples on their mission are guilty of a far graver fault than merely lack of hospitality to a fellow human being; they are rejecting God.

John Nolland: The role here of **equivalence** between Jesus and the missionary links back to the expectation of equivalent treatment established in the beginning of the unit at **v. 24**, while the role of welcome here refreshes the focus on being sent out, which was strong in the opening two units of the discourse but has lost visibility thus far in this final part of the mission charge. The verse provides assurance that no ‘dilution’ is involved in encountering at one step removed what Jesus stands for and brings, but, more than that, it probably extends the recognised range of the presence of God anticipated in **1:23**. In a mission charge such a statement offers great confidence of empowerment, and assurance of the significance of the task undertaken. A tie is generally claimed here with Jewish notions of the ‘authorised representative’ (*šāliḥ*) whose presence is to be treated as equivalent to that of the one who has sent him or her. A connection is certainly possible, but issues of legal authorisation are not particularly in focus here. In light of **10:11** and **vv. 41-42** to come it is likely that receiving is intended to embrace welcoming and accepting for oneself the ministry of the disciple, and also supporting the ministry of the disciple.

B. (:41-42) Specific References to Various Rewards

1. (:41a) Reward of a Prophet

*“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet
shall receive a prophet's reward;”*

2. (:41b) Reward of a Righteous man

*“and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man
shall receive a righteous man's reward.”*

Daniel Doriani: But Jesus continues down a line to people who are ever less prominent:

- To receive an apostle is to receive Christ.
- To receive a prophet is to receive Christ.

- To receive a righteous man is to receive Christ.
- To receive a little one—the smallest member of the kingdom—is to receive Christ.

Tasker: Levertoff's understanding of these verses would seem most probable. "The passage", he writes, "seems to imply that as of old kindness shown to a prophet because he represented God (e.g. Elisha and the widow), and to a righteous man because he was righteous, was rewarded by God according to the measure of the merit of the prophet or the righteous man; so now even the simplest kindness shown to the most insignificant disciple of Christ, because he is a disciple of His, will be rewarded according to the merit of Christ himself." It is unlikely that there is any reference to a class of Christian prophets or any group of Christians known as "righteous men."

3. (:42) Reward for Any Work of Kindness

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."

Grant Osborne: So Jesus is speaking of the smallest of services to the weakest of people, yet an act noticed and rewarded by God.

Bob Utley: We can share in the reward of God's servants by supporting them in their work. Even **seemingly insignificant works of kindness** (a cup of cold water) performed for God's people are meaningful in God's eyes.. What could seem more insignificant than giving a person a cup of cold water? In a short time, they will be thirsty again. Yet even such a small gesture will always be remembered and rewarded by God. They shall by no means lose their reward. "Again it is not philanthropy which is in view, but reception of a disciple because he is a disciple (again literally 'in the name of')."

Donald Hagner: The supreme importance of the messengers and their message is made very clear. Reception of the message and the messengers amounts to reception of Jesus and, in turn, the one who sent him, God. For Matthew, this applies not merely to the twelve but to the messengers of the kingdom in his community and thus to those of the Church in every era. Here is the beginning of the NT teaching concerning the mediatorship of Jesus, bridging between humanity and God (**1 Tim 2:5**; cf. **Heb 9:15; 12:24**). Thus the reception accorded the messengers of the kingdom is nothing short of the reception accorded God himself! If the messengers are that important, then the hospitality accorded the representatives of the kingdom will not go unrewarded. And one's kind treatment of even a disciple will not be forgotten. Treatment of a disciple will later be described as equivalent to such treatment of Jesus, a point very much in accord with the present passage (cf. **25:40**). All of this points finally to the extreme importance of the mission and therefore of the messengers themselves. The gospel must be proclaimed, and those who aid that proclamation, however indirectly, are performing an important, praiseworthy function.

Daniel Doriani: Why does God so notice? First, a small act—such as a timely word—can do great good. A timely word brings "healing to the bones." An apt word is like "*apples of gold in settings of silver*" (**Prov. 15:23; 16:24; 25:11; Eccl. 10:12; 12:11**). A kind word is as small as a cup of cold water, yet it can change a life.

Adelaide Proctor:

It isn't the thing you do, dear,
It's the thing you leave undone,
Which gives you the bitter heartache
At the setting of the sun;
The tender word unspoken,
The letter you did not write,
The flower you might have sent, dear,
Are your haunting ghosts at night.
The stone you might have lifted
Out of your brother's way,
The bit of heartsome counsel
You were hurried too much to say;
The loving touch of the hand, dear,
The gentle and winsome tone,
That you had no time or thought for,
With troubles enough of your own.
These little acts of kindness,
So easily out of mind,
These chances to be angels,
Which even mortals find—
They come in night and silence,
Each chill reproachful wraith,
When hope is faint and flagging,
And a blight has dropped on faith.
For life is all too short, dear.
And sorrow is all too great,
To suffer our slow compassion
That tarries until too late.
And it's not the thing you do, dear,
It's the thing you leave undone,
Which gives you the bitter heartache,
At the setting of the sun.

(11:1) CONCLUSION TO MISSION DISCOURSE -- TRANSITION

*“When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples,
He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.”*

Grant Osborne: This verse concludes the **Mission Discourse**. Like the previous discourse, it ends with *“it happened that when Jesus had finished”* (see on **7:28**; cf. **13:53**; **19:1**; **26:1**), which provides a transition to the action narrative that follows in **chs. 11–12**.

R. T. France: *“Teaching and preaching”* summarizes the general nature of Jesus' mission, which has been more fully described in **4:23**; **9:35**. The disciples' role in this mission, which has been so carefully spelled out in **ch. 10**, is surprisingly not now mentioned. We are not told anything about what happened during their mission (nor even explicitly that they went at all, though **10:5** says they were *“sent”*), nor when they returned from it, and Matthew does not even include their

report back to Jesus (contrast **Mark 6:30; Luke 9:10; 10:17**). In **12:1** we shall find the disciples still accompanying Jesus in his travelling ministry, and there is nothing in **ch. 11** to indicate that they were not with Jesus during the events there recorded. Clearly Matthew is more interested in the **principles** underlying the disciples' mission (and therefore that of his readers) than in any contribution it makes to his narrative of Jesus' Galilean period; the only time we shall hear of any of the disciples operating independently of Jesus is in **17:16**, where it was not a success. The mission which has been that of Jesus from the beginning continues in the same vein despite its theoretical extension to the disciples in **ch. 10**. It will be only after Jesus' resurrection (**28:19–20**) that Matthew's narrative will envisage the disciples actually going out on their own.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you define the choice involved in following Jesus in terms of the challenges discipleship presents?
- 2) What are some of the ways in which we can deny Jesus in our everyday lives?
- 3) What are some of the wrong ways people today apply the phrase of "taking up your cross"?
- 4) What type of support are you providing for today's ambassadors of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Matthew McCraw: Jesus is hitting on this theme that He originally talked about when He told the apostles to go from town to town. He's saying that **people who accept the apostles will be rewarded**. Remember, He said it would be bad for those who rejected the message of the apostles. Now, He says He will reward those who welcome the message and welcomes those sent out.

He says even a cup of water given to a disciple of Jesus will not go unrewarded.

This passage should encourage us on two levels.

First, we should be encouraged that God will reward those who support us in the proclamation of God's message.

We have help in the mission. God has supernaturally and providentially orchestrated helpers along the way to encourage us, aid us, support us, and sustain us in our faithfulness to the proclamation of the Gospel!

How cool is that? God is involved in our lives and the lives of others to make this beautiful display of obedience and sacrifice play out.

Secondly, we should be encouraged to know that God will use us in the encouragement of those who are proclaiming God's message.

We can also be used by God to support each other, and others as the Gospel is proclaimed. Every little prayer you pray, every little email or note of encouragement you write, every dollar you give is seen by God. As you do it for disciples of Jesus it is as if you are doing it for Jesus Himself. Jesus sees you and you will be rewarded. Pray with confidence and joy! Support with confidence and joy! Encourage with confidence and joy! Give with confidence and joy!

Your faithfulness to accomplish the mission matters and your faithfulness to support the mission matters.

Jesus is so important, He is such a priority, that when you support those who serve Him, you are remembered and rewarded by God. It's all about Jesus and His work.

If you welcome a prophet of God, or a righteous person of God, or one of the disciples of God (or little ones as Jesus calls them), you will be rewarded by God.

Show how much a priority He is in your life by being a faithful disciple and supporting faithful disciples.

Scott Harris: Who Is a Disciple?

In recent years there has been a bit of a controversy among evangelicals over the **nature of discipleship**. **Zane Hodges**, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, began to promote the idea that there was a separation between salvation and being a disciple of Jesus. That notion has been picked up by others and promoted widely. However, the thesis is a false one. There is no separation between salvation and being a disciple because as I have pointed out before, a disciple is simply a student, a learner, someone that attaches themselves to a teacher in order to learn from them and become like them. There are those that read the Bible and think highly of Jesus and even try to imitate some of His character qualities, yet they do not know Him personally, they have not repented from their sins, they have not placed their faith in Him alone, they are not regenerate. There are pseudo-disciples of Jesus and they are not saved. But when it comes to those who are saved, there is no such thing as a saved person who is not a disciple. **Romans 8:29**, among other passages, makes it very clear that the purpose of our salvation is to become like Jesus Christ. Thus we can say that you can be a disciple without being saved, but you cannot be saved without being a disciple. Every true believer in Jesus Christ is also His follower.

Hallmarks of Genuine Disciples of Christ:

- **THEY CONFESS CHRIST – Matthew 10:32, 33**

This confession is to be "*before men*," so it is public in nature. Remember the context here contains persecution. It is the willingness to confess that Jesus is your Lord and to continue to do so even when that will cost you, possibly even your life. Jesus says here that for those who will do that, He will in turn confess them before the Heavenly Father.

- **THEY VALUE CHRIST – Matthew 10:34-39**
 - More than family
 - More than themselves

- **THEY RECEIVE A REWARD – Matthew 10:40-42**

To summarize these verses, any service done to any of God's people in Jesus' name amounts to service to Him and will be rewarded. When you go representing Christ bringing the whole gospel message to someone and they receive you and the message, they receive Jesus, and the person who receives Jesus receives God the Father as well. When we help out those that are serving the Lord we share in their reward even to the point of giving a cup of cold water to believers who seem insignificant and unimportant. When we are a blessing to others we are also blessed, and when other believers are a blessing to us they too are blessed. In God's work the lowliest believer can share in the blessings of the greatest. True disciples gain reward.

https://www.gracebible.org/who_is_a_disciple_matthew_10_32_42

Brother Rory: The Choice – Cost and Compensation of Discipleship

I. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (Matthew 10:34-38)

- Jesus says we must choose who we love.
- Jesus says we must choose who we want a relationship with.
- Jesus says we must choose where we want comfort.

And the reality is that if you choose anything over Jesus, then you don't get Him. It is the epitome of what God meant when He said, "I am a jealous God..." In other words to choose something over Him is the equivalent of denying Him. A disciple must choose Jesus over every other thing.

And then Jesus gives THREE THINGS that routinely cause people to deny Him.

1) SEPARATION FROM FAMILY

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

2) THREAT OF SUFFERING

(38) *"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."*

Just before Jesus time, there was a Jewish insurrection against Rome by a zealot named Judas. The Romans easily stopped the insurrection, but to make a statement, the Roman general Varus ordered over 2,000 Jews to be crucified. It is said that the crosses lined the roads of Galilee from one end to the other.

When Jesus said take up your cross, they knew what it meant. They had to be willing to suffer for Him. They had to be willing to endure the harshest of treatment.

3) LOSS OF LIFE

(39) "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

Now certainly that could refer to physical death.

(the cross certainly would be)

But there is more to losing your life than just physical death.

A Christian is called to **die to self**. Paul said, "*I die daily*"

- It can be your occupation (like Matthew)
- It can be your reputation (like Paul)

There are many ways in which following Jesus will cost us life as we know it.

- Many have confessed Christ, and then moved across the world on mission.
- Many have confessed Him and very quickly changed occupations.
- Many have confessed and accepted a dramatic change in income.
- Many have confessed and as a result given up their fame or popularity.

Confessing Jesus costs you your life. And many aren't willing to follow that far.

II. THE COMPENSATION OF A DISCIPLE (Matthew 10:39-42)

Persecution is a real consequence of living for Jesus.

However, so is **Heavenly Compensation**.

If you choose to keep your life on earth, you have forfeited life for eternity.

If you choose to sacrifice your life, then you will receive your life for eternity.

"Losers finders, Keepers weepers"

Jim Elliot – "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

You cannot lose anything, that God will not reward you.

Now, I know that Jesus is speaking directly to the twelve disciples, but if you'll notice, He extends this offer to all who hear this message.

(40) "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

If we will but surrender our life in this world, we will gain it come eternity.

AND NOT EVEN THE SMALLEST SACRIFICE WILL GO UNREWARDED

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

A disciple will be compensated.

Mark 10:28-30 *"Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."*

So that is it, very clearly and simply.
Do you choose the present or the future?
Do you follow Christ, or silently deny?

The notion that we can have this world and the next is just not a part of the gospel that Jesus preached. I know it is popular on television today, but Jesus never offered it. Jesus was very clear.

- Lose this life and find life for eternity.
- Keep this life and lost it for all eternity.
- You must be willing to surrender all to Jesus.

Matthew 10:32-33 *“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny Him before My Father who is in heaven.”*

<https://fbcspar.org/choice-matthew-1032-42/>

TEXT: Matthew 11:2-19

TITLE: DON'T LOOK FOR SHORTCUTS TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS MUST PRECEDE ENJOYMENT OF KINGDOM EXALTATION – NO BYPASSING THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Matthew 11:2 indicates a **turning point** in Matthew. There has been sporadic opposition (mainly 9:3–4, 11, 14, 34), but primarily a positive atmosphere as Jesus showed his authority and called for faith. The success of his ministry caused astonishment (7:28; 8:27; 9:8, 33), and the news went everywhere (4:24–25; 8:34; 9:26, 31). In the Mission Discourse he prophesied great trouble for future missions (10:14, 17–22, 25, 28, 35–36), and that begins here as the **opposition intensifies in chs. 11–12**. Of the nine pericopae in 11:1–12:50, six deal with rejection and judgment (11:2–19, 20–24; 12:1–8, 9–14, 22–37, 38–42), and the section begins with the doubt even of John the Baptist (11:3). Then Matthew adds to the parables of **Mark 4** the parables of the weeds (13:24–30, 36–43) and of the net (13:47–52), both centering on the harvest that leads to final judgment. The section ends with Jesus rejected even in his own hometown (13:53–58).

I want to quote the mindset of the great Apostle Paul – what was his great passion in life:

Phil. 3:10-11 *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to his death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

He suffered greatly throughout his ministry and had many opportunities to be frustrated and doubt his calling – but he was in strong in faith – knowing that his call to ministry had included the promise of fellowship in the sufferings of Christ – remember God’s instructions to Ananias to help him overcome his hesitation to commission the former persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ:

Acts 9:1-16 *“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*

Today we are going to look at the **frustration of an OT prophet** whom Jesus himself labeled as greater even than the prophet Isaiah --

[Many other comparisons and contrasts in this deep passage –

- Comparison between John the Baptist and Elijah – the prophesied prophet who must come before the day of the Lord
- Comparison between John the Baptist and Christ – the people rejected both – different style of presentation, but same message of repentance from sin
- Comparison between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of Christ – a new era has dawned in God’s program of redemptive history

- Comparison between the wickedness of past cities like Sodom and Gomorrah and the wickedness of this present generation who were privileged to witness the very miracles of Christ – they had the King Himself present to preach to them and convict them of sin and offer salvation -- and yet still rejected Him]

We are going to focus on what this passage teaches us with respect to the **frustration** felt by **John the Baptist**

Richard Gardner: Outline

1. Who Is Jesus? **11:1-6**
2. Who Is John? **11:7-15**
3. How Were They Received? **11:16-19**

Donald Hagner: In **chap. 11**, the glorious character of the kingdom of God comes into view and then in turn the reality of judgment for those who reject it, a theme that will become increasingly prominent. John’s question enables the summarizing description of Jesus’ deeds, which corresponds to the sketch of **chaps. 8–9** and to the commission given to the disciples in their missionary activity (cf. **10:8**).

I. (:2-6) WORRISOME QUESTION FROM A FRUSTRATED SERVANT OF GOD

A. (:2-3) Frustrated Confusion in the Question of the Imprisoned Prophet

“Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, 3 and said to Him, ‘Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?’”

Donald Hagner: John’s doubts should not appear unreasonable, since he was obviously expecting an imminent end of the age involving the judgment of the wicked (**3:12**). And though he had heard rumors of messianic-like deeds performed by Jesus, his wicked captors had not yet been judged and he had not yet experienced the fulfillment of the messianic promise of “*liberty to the captives*” (**Isa 61:1**; and even more vividly, **Isa 42:7**). He continued to sit in the prison of Herod Antipas (in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, according to Jos. Ant. 18.5.2) and thus could only send his disciples (cf. **9:14; 14:12**) to Jesus with his question.

Grant Osborne: Jesus had come to be the suffering Servant who conquered sin, not the conquering King who came to destroy the enemies of God’s people. Neither John nor Jesus’ followers were ready for this type of Messiah.

If anyone deserved to be frustrated in ministry, it was certainly John the Baptist. If anyone was ever justified to have his faith overshadowed by troubling doubts, it was certainly John the Baptist. [You know the Scriptures never teach that the doctrine of Eternal Security – once saved always saved – means an experience of Zero doubts.] No one had sacrificed more or shown more commitment to the cause of Christ than that great forerunner who announced the message of Repentance in preparation for the ushering in of the great kingdom of God.

But where was that kingdom? John found himself in prison for courageously delivering God’s message to King Herod like a faithful prophet should ... condemning him for his immorality to take his brother Philip’s wife. **Matt. 14:3-12** recounts his upcoming execution. John had been in prison for about a year. John certainly felt like he deserved better. Do you ever feel that way? Do you feel that your little service for Christ ... insignificant by contrast to the prophet John the

Baptist or that great Apostle Paul ... yet nevertheless very painful .. **Do you feel that you deserve better?**

John Walvoord: John had been imprisoned in the fortress of Machairus, the royal house of Herod, facing the Dead Sea, because of his fearless attack upon the immorality of Herod, who was living in adultery with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (**Mt 14:3-4**). Significantly, the Jewish leaders had been silent concerning this public scandal. . . It is most significant that Jesus did not attempt to answer the real question of John, of why judgment on the wicked was not being inflicted and why the people of Israel had not yet been delivered. Instead, Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who would not be offended by the apparent delay in fulfilling predictions of divine judgment.

John wanted Christ to ascend to the throne and usher in the kingdom. He wanted His Savior to come and deliver him from prison and exalt him for his loyal service. He wanted vindication before his enemies. He wanted to see proud King Herod judged and rendered speechless before the righteousness of the King of Kings. Yet Jesus seemed to be going about His ministry with no concern for his desperate plight. So in his frustration, John sends a couple of his disciples with this very sad question.

You can imagine how Christ must have felt upon hearing these words of doubt and self-pity. What about the suffering that lay ahead for the sinless Lamb of God? No one knew better than Christ that the road to the Cross could not be avoided. No one knew better than Christ that there were **no shortcuts to kingdom exaltation**.

John Nolland: It is not clear how we are to relate John's confidence about Jesus' identity implicit in **3:14** with the present questioning, but a certain **discomforting tension** between John's expectations and what Jesus did is common property to **Mt. 3:14, 9:14, and 11:3.7** John needed to come to terms with the fact that the one of whom he had now been hearing such remarkable things was, despite the quite unexpected form of his ministry, the one whom he had heralded as eschatological judge and deliverer — *'the one coming after'* John (**Mt. 3:11**).

B. (:4-6) Focused Certainty in the Response of Jesus Regarding His Messianic Identity

1. (:4) Eyewitness Testimony to the Identity of the Messiah

*"And Jesus answered and said to them,
'Go and report to John what you hear and see: '"*

2. (:5) Extensive, Irrefutable Proof from the Ministry of Jesus

*"the blind receive sight and the lame walk,
the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear,
and the dead are raised up,
and the poor have the gospel preached to them."*

Look at how Jesus responded to John's disciples. The Messiah is busy doing the will of God as prophecied in the OT. We will study some of these prophecies as we get to them in the book of Isaiah.

You haven't picked the wrong horse. You got it right. My miracles speak for themselves. How could you even raise such a question about my identity? And if you understand Who I am .. then

how can you question the timing of what I am doing or the ultimate fulfillment of all of the promises? But we question those two things all the time:

- “How long, O Lord?” . . .
- “Is your grace really going to prove sufficient for me in my present difficult circumstances??”

3. (:6) Exhortation Not to Make Any Mistake about the Identity of Jesus

“And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.”

Jesus here seems to be less than sympathetic to the plight of John the Baptist and his concerns for his own deliverance – Instead He delivers what sounds like a mild rebuke and a warning: “*make sure that you don’t stumble or be offended by your association with Me;*” it’s not all about your situation and what you want to see happen to improve your lot in life

R. T. France: [John the Baptist] has heard much in Jesus’ favor, but he would have liked to hear more. Jesus’ reply does not change the agenda, but offers **further evidence** along the same lines (“*the deeds of the Messiah*”), with the additional element of a clear echo of OT prophecies of eschatological salvation. He expects such evidence to convince John, and the “*rebuke*” of **v. 6** does not require us to believe that John’s expectation was on the wrong lines, but only that he was **slow to read the evidence**.

Richard Gardner: Speaking to all potential followers and not merely to John, Jesus urges persons not to stumble over the fact that he doesn’t fit their preconceptions of messiahship: Blessed are those who do not wait for another, but who in faith accept what God is doing through Jesus.

Donald Hagner: In short, John is meant to understand that he was correct in his recognition of Jesus as the promised one but that he must also be prepared to accept the fact that the kingdom Jesus brings does not, for the time being anyway, entail the judgment of the wicked. Indeed, on the contrary, the message of the kingdom goes precisely to the unrighteous (cf. **9:13**). The personal consequences for John were to be significant: not only continued imprisonment but eventually a martyr’s death. These too were not incompatible with the reality of the kingdom brought by Jesus.

II. (:7-10) WORD OF COMMENDATION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FOR HIS FAITHFUL FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

R. T. France: [These verses] define John’s position as the last and greatest of the prophets, fulfilling the role of the eschatological forerunner foretold in **Mal 3:1** and **4:5–6**, and as such ushering in the time of salvation to which he himself nonetheless remains to some degree an outsider. It is a role of high honor, but it remains that of a **herald**. . .

Verses 7–9 present a series of three matching questions with suggested answers which clearly belong together and build up to the climactic declaration of John’s prophetic status. **Verse 10** undergirds that declaration with a scriptural text more closely defining John’s role as the eschatological forerunner. **Verse 11** then summarizes the paradox of John’s salvation-historical position.

(:7a) Balancing Word of Commendation Introduced

“And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John,”

But now Jesus wanted to balance his soft rebuke with words of appreciation for John the Baptist

Jesus defends the character and ministry of John the Baptist before the crowd – correcting their possible false conclusions . . .

But this message is delivered after the disciples of John the Baptist have left; this message was delivered to the **crowds** – Why wasn’t this commendation delivered to John himself? It’s not all about John Jesus agreed with John’s assessment that John must decrease and Christ must increase – it is all about **how people respond to Jesus Christ**

3 CATEGORIES ON THE SCORECARD FOR FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD – 3 ESSENTIALS FOR THE MESSENGER OF GOD --

(cf. Mike Preston grading the Ravens after each game – let’s grade ourselves as we study these three characteristics – How faithful are we?)

Both John the Baptist and Christ grade out with A+s in these 3 categories --

A. (:7b) Man of Conviction – Not Shaky or Wishy-Washy – Faithfully taking a stand for what is right and pleasing to God

“What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?”

τί ἐξήλθατε εἰς τὴν ἔρημον θεάσασθαι; κάλαμον ὑπὸ ἀνέμου σαλευόμενον;

See, look at, behold

D. A. Carson: *“A reed [probably a collective singular referring to cane grass, found in abundance along the Jordan] swayed by the wind”* suggests a fickle person, tossed about in his judgment by the winds of public opinion or private misfortune. Figure of speech to suggest **vacillation**.

Spoke strong, bold words of the necessity of repentance; he did not back down from the Jewish religious leaders; nothing spineless about John the Baptist; even difficult circumstances should not shake our confidence in the Word of God and His promises; should not cause us to question or alter our message of biblical conviction

Isaiah 42:3 *“A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.”*

Matthew 12:20 *“A battered reed He will not break off, And a smoldering wick He will not put out, Until He leads justice to victory.”*

James 1:6 *“the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind”*

Ephes. 4:14 *“we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”*

Our culture does not value a man of conviction; they tar him with derogatory characterizations: narrow-minded; intolerant; etc.

The more I study ... the more convictions I develop; the more I follow my convictions, the more isolated I become ... so why study??

John MacArthur: He was a man who knew what **William Penn** said, **William Penn** said: "Right is right even if everyone is against it and wrong is wrong even if everyone is for it." That's simple but true. He was a man of great conviction. He was so great because he faced his weakness and overcame it and because he was strong in his conviction and nobody could intimidate him. He knew what was right and he would do it.

Phil Newton: Convictions are strong, unbending positions that one holds because of his understanding of truth and law.

Thomas Carlyle: Conviction is worthless unless it is converted into conduct.

Eleanor Roosevelt: When you have decided what you believe, what you feel must be done, have the courage to stand alone and be counted.

Martin Luther: Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason. I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

How do you grade yourself in terms of following **biblical convictions**??
Or do you live your life based on the decisions of **expediency** – what do I think will work out the best for me?

Look at how Christ spoke with such authority and conviction that people marveled; so different from the other rabbis of the day

Sometimes even those closest to you will counsel you to abandon your convictions ... why pay the price? Do what is convenient ... Does God really care? Why study the Scriptures if we are not going to commit ourselves to obedience – regardless of the cost

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.

Standing by a purpose true,
Heeding God's command,
Honor them, the faithful few!
All hail to Daniel's band!

B. (:8) Man of Calluses – Not Soft and Indulgent – Toughness
Faithfully living a life of discipline with his priorities in line with his mission

“But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces.”

ἀλλὰ τί ἐξήλθατε ἰδεῖν; ἄνθρωπον ἐν μαλακοῖς ἡμφιεσμένον; ἰδοὺ οἱ τὰ μαλακὰ φοροῦντες ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τῶν βασιλέων εἰσίν.

John the Baptist was not found enjoying the life of ease in the palace of the king; he was locked away in the dungeon on Death Row

Soft, luxurious, effeminate – by way of contrast to his rugged attire

Not an advocate of the Dress for Success mantra

No valet dressing him in fancy clothes for dinner as on Downtown Abbey

Matt. 3:4 *“Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist”*

Knew how to live a life of discipline and self-denial; lived in the wilderness, not in the palace; a rugged man’s man; would have made a good soldier

2 Tim. 2:1-4 *“Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”*

John MacArthur: Did you go out there just to see another typical guy who is a courtier, who operates in the palace, who favors the king, who does whatever you need to do to get the royal favors? A man who lives a life of luxurious self-indulgence ... did you go out there to see a guy who plays to the court, who seeks the favors because he wants to pad his seat?

We live in a soft society – probably this point of evaluation strikes home with us more than any other

C. (:9-10) Man of Commission (of Calling) – Not Self Appointed or Self Willed – Forerunner faithfully announcing the coming Messiah and fulfilling his calling

“But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’” [Quote from Mal. 3:1]

ἀλλὰ τί ἐξήλθατε ἰδεῖν; προφήτην; ναι λέγω ὑμῖν, καὶ περισσότερον προφήτου. ¹⁰ οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.

John 1:6 *“There was a man sent from God whose name was John”*

Barclay: The prophet is the man with God’s wisdom in his mind, God’s truth on his lips, and God’s courage in his heart.

Amos 3:7 *“the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets”*

Phil Newton: There had not been a prophet in Israel for several hundred years.

How are we doing in terms of obeying the Great Commission?

How are we doing in terms of aggressively using our spiritual gift for the kingdom of God?

III. (:11) WORD OF CONTRAST BETWEEN THIS DAY OF ANTICIPATION WHICH INVOLVES SUFFERING (EXEMPLIFIED BY THE MOST FAITHFUL = JOHN THE BAPTIST) AND THE DAY OF FULFILLMENT FOR GOD'S KINGDOM PROMISES (EXPERIENCED BY THE LEAST OF KINGDOM SAINTS)

Contrast between John the Baptist and his disciples and the disciples of Christ

R. T. France: The contrast is between two eras, that of preparation, culminating in John, and that of fulfillment, the arrival of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus has now inaugurated. John had proclaimed it (**3:2**), but he apparently remains outside while even the less important (cf. **5:19** for “least” and “great” in the kingdom of heaven) of those whom Jesus has now welcomed into the kingdom of heaven enjoys a **privilege** beyond that even of John himself.

Michael Wilkins: The contrast is not between human accomplishments but between **eras**. The arrival of the kingdom of heaven ushers in an incomparably greater era than any preceding it.

A. Greatness of John the Baptist

“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist;”

Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν· οὐκ ἐγήγερται ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν μείζων Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ·

- Arrived on the scene in fulfillment of prophecy
- Filled with the Holy Spirit
Luke 1:15 “for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.”
- Preached a message of repentance from sins
Luke 3:7-8 “He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”
- Identified Jesus as the Messiah
- Exemplified Humility – “He must increase but I must decrease”
- Leadership ability to continue to motivate loyal disciples even while in prison

B. Exalted Greatness of Kingdom Believers – Privileged Position

“yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

A new era dawned with the completed work of Christ on the cross and the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost; a new day yet even greater will dawn as Christ returns in victory to judge His enemies and rule from the throne of David over His kingdom on earth

Would you rather be living under the OT law or with the full realization of grace and truth that came with Christ?

Do you understand the privilege of being a kingdom of priests with direct access to God through the one Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ vs. living under a religious system with strict guidelines for Levitical priests?

Do you see the limitations of living in the days of types and shadows rather than in the blazing light of the fulfillment of God's promises in the person of His Son?

Heb. 1:1-2 *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son”*

S. Lewis Johnson: I'm more inclined to think that what is meant is that the position of John, before the time of the cross and before the institution of the kingdom of God, that John's position is less than that of the position of the simplest believer who is in the kingdom of the heavens. There is going to come a kingdom of God upon the earth, and compared with the position of John outside the kingdom at that time with the position of the person who is in the kingdom, the state or position of that man is greater than John the Baptist. And every man who has believed upon the Lord Jesus and who eventually reaches the kingdom of God will be in a situation or in a position that is greater than John the Baptist's position at the time this was spoken.

Phil Newton: And so we see that the greatness of the kingdom citizen is not found in some achievement of that particular believer but it is found in the greatness of the King, who has bestowed His great love, favor, and relationship upon the most insignificant person. Can we find the world's applause to count anything in light of the greatness belonging to a kingdom citizen through Christ?

William Barclay: So John had the destiny which sometimes falls to an individual; he had the task of pointing men and women to a greatness into which he himself did not enter. It is given to some people to be the signposts of God. They point to a new ideal and a new greatness which others will enter into, but into which they will not come. It is very seldom that any great reformer is the first person to toil for the reform with which his or her name is connected. Many who went before glimpsed the glory, often laboured for it, and sometimes died for it.

IV. (:12-19) WISDOM IS VINDICATED BY HER DEEDS

A. (:12-15) Understand the Times

1. (:12) Context of Violent Opposition against God's Kingdom

*“And from the days of John the Baptist until now
the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.”*

R. T. France: If, however, we translate *harpazō* in its more normal sense of “seize,” it might refer to a take-over bid aimed at the Jesus movement by people with an agenda of violence (against Rome?) rather than of spiritual salvation. The phrase remains obscure. . .

Michael Wilkins: Since the announcement of the kingdom of heaven in John's ministry, it has received opposition from the religious establishment of Israel. Now John has received opposition from Herod Antipas, a violent man who will put John to death violently.

William Barclay: It is likely that we will get the full meaning of this difficult saying by putting together the recollection of Luke and Matthew. What Jesus may well have said is: ‘Always my kingdom will suffer violence; there will always be antagonism and people will try to break up the kingdom, and snatch it away and destroy it; and therefore only those who are desperately in earnest, only those in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution, will in the end enter into it.’ It may well be that this saying of Jesus was originally at one and the same time a warning of violence to come and a challenge to produce a devotion which would be even stronger than the violence.

Donald Hagner: For all its greatness, the kingdom suffers violence and violent men plunder it. The kingdom involves **suffering**. In the same way, Matthew continues, so must the Son of Man suffer.

2. (:13) Crescendo Point of God’s Historic Revelation

“For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.”

R. T. France: Until the time of John the Hebrew scriptures (with the prophets unusually placed in the foreground) were pointing forward to a time of fulfillment (“*prophesying*”); after John that fulfillment has come. We noted in the comments on **5:17** how this little statement helps to explain the “*fulfillment of the law*” as it is expounded in **5:17–48**. It was not only the prophets who pointed forward to what was to come; the law too had this function, preparing the way for a fuller revelation of the will of God which was to come in the time of fulfillment, and which Matthew now finds present in the ministry of Jesus. Thus not only the prophets but even the law itself “*prophesied.*” With the coming of John, the last and greatest of the prophets, that forward-pointing role is complete.

3. (:14) Comparison to Elijah

“And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.”

Richard Gardner: In any case, the advent of the kingdom begins with John, who sets in motion the events that fulfill the hope of all the prophets and the law. More specifically, John fulfills Israel’s hope in the return of Elijah (vv. **14-15**, cf. **17:10-13**; **Mal. 4:5-6**; Sir. 48:10). Elijah’s role was to call the people back to covenant relationship with God. To accept John as Elijah requires an **act of faith** (just as faith plays a part in receiving Jesus as the Christ). And Jesus calls for such faith when he appeals to the crowd to hear what he has revealed (cf. **13:9**; **19:12d**).

4. (:15) Challenge to Listen Carefully

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

William Barclay: The old proverb has it that you can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink. God can send his messenger but men and women can refuse to recognize him, and God can send his truth but they can refuse to see it. God’s revelation is powerless without our response. That is why Jesus ends with the appeal that those who have ears should use them to hear.

B. (:16-19a) Unrepentant Will Always Find Excuses to Reject God’s Truth

1. (:16-17) Inconsistent Complaints about Ministry Methodology

“But to what shall I compare this generation?”

It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children,

*17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'"*

William Barclay: The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person, and the same institution, from quite opposite grounds. If people are determined to make no response, they will remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

2. (:18-19a) Inconsistent Complaints about Personal Behavior

*"For John came neither eating nor drinking,
and they say, 'He has a demon!'"*

*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous
man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!'"*

Donald Hagner: John and Jesus, central figures in the salvation being effected by God, are nevertheless **rejected by the populace**. The mystery becomes even greater when, as the Gospel proceeds, each is killed. Those who oppose God will always seem to have reasons to resist. At one level the arguments can seem plausible. But at bottom they reflect **unreceptive and unbelieving hearts**. John is too holy; Jesus is not holy enough. And Jesus in particular does not conform to the accepted standards of righteousness. Can either be what they claimed? The opponents of John and Jesus will in fact accept fulfillment of the promises only on their own terms. Whatever fails to match that preconception, regardless of all other evidence and arguments, is automatically rejected. Yet ultimately John and Jesus, the forerunner and the Messiah, can only be **vindicated**, for they constitute the turning point and heart of salvation-history.

C. (:19b) Ultimate Verdict Will Vindicate Christ and His Followers

"Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

John Nolland: ἐδικαιώθη then refers to the vindication of Wisdom over against those who make the accusations of vv. 18-19. The process of vindication is perhaps best illustrated by returning to vv. 2-6: for those prepared to see, what is going on points transparently to its significance. (In the Lk. 7:35 parallel, Wisdom is vindicated, rather, by the impact of the ministries of John and Jesus on those who see that **God's marvellous purposes are here being worked out.**)

William Barclay: Then comes Jesus' final sentence in this section: '*Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds.*' The ultimate verdict lies not with the cantankerous and perverse critics but with events. The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved the hearts of men and women to God as they had not been moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices and perversities, and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suit us.

Richard Gardner: Whether by deeds done or disciples made, Wisdom leaves a witness that vindicates God in spite of Israel's unbelief.

Grant Osborne: It seems clear that Jesus identifies himself with the work of Wisdom, so that Wisdom's deeds are Jesus' deeds (and those of his followers). So this means that Jesus himself is ἐδικαιώθη, "justified" or "vindicated" on the basis of the deeds named in **11:1, 5**. In other words, Jesus is proven right by his works (both word and deed) as well as the works of John the Baptist and his disciples in **ch. 10**, so that the indifference and outright rejection of Jesus' contemporaries will simply bring divine judgment on them (see the next section). . .

God's Vindication of Truth: God's messengers should never seek popularity and acceptance. We need the boldness of John and Jesus and must allow God to justify our ministry; we must refuse to play the numbers game of worldly popularity. John and Jesus did not worry about what people thought or even how people reacted. They proclaimed truth the way God led them, and so must we. Will our vindication come from the world (even from members of our church) or from God? We need more fearless proclaimers and fewer shallow popularizers!

CONCLUSION:

Back to the mindset of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 3 – keep pressing forward – seeking after a deeper **knowledge of Jesus Christ** and a richer experience of the **power of His resurrection** working in me right now ... so that I don't live in a state of frustration ... Yes, I experience **fellowship in His sufferings** in fulfilling my calling of following Jesus ... but His grace and power are sufficient for now and we will reign with Him in the coming Kingdom ... There are no shortcuts to kingdom exaltation!

Acts 14:22 *“encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*

“violent men take it by force”

James 5:7-11 *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord ...”*

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What should have been the mindset of John the Baptist while in prison?
- 2) Why did this generation both reject the presentation from John and the presentation from Jesus – as if they always wanted the opposite?
- 3) Where have we exhibited a life of conviction?
- 4) How have the comforts of this life made us soft and distracted us from fulfilling our calling?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: So John had the destiny which sometimes falls to men; he had the task of pointing men to a greatness into which he himself did not enter. It is given to some men to be the signposts of God. They point to a new ideal and a new greatness which others will enter into, but into which they will not come. It is very seldom that any great reformer is the first man to toil for the reform with which his name is connected. Many who went before him glimpsed the glory, often labored for it, and sometimes died for it.

S. Lewis Johnson: Sometimes Christians obtain the idea – I don't know where, really, they obtain it – that a strong believer in the Lord Jesus Christ never has any doubts. But that is not true to Christian experience, and it is really not true to the word of God. If you turn to the Old Testament and read the Psalms, for example, you'll discover that even in the same Psalm, the Psalmist often expresses great confidence in God, and then in the next verse or two, he is expressing in the words that he utters that his own faith has begun to waver and fluctuate, so that it is entirely possible and really true to our experience for us to have a fluctuation in our trust in God. . . So I think I can understand how John, in the course of being in prison, looking at the course of the Messianic ministry, seeing no real manifestation of the power of the Messiah, should become disturbed and begun to ask questions arising from his inner man: is it really true that he's the Messiah after all?

J. Ligon Duncan: More Than a Prophet

First of all, he's reminding us that He, Himself, represents a transition point in the history of God's dealings with His people. Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets were until John. All the things that lead up to the Messiah came to their culmination in John. With the coming of the Messiah, with Calvary and with Pentecost, the people of God are ushered into a new era. They experience a new fullness of the Spirit, a new fullness of His indwelling, a new universal proclamation of the gospel, a greater depth of spiritual experience than was normally experienced by those believers under the Old Covenant.

The Lord Jesus is saying that John - though he is the Joshua, though he is the Moses to point you to the promised land - John does not experience himself the blessings of the promised land realized. He is not unlike Moses, is he? Moses' job was to take the children of Israel into the land, and yet, Moses had to peer from Pisgah into the land. Moses never entered into the land. He was buried outside the land. His whole life was devoted to bringing the children of Israel into the land; but he, himself, did not go in. Joshua took the people of Israel in. So, also, John the Baptist. He would die in prison. John never got to see Jesus' incredible miracles with his own eyes. Can you imagine if you were like Simeon, holding that little baby in his arms and imagining the things that this child was going to do for God and for His cause and yet, he, himself, never saw our Lord do His great deeds. John never saw Calvary. He never saw Pentecost. His whole life was devoted to preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ and he never saw those things with his own eyes. You and I have been given those things in this book. We have been given a heritage that John was never even allowed to see. And, you know, the sad thing is that we discount it. We overlook it. We don't realize the privilege that is ours. That's precisely what the Lord Jesus is saying here. He is saying that 'those who were children of the kingdom - My kingdom that I've inaugurated now in a fullness that had never been experienced

before under the days of the Old Testament - My people are greater even than John the Baptist; even the least of them are more blessed, more privileged and have more benefits.'

Alan Smith: Forceful Men [telling illustration from **Pilgrim's Progress**]

Early in the book, Pilgrim is led up to the doors of a grand palace. Outside the palace sits a recorder who is ready to write down the names of those who enter the palace. Many people are standing around waiting to go in, but they are afraid of the armed men who block the entrance. Then Pilgrim saw a man with a "very brave countenance" come near. He said to the recorder, "Set down my name, sir!" And then armed with a sword and a helmet, the brave man fought his way into the palace of glory.

Let me raise a question to you this morning: Do you think this is an accurate portrayal of the Christian life, or was John Bunyan just being overly dramatic? Is it the case that we must fight our way into the Celestial City tooth and toenail, or is it possible that we can stroll into heaven with our hands in our pockets?

There are many people who evidently believe that the pathway to heaven is an easy one.

Stanly Saunders: Who and what are we looking for as we await the coming Messiah? Does he fit our hopes and expectations? Will we even recognize him when he comes? John the Baptizer's disciples have already expressed some doubts about Jesus' piety (cf. **9:14**), and now John's patience may be waning as he sits in Herod's prison, facing eventual death (**14:1-12**). Is Jesus really the Christ, the one who will set the captives free? The designation "[he] *who is to come*" (**11:3**) echoes John's own proclamation concerning "*the one coming after,*" who uses his winnowing fork to "*gather his wheat into the granary*" and will "*burn*" the chaff "*with unquenchable fire*" (**3:11-12**). John may be looking for the fire, while Jesus seems more clearly focused on gathering. But Jesus' ministry actually accomplishes both tasks at once; the acts by which Jesus gathers also generate resistance and judgment.

Jesus invites the audience to focus on the concrete signs of God's power at work among them, signs that will tell them what time it is and whether Jesus is the one coming: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and good news is proclaimed to the poor (**11:5**). These signs correspond to Isaiah's vision of the time when God redeems and restores Israel (e.g., **Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:18; 61:1**). Blessing comes to those who do not stumble (or take offense) over these irruptions of divine power (cf. **16:17, 23**), but judgment to those who turn away.

John himself is a sign of God's presence and power (**11:7-15**). He is a prophet who, like Elijah, announces judgment against the king and his advocates. Jesus describes John in terms that also mock Herod, who minted coins bearing the image of reeds (**11:7**) and dressed in the soft clothes of the elite (**11:8**). Herod is indeed violent and fearsome, but in the end really more like a reed in the wind, or a dandy (cf. **14:1-12**). The people have come to the wilderness, recalling the exodus from Egypt, to be set free from slavery to rulers like Herod. The image of reeds blowing in the wind also evokes the memory of Israel crossing the Sea of Reeds as God delivered them from Pharaoh's hand (**Exod. 13:18**). Just as the images Jesus uses mean more than one thing, so too John himself, though bound in Herod's prison, is more than he seems. He is the prophetic forerunner, come to announce liberation, judgment, and the advent of God's empire (**11:10**; cf. **Mal. 3:1; Exod. 23:20; Isa. 40:3**). John is, in fact, the greatest of those yet born, greater even

than his captor. He is overshadowed only by the least one—the servant—in God’s empire (11:11).

Jesus’ comments in 11:11–12 subtly distinguish three eras: the time until John, the time from John until “*now*” (a time when the violent attempt to seize the rule of God by force), and the time when one greater than John is present. Reading the signs rightly helps one know what time it is, just as knowing what time it is helps us know what the signs mean. The latter two “times” are not ordered in linear sequence, but overlap, for this is both the time when the signs of God’s presence and power are abundant, the time of repentance, and the time when the violent seek to turn God’s power to their own will. **This is the time of salvation and of judgment.**

John’s ministry, like Jesus’ own, is not violent, but nonetheless generates violent responses (cf. 14:1–12). Herod Antipas is one of the political and religious leaders who employ violence to seize the empire of heaven (11:12), as the prophets before John had warned (11:13). The powers of this world seek to bend religion to their own purposes, to baptize their violence in the language of divine will, destiny, and holy order, or to destroy it. God’s rule suffers these attacks no less than any other.

TEXT: Matthew 11:20-24

TITLE: WOES AGAINST UNREPENTANT PRIVILEGED CITIES

BIG IDEA:
GREATER OPPORTUNITY AND REVELATION BRING MORE SEVERE JUDGMENT FOR FAILURE TO REPENT

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Doriani: Jesus warns three cities—Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—that their resistance to his ministry is culpable. Each has the same pattern:

1. Jesus calls out the word of woe and warning.
2. Jesus explains why the city is liable to judgment.
3. He compares the cities of Israel to infamous pagan cities.

Richard Gardner: Each pronouncement contains:

- (1) A woe statement or its equivalent (**21a, 23a**).
- (2) An if... then statement (**21b, 23b**).
- (3) An I tell you statement drawing the consequences (**22, 24**).

To appreciate the force of these unfavorable comparisons, we must remember that Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were all **foreign cities**. What Jesus is saying, then, is that Gentiles repent more readily than Israel (cf. **12:41-42**), and that accordingly they will fare better than God's own people at the judgment.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus employs the common Old Testament form of a **woe** (cf., e.g., **Num 21:29; 1 Sam 4:8; Isa 3:9-11; Jer 13:27; Ezek 24:6-9**)—an exclamation of “how greatly one will suffer,” **mingling doom with pity**. Jesus laments God's coming judgment on the cities in which many of his miracles occurred.

Ray Fowler: In these verses we learn five things about those who do not repent:

- 1) Jesus denounces those who do not repent.
- 2) Jesus mourns for those who do not repent.
- 3) Jesus looks for sincerity and sorrow in those who do repent.
- 4) Jesus warns of coming punishment for those who do not repent. And
- 5) Jesus urges you to repent now rather than later.

R. T. France: Even in Galilee, including Jesus' “*own*” town of Capernaum, the honeymoon period is apparently over. And when those who have been privileged to witness Jesus' ministry in their own communities fail to respond, they must expect to face a more serious judgment than the notorious pagan cities which had no such special revelation.

Walter Wilson: The vista presented in the previous segment continues to unfold here, as Jesus is seen further denouncing the people for their failure to receive the kingdom. Such refusal, we now see, is especially damnable for those who have witnessed public demonstrations of kingdom power. As in **11:2-5**, the miracles Jesus performs are presented as manifestations of his identity, in which case the people's rejection of the miracles constitutes **rejection of Jesus himself** a.

With great irony, the fate of biblical places notorious for their wickedness is compared favorably to the end awaiting cities that experienced the Messiah's ministry firsthand, including his own hometown. We then learn that the rejection of the Messiah accords with a divine pattern in which truth is concealed from the powerful and revealed to unlikely recipients. As the embodiment of Wisdom (cf. **11:19**), Jesus confounds human expectations, even as he continues to invite humanity to participate in the grace and compassion that the kingdom offers.

Charles Swindoll: After mentioning the irreverent and irrational mocking of the critics who had rejected His preaching and miracles (**11:16-19**), Jesus decided it was time to denounce the passivity of those places that had received maximum exposure to the words and works of the Messiah. They were without excuse. The three cities he explicitly mentioned were Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum – His own ministry base. Though we aren't given any specific details of Jesus' ministry in the first two cities mentioned, we can assume these were included among the cities where Jesus preached after departing from Capernaum (**11:1**). While the disciples made longer and farther trips in their preaching mission, Jesus likely stayed closer to His home base. Evidently, the reception of His message had been lukewarm to downright chilly in those cities (**11:20**).

Allen Ross: What is interesting in this section is that Jesus hints that there will be **degrees of punishment** in the judgment based on the amount of "light" or revelation people had. People like the Sodomites may have been wicked and idolaters, but it will go easier on them in the judgment because they did not have the amount of light Capernaum did. Capernaum had a lot of revelation, and since they rejected it, the judgment will be severe on them. This shows us that God is very much aware of how much information people had of the truth and will take that into account. Judgment will be fair. But it will be the most severe on those who had the most information and refused it. People who live in a region which is filled with churches and religious communications will have no excuse if they choose not to respond to the message.

I. (:20) CONDEMNATION OF CITIES FOR FAILURE TO REPENT IN SPITE OF THE ABUNDANCE OF OPPORTUNITY

"Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent."

D. A. Carson: The many miracles again remind us of the extent of Jesus' ministry (cf. **4:23; 8:16; 9:35; Jn 20:30; 21:25**) and of the depth of responsibility imposed on those with more light.

Donald Hagner: Now the extent of the rejection of Jesus comes into full light. With the unbelief of Israel, a **turning point** in the narrative has been reached (cf. **Comber**). For the first time we encounter the mysterious fact of the failure of Jesus' mission to Israel. Jesus rebukes the largely **unreceptive cities** (i.e., villages) of Galilee, particularly since they had been **privileged** to see the mighty deeds, indeed *αἱ πλεῖστα δύναμεις*, "*most of the miracles*," of Jesus. This word *δύναμεις*, "*mighty deeds*," occurs like a refrain in vv **21** and **23**. Although they had witnessed these deeds of power, they did not respond to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom (cf. **John 12:37**): they did not "*repent*" (*μετενόησαν*). The same verb occurs in v **21** and is implied in v **23**. This indicates that Jesus' message about the kingdom (cf. **4:23; 9:35**; cf. 10:7) was accompanied, as from the beginning (**4:17**), by a **call to repentance**.

Walter Wilson: The vindication of wisdom is accompanied by the punishment of those who reject it. In this sense, the scenarios of judgment in **11:20–24** (based on Q/**Luke 10:12–15**) follow logically after the polemic of **11:16–19** (based on Q/**Luke 7:31–35**). Having completed his reproof of “*this generation*,” Jesus now singles out some of its **most culpable representatives**, specifically the cities in which he had performed most of his δυνάμεις (“*miracles*”), a term that recalls ἔργα (“*works*”) in **11:2+19** and the enumeration of Jesus’s deeds of power in **11:5**. If those who accept the one performing such deeds are blessed (**11:6**), those who fail to do so are **condemned**. Presupposed throughout is the idea that the miracles performed by Jesus are to be understood as eschatological signs, that is, as **portents of impending judgment**.

Leon Morris: It is clear that Jesus had performed a number of miracles, mostly works of healing, and he expected those who saw them to recognize them for what they were, signs that God was at work in their midst. Jesus was not looking for amazement and admiration, but for repentance. That was the first note he struck in his preaching (**4:17**), and it remained a constant.

II. (:21-22) CHORAZIN AND BETHSAIDA WORSE OFF THAN TYRE AND SIDON

D. A. Carson: Three large theological propositions are presupposed by Jesus’ insistence that on the day of judgment (cf. **12:36; Ac 17:31; 2Pe 2:9; 3:7; 1Jn 4:17; Jude 6**), when he will judge (**7:22; 25:34**), things will go worse for the cities that have received so much light than for the pagan cities.

1. The first is that the Judge has contingent knowledge: he knows what Tyre and Sidon would have done under such-and-such circumstances.
2. The second is that God does not owe revelation to anyone, or else there is injustice in withholding it.
3. The third is that punishment on the day of judgment takes into account opportunity. There are degrees of felicity in paradise and degrees of torment in hell (**12:41; 23:13**; cf. **Lk 12:47–48**), a point Paul well understood (**Ro 1:20–2:16**).

The implications for Western, English-speaking Christendom today are sobering.

A. (:21) Miracles without Repentance Bring Condemnation on Chorazin and Bethsaida

1. Calling Out the Cities for Failure to Repent

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus calls out, “*Woe*,” to them. “*Woe*” suggests both anger and lamentation, both pity and doom. It announces impending judgment: *Woe*, for “*it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you*” (**11:24**). Yet the *woe* implies that there is still time to repent. The end is almost, but not quite, here. “*Woe*” calls out judgment, yet it also offers a **shred of hope** for the penitent.

Grant Osborne: Chorazin was a medium-sized town noted for its wheat production and identified with modern Khirbet Karazeh about two miles north of Capernaum. Bethsaida was on the northern tip of the lake just on the western side of the Jordan River in Gaulanitis (but geographically part of Galilee) and was the original home of Simon and Andrew as well as Philip (**John 1:44, 12:21**). Jesus had two mission trips through Galilee in Matthew (**4:23; 9:35**), walked on the water on the way there in **Mark 6:45**, and healed a blind man there in **Mark 8:22** and many others in **Luke 9:10**.

Michael Wilkins: Korazin (Khirbet Kerazeh) is only 2–1/2 miles (4 kilometers) north of Capernaum. Little evidence from the time of Jesus remains, but by the third to fourth centuries it was described in rabbinic literature as a “medium-size town.” The black basalt ruins of a large synagogue from that later era have been excavated, with the famous “*seat of Moses*” (cf. **23:2**) discovered in the ruins. The city was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt in the fifth century, only to be destroyed again in the seventh or eighth century.

Bethsaida (Aram. “*house of fishermen*”) was the birthplace of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (**John 1:44; 12:21**), and possibly others of the disciples including James and John, the sons of Zebedee. It is mentioned more often in the New Testament than any city except Jerusalem and Capernaum. It is located four miles northeast of Capernaum at the northernmost tip of the Sea of Galilee at the place where the Jordan River enters the sea. The city was built by Herod Philip (cf. **16:13**), son of Herod the Great and half-brother of Herod Antipas, and lay in the region under Philip’s governance. During Jesus’ time the Jordan delta extended further inland at that point (perhaps as much as 1–1/2 miles further than presently), giving it one of the largest harbors on the Sea of Galilee and making it an important fishing center.

Walter Wilson: The inclusion of Chorazin and Bethsaida (**11:21**) among the cities in which “*most of his miracles had happened*” (**11:20**) comes as a surprise, since no mention has been made of Jesus’s activity in either place. Perhaps the reader is meant to understand these localities as being **representative** of the various cities and villages throughout Galilee in which he performed wonders, as indicated by the **summary statements** in **4:23** and **9:35** (cf. **11:1**).

2. Contrast with Tyre and Sidon

“For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Richard Gardner: The Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, with which Chorazin and Bethsaida are unfavorably compared in **verses 21b-22**, were famous for their wealth and power, but condemned by the prophets for their pride (cf. **Isa. 23; Ezek. 27-28**).

John Nolland: **Sackcloth** is a rough cloth made of goats’ hair and worn over the naked body in token of mourning or penitence. In the Greek world the meaning of the word is wider (coarse hair cloth for bags and sacks), but the penitential use of the material was known. The link with **ashes** is found in several OT texts. One covered oneself with sackcloth and either dusted oneself down with or sat in the ashes.

B. (:22) More Severe Judgment than for Tyre and Sidon

“Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.”

III. (:23-24) CAPERNAUM WORSE OFF THAN SODOM

A. (:23) Miracles without Repentance Bring Condemnation on Capernaum

1. Calling Out the City for Pride

“And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades;”

Grant Osborne: Capernaum, a town of about 1,500 population, was the leading city in the area, well-situated geographically and economically.

2. Contrast with Sodom

“for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.”

Donald Hagner: Capernaum was the headquarters of Jesus’ Galilean ministry (**4:13; 8:5; 9:1; 17:24; cf. Mark 2:1**). It must have been particularly distressing that Capernaum was in the main unreceptive to Jesus’ ministry (cf. **13:57**). Capernaum was apparently **proud** and **ambitious**, as the question *“Will you be exalted to heaven?”* suggests (cf. **Isa 14:13**). Yet her fate would prove to be the opposite: she would go down to *“Hades”* (ἄδου; Heb. šē’ōl), i.e., the unseen realm of the dead (used by Matthew elsewhere only in **16:18**). This is an allusion to the LXX of **Isa 14:15**: εἰς ἄδου καταβήσῃ (cf. **14:11**, which has only a slightly different word order). It is difficult to make the application of the first rhetorical phrase to Capernaum more precise, but it seems to refer to an unwarranted, prideful confidence in an exceptional degree of eschatological blessing. The imagery of **v 23** is clearly borrowed from **Isa 14:13–15** (for šē’ōl, see too **Ezek 26:20–21**). The comparison with Sodom makes Jesus’ indictment of Capernaum all the sharper. Sodom’s wickedness and consequent destruction were notorious from the OT record (**Gen 18:20–19:29; cf. Isa 1:9; Rom 9:29; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7**). Had the miracles of Jesus been performed in Sodom, even Sodom would have repented and the city would not have been destroyed: it would have *“remained until today”* (ἔμεινεν ἄν μέχρι τῆς σήμερον). But in the last judgment, Sodom, like Tyre and Sidon compared to Chorazin and Bethsaida, will fare better than unbelieving Capernaum.

R. T. France: Capernaum has been hitherto a place of revelation and response (**4:13–16; 8:5–17; 9:1–34**), but woven into those accounts has been an undercurrent of **opposition** and **rejection** (**8:10–12**, with special reference to its Jewish inhabitants over against the Gentile centurion; **9:3, 11, 34**) provoking Jesus’ comment that the old wineskins cannot accommodate the new wine (**9:16–17**). Capernaum, as the base of Jesus’ operations, has received more of the light (**4:16**) than the other towns, and so its unresponsiveness deserves a greater condemnation. The comparison with Sodom (cf. **10:15**) is therefore even more wounding than that with Tyre and Sidon, since at least the Phoenician cities, though captured by Alexander the Great, were still standing, whereas Sodom was the **classic example of total destruction**, its remains now buried under the waters of the Dead Sea. Even worse is the unmistakable echo in **v. 23** of Isaiah’s taunt (**Isa 14:13–15**) against the ambitions and downfall of the king of Babylon, the traditional enemy and destroyer of Judah. . . . The example of the king of Babylon is apparently being used not because of any specific equivalence, but as a proverbial example of **pride going before a fall**, the pride in this case being Capernaum’s failure to recognize any need to respond to Jesus’ call to repentance. **Hades** is the place of the dead rather than a place of punishment; here, as in **16:18**, its only other use in Matthew, it **symbolizes destruction**.

B. (:24) More Severe Judgment than for Sodom

“Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

Stanley Saunders: Jesus reserves his most solemn judgment for Capernaum, the home base of his ministry. If the people of Capernaum imagine that the divine power manifested among them implies that they don’t need to repent, they are mistaken. The powers that Jesus has

demonstrated are not meant to elicit a sense of triumph or complacency; they are a call to discern the time, to repent of the ways that enslave, and turn toward God. Every generation that witnesses the signs of God's presence and power but continues on its way joins the ranks of "this generation."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can a loving Jesus issue such **harsh words** of condemnation and divine judgment?
- 2) Are these towns being upbraided for gross immorality and deviant behavior or for their **indifference** to the message of the kingdom and the call to repentance?
- 3) Is it fair for God to provide differing levels of knowledge and opportunity to respond to His message of salvation?
- 4) How does this passage refute the view of **annihilism**?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: This passage vividly illustrates the simple truth that **the greater the revelation, the greater the accountability**. This is a principle encountered elsewhere in the NT, for example, in **Rom 2:12–16**. The cities of Galilee were especially privileged. A great light had shone in their midst (cf. **4:15–16**), yet they refused to acknowledge that light. They accepted neither the message of the kingdom nor the messenger of the kingdom. They are accordingly more culpable than those who, though very wicked, had less clear evidence of the will of God. The reality of their future judgment points inescapably to the supreme importance of the mission and message of Jesus. This is the true center of the passage. The meaning of the failure of Jesus' mission to Israel will remain unclear until his disciples are forced to grapple with the problem of the failure of their mission to Israel (see esp. **Rom 11:11–12, 25**).

Daniel Doriani: Lessons:

Several important lessons rise from these verses.

First, **God is the one truly competent Judge**, for he alone knows all things. Every human judgment is based on imperfect knowledge. We make every decision on insufficient evidence. Not so with God. He knows all that is, was, and shall be. But he also knows hearts so well that he has contingent knowledge, knowledge of what might have been.

Second, **God is sovereign**. He does not owe anyone his revelation; he is not unjust to give more light to Israel. But he does judge people according to the light they have. There are degrees of joy in heaven and degrees of misery in hell (**Matt. 12:41; 23:14**—"twice as much a son of hell"). The more knowledge one has, the more accountable he or she is.

Third, **there is corporate as well as individual responsibility**. Whole societies harden their hearts to God, and they fall into certain sinful patterns for decades, even for generations. For

example, today Americans have the highest divorce rate on earth, and by a large margin. Meanwhile, couples cohabit, outside of marriage, ever more often. We have learned to abuse the institution of marriage. Let us pray for our generation and speak to our generation, so it does not become hard to God's truth.

Fourth, **those who claim to be religious are often the most hardhearted of all.** The religious often think they have everything worked out. They know their doctrines, their duties, and are pleased with their knowledge and virtue. Meanwhile, they despise others (**Matt. 23:13–36; Luke 18:9–14**). Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom would have repented had they seen Jesus' miracles. Capernaum saw but, for a while, remained unmoved. I say "for a while" for Capernaum was a center of Christianity by A.D. 50–55. That is, Jesus' plain speech, his "woe," his word of judgment was effective.

Fifth, **we should not shy away from Jesus' teaching on judgment and hell**, even if it seems unpopular. Heaven and hell are eternal realities, and it is both right and helpful to tell people so. If someone is in danger of hell, we must say so. Even religious people can be in danger. If we tell the truth, people may hear, repent, believe, and escape God's judgment. Indeed, if any reader is not certain he is ready for the judgment day, then do not delay. Let the warning be effective for you. Ask God for his mercy today, so you can be sure you are right with God.

Sixth, **let us labor wisely in our missional work.** Jesus said Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom—unlikely places all—could come to faith. Other unlikely cities—Alexandria, Ephesus, and Rome—became centers of the early church, along with Capernaum. So follow the movement of the Spirit, not our guesses, and follow him to those places where he is working.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Lord Jesus does not use these hard words to be mean. He doesn't use these words to tear people down. He is trying to **shake them out of their indifference** because He loves them so much. He loves them so much He doesn't care whether they get angry with him. And we need folks who will care about us more than they care about what we think about them. We need those folks who will administer to us the wounds of a friend. That's a scary thing to have to do. Counselors and ministers and friends have to do it all the time. After many hours of patient listening, of empathetic understanding, of coming along side, there may come that time when we have to say to our friend, "There is a glaring flaw that I must tell you about in your life if I am to be a real friend to you." And we know that it may cost us our friendship to do it, but we do it because we love one another; not because we're mean spirited; not because we want to tear someone down; but because we love them so much we're willing to risk losing their love for us. That's how much we love them. The Lord Jesus Christ is trying to shake these people awake, spiritually, in the words that He says to them. . .

And the Lord Jesus uses this language to shake them into awareness of their condition, and secondly to emphasize the **seriousness** of the matter. The Lord Jesus is not trifling with them and He doesn't expect to be trifled with. He is using this language deliberately and pastorally to teach them of the urgency of their situation. . .

I want you to notice at least three things which raise the issue of **God's sovereignty** and **man's responsibility** in **verses 20** through **25**.

- First of all, isn't it interesting that Jesus reminds us here that **not everyone has the same exposure to the gospel**. The folks in Bethsaida and Chorazin and Capernaum had more

exposure to gospel inducements than did the people in the Old Testament in Sidon and Tyre, and in Sodom and Gomorrah. They had more opportunities in these cities where Jesus was preaching to hear the gospel than did these people to hear the prophets of the Old Testament. “That’s not fair,” somebody says. Jesus said it. I didn’t say it. I didn’t write it. Calvin didn’t write it. Jesus said it. That’s the way it is. They had more opportunities. Listen to what **Matthew Henry** says, “Some places enjoy the means of grace in greater plenty, power, and purity than others.” That is just the way it is.

- Secondly, notice that Jesus indicates that some would have repented if they had more light. Now, boy, if that isn’t a mental tongue twister, I don’t know what is. Get what Jesus is saying here. He is not saying that there would have been, that the reason that some people don’t repent is because they don’t have as much light. He’s not saying that. He is, however, saying, as a figure of speech, He’s raising the question, “Why do some people repent and others don’t?” Now that again, is a question that involves the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of men.
- And then finally, in **verse 25**, you’ll see thirdly that the Lord Jesus suggests that God the Father has actually hidden repentance from some people, even though Jesus invites all to come to Him. Now let me just stress again, Calvin didn’t write that passage. Jesus spoke that passage. The issues of sovereignty and responsibility are just there in the Bible, and we only ignore them if we want to ignore the Bible. We’re not ignoring somebody’s manmade theology when we ignore those words, we’re ignoring the Lord Jesus Christ.

S. Lewis Johnson: But the question is very hard for common sense. If Tyre and Sidon would have repented, and if Sodom **would have repented**, then **why did they not have opportunity?** And I don’t think anyone can answer that who does not believe in the sovereign grace of God. And if the question remains, it’s a question that we shall find ultimate answer upon when we get to heaven. But we can be sure that so far as God is concerned, he has stated plainly in his word that he “*hardens who he wills and he exercises mercy on who he wills.*” These are the words of God. And if we don’t like them, if we thrash about seeking to escape their force, then our argument is not with men. Our argument is ultimately with the word of God.

John MacArthur: Treating Christ with Criticism (:16-19) and Indifference (:20-24)

The gentleness is gone when you hit **verse 20**. There’s almost a line of demarcation between those two verses. Something dramatic changes, and judgment begins to come with fury in **verse 20**. And this, of course, accelerates the events that lead to the people crucifying Christ. But there is definitely an open flow of the wrath of God that comes in the next section. Now, we’ve seen the response of criticism, what men did: they criticized. Now, I want you to see the **response of indifference**: what men didn’t do. . .

Verse 20, “*Then began He to upbraid*” - it means to reproach, or to speak condemnation against - “*the cities in which most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.*” The gentleness of **verse 19** is gone now. I mean, they’ve had ten chapters of revelation. They’ve had the fullness of the Galilean ministry, with all of its myriad of miracles - He banished disease from Palestine. I mean, they’ve seen enough to know - forgiving sin, casting out demons, raising the dead, you name it.

And now, they have not repented, and so He moves to the statement of His judgment. This is, if you will, **the wrath of the Lamb**; as gracious as the Son of God is in His friendship with sinners, so fierce is He in His denunciation of those who will not acknowledge their sin. It is holy anger; it is holy fury that you see in this passage. Now, he mentions the cities - Matthew does - in which most of His mighty works were done. Now, this would be the Galilean cities, where His Galilean ministry had taken place. . .

Now, listen to this: when men have that kind of privilege and do not repent, what happens is their guilt becomes aggravated, and they are more severely guilty than if they never heard at all, or saw at all, a miracle. It is far better, my friend, for you to know nothing about Jesus Christ, than to know anything about Him and reject Him. For there is greater punishment - **Hebrews 10:26** - to the one who knows of Christ, and tramples His blood under his feet, than the one who never knew. . .

They had a languid interest in His teaching. His miracles entertained them, and nothing more. His providential goodness never touched their hearts. His doctrine produced no change in their lives. Self-satisfied, complacent, whether in the form of Pharisaic self-righteousness or popular indifference, is condemned by Christ as the grossest of evils. On the outside, they were eminently respectable, but hell will be hotter for them than for Sodomites.

TEXT: Matthew 11:25-30

TITLE: SOVEREIGN REVELATION BUT UNIVERSAL INVITATION

BIG IDEA:

**ESSENTIAL DIVINE REVELATION IS TARGETED BUT UNIVERSAL
DISCIPLESHIP INVITATION IS EXTENDED TO ALL**

INTRODUCTION:

Craig Blomberg: The language of these verses (“*hidden*,” “*revealed*,” “*your good pleasure*”) is incontrovertibly **predestinarian** in nature, but the language of **free will** appears equally clearly in **vv. 20-24**, in which people are judged for their rejection of Jesus, and in **vv. 28-30**, in which Jesus offers salvation to those who will respond more positively. Scripture in fact regularly and without sense of contradiction **juxtaposes the themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility** (e.g., **Gen 50:19-20; Lev 20:7-8; Jer 29:10-14; Joel 2:32; Phil 2:12-13**).

Grant Osborne: Jesus traces several themes here.

- (1) God’s own elect sovereignty is made known in revealing the kingdom truths not to the so-called “*wise*” but to “*infants*,” i.e., the “*little ones*” (**10:42**), Jesus’ followers (**11:25–26**).
- (2) The intimate union of Father and Son is demonstrated in their unique knowledge of each other and in the revelation Jesus has provided (**v. 27**).
- (3) Jesus invites all who will to become followers and find rest in him by taking his easy “*yoke*” upon themselves (**vv. 28–30**).

The progression of thought is this: Jesus thanks God for his sovereign will in revealing salvation, then takes on himself that authority as the Son, and finally uses that authority to invite the weary to enjoy salvation and rest in him. In all of this Jesus is God’s Wisdom, the voice and presence of God in this world and the true authoritative interpreter of God’s truth.

David Thompson: **Dr. Stanley Toussaint** said that Matthew **chapter 11** presents three main evidences that Israel had rejected Jesus Christ as King:

- 1) Israel was antagonistic to the King (**11:2-19**);
- 2) Israel was indifferent to the King’s message (**11:20-24**);
- 3) Christ’s invitation for all to come to Him indicates Israel has rejected the King (**11:25-30**).

This section of Scripture presents a major turning point in the book of Matthew. There is a major turn from the national to the individual. There is a major change from promoting an announcement of a national kingdom to an announcement of personal salvation.

Notice how **verse 25** begins—“*at that time*.” The Greek emphatically stresses that this turn occurred in the time when Jesus was concluding His words of condemnation against the Galilean cities that had seen His miracles but refused to repent.

There is a wonderful, gracious invitation that is presented in this great passage of Scripture:

ANY PERSON WHO WANTS A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND DESIRES A HEART AND SOUL THAT IS AT REST WILL COME TO CHRIST IN CHILDLIKE FAITH AND LEARN FROM HIM.

I. (:25-27) GOD'S SOVEREIGN ROLE IN REVELATION

A. (:25-26) Praise for God's Sovereignty in Revelation

1. (:25) Grandiose Praise

a. Praise for God's Sovereignty

*“At that time Jesus answered and said,
‘I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,’*

Grant Osborne: Jesus' prayer flows out of the condemnation of the Galilean cities and prepares for another rejection scene in **12:1–8**. Thus the “*answering*” probably means Jesus is responding to the Jews' refusal to accept his message.

D. A. Carson: While *exomologoumai soi* (“*I praise you*”) can be used in the sense of “I confess my sins” (cf. **3:6**), the basic meaning is **acknowledgment**. Sins truly acknowledged are sins confessed. When this verb is used with respect to God, the person praying “acknowledges” who God is, the propriety of his ways, and the excellence of his character. At that point, acknowledgment is scarcely distinguishable from **praise** (as in **Ro 14:11; 15:9; Php 2:11**; cf. LXX of **Ps 6:6; 7:18; 17:50** et al.).

Here Jesus addresses God as “*Father*” and “*Lord of heaven and earth*” (cf. Sir 51:10; Tob 7:16). These are particularly appropriate titles, because the former indicates Jesus' sense of sonship and prepares for **v.27**, while the latter recognizes God's sovereignty over the universe and prepares for **vv.25–26**. God is sovereign, free to conceal or reveal as he wills. God has revealed “*these things*”—the significance of Jesus' miracles (cf. **vv.20–24**), the messianic age unfolding largely unnoticed, the content of Jesus' teaching—to *nēpiois* (“*little children*,” “*childlike disciples*,” “*simple ones*,” GK 3758; see Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 111; cf. **Jn 7:48–49; 1Co 1:26–29; 3:18**); and he has hidden them from the “*wise and learned*.”

b. Praise for God's Revelation Program

*“that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent
and didst reveal them to babes.”*

D. A. Carson: Many restrict the “*wise and learned*” to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, but the context implies something broader. Jesus has just finished pronouncing woes on “*this generation*” (**v.16**) and denouncing entire cities (**vv.20–24**). These are “*the wise and learned*” (better, “*the wise and understanding*”) from whom the real significance of Jesus' ministry is concealed. The point of interest is not their education, any more than the point of interest in the “*little children*” is their age or size. **The contrast is between those who are self-sufficient and deem themselves wise and those who are dependent and love to be taught. . .**

We must not think that God's concealing and revealing are symmetrical activities arbitrarily exercised toward **neutral human beings** who are both innocent and helpless in the face of the divine decree. God is dealing with a race of sinners (cf. **1:21; 7:11**) whom he owes nothing. Thus

to conceal “*these things*” is not an act of injustice but of **judgment**—the very judgment John the Baptist was looking for and failed to find in Jesus. The astonishing thing about God’s activity is not that God acts in both mercy and judgment but who the recipients of that mercy and judgment are: those who pride themselves in understanding divine things are judged; those who understand nothing are taught. The predestination pattern is the counterpoint of grace.

Craig Blomberg: *You hid* does not mean that God completely concealed the things in question from the world’s wise ones, but rather that it is in **his plan** that the way to knowing them is not the way of human excellence or wisdom (cf. **1 Cor. 1:18-19; 2:6-8**). As far as human excellence in itself is concerned, these things are hidden, and that by the divine plan. Jesus does not define these things, but the expression “must refer, in one way or another, to the secret of the presence of the Kingdom which was the burden of Jesus’ preaching.” Some interpret it as speaking of eschatological happenings, and others of the knowledge the Son received from the Father and which he passes on to his followers. Or there may be a reference to the mighty works Jesus did and which the Jews in general were unable to understand as signs of kingdom. But all such views surely point to “**the presence of the Kingdom,**” and we will do well to take this as our starting point. . .

Their self-sufficiency means that they do not easily come to trust God for salvation. This does not mean that none of the world’s wise and clever people will come to know it. In every age there have been wise and clever people who have rejoiced in the revelation Jesus has made known. But the point is that they came to know it by their simple trust in Jesus, not by their intellectual skills and their knowledge of abstruse research methods. And that simple trust is open to the humblest of us all, to the babies among us.

Daniel Doriani: The spiritual question of the hour was this: **Why did Israel respond so poorly to Jesus?** The answer is twofold.

- First, Jesus says, it was their fault. Some were hard to please—fickle and spiritually lazy. Others had an academic consensus about the proper interpretation of Scripture and its laws. They were quite convinced of their orthodoxy and rectitude.
- But second, God hid the truth from those who claimed to be wise and revealed it to infants. He chose to turn the world upside down.

By this Jesus commends a **childlike attitude**. Some people think the commendation of children means that Jesus does not want us to bother with doctrine or with deep things of the faith. They say we must simply trust God and live by his commands. Anything more is superfluous. But this confuses the metaphor. Children are not thoughtless or foolish. Children think very hard about things that affect them, and so should we. Christians should have a child’s heart and an adult’s head.

Richard Gardner: Here the knowledge to be disclosed is the meaning of Jesus’ messianic deeds; the infants to whom God reveals these things are the disciples; and the wise and the intelligent from whom this knowledge is hidden are the scribes and the Pharisees. All of this, Jesus says, is a matter of God’s own choosing.

Donald Hagner: **God’s mysterious sovereignty** lies behind both belief and unbelief, yet without obviating the culpability of those who fail to believe. That some believed and others did not

believe the message of Jesus can be described from this perspective as God either concealing or revealing the truth of that message.

Grant Osborne: God reveals his truths only to those who open themselves up to him with a childlike simplicity and receptivity, not to those who in their pride and self-sufficiency feel no need for it.

2. (:26) Governing Principle of God's Sovereign Revelation

"Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight."

B. (:27) Primary Role of Jesus as the Revealer of the Father

1. Authority for Revelation Delegated to Jesus

"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father;"

Richard Gardner: According to **verse 27**, Jesus plays a pivotal role in the process of revelation. Note the formula of authorization in **11:27a**, which appears again at the end of the Gospel (**28:18a**). There Jesus announces that he has been given dominion over all. Here the claim is that Jesus has been granted **knowledge of all**, which he in turn shares with others: God alone knows the divine purpose at work in Jesus' mission; and Jesus alone has access to this divine understanding.

2. Access to Revelation Determined by Jesus

*"and no one knows the Son, except the Father;
nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son,
and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."*

D. A. Carson: The reciprocal knowledge of Son and Father where the Father is God presupposes a special sonship indeed. And this unique mutual knowledge guarantees that the revelation the Son gives is true. . . There is a self-enclosed world of Father and Son that is opened to others only by the revelation provided by the Son. . .

What is made clear in this passage is that **sonship** and **messiahship** are not quite the same. "Sonship precedes messiahship and is in fact the ground for the messianic mission" (**Ladd**, *Theology of the New Testament*, 165–67, esp. 167).

Donald Hagner: Jesus is the unique agent of the Father—the one fully known by the Father alone. He is the sole mediator simultaneously of the knowledge of the Father and of his salvation purposes, for the Father and his will are fully known to Jesus. Jesus reveals this knowledge only to those who will receive it. Yet the invitation remains open to "*all*" (cf. πάντες in **v 28**).

Grant Osborne: The main idea is that God has shared his authority and his wisdom with his unique Son, and Jesus alone can truly reveal his Father (cf. **John 1:18**).

II. (:28-30) MAN'S ACTIVE ROLE IN RESPONDING TO UNIVERSAL SALVATION INVITATION

A. (:28) Come to Jesus and Find Rest

1. Essence of the Invitation

"Come to Me,"

Walter Wilson: Having established his intimate and exclusive role in relation to divine knowledge, Jesus issues an invitation to participate in the scheme of revelation just articulated (**11:28**).

Warren Wiersbe: “*Come.*” The Pharisees all said “**Do!**” and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions. But true salvation is found only in a person, Jesus Christ. To come to Him means to **trust Him**. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of pharisaical legalism (**Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10**).

2. Targets of the Invitation

“*all who are weary and heavy-laden,*”

3. Promise of the Invitation

“*and I will give you rest.*”

Craig Blomberg: The **rest** Jesus offers his disciples enables them to overcome a certain measure of “fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and meaninglessness in the joy and peace of God's very presence in Jesus Christ.” By way of contrast, most Jews found the interpretations of the law imposed on them by their leaders increasingly **burdensome** (**23:4**; cf. **Acts 15:10**, which uses the identical “yoke” imagery).

Donald Hagner: What Yahweh promised in the Jeremiah passage [**6:16**], Jesus now promises to those who come to him and follow him in discipleship: he will give them *rest* for their souls, i.e., a realization of a deep existential peace, a shalom, or sense of ultimate well-being with regard to one's relationship to God and his commandments (cf. the “*rest,*” κατάπαυσις, of **Heb 4:3–10**).

Grant Osborne: In the Hebrews passage as here, the rest is both present and future, both the present relationship with God and the eternal rest in heaven. In coming to Jesus, the disciple enters the rest of God (**Heb 4:3**, “*we who have believed enter that rest*”).

B. (:29-30) Commit to Discipleship and Find Rest

1. (:29) Discipleship Involves a Learning Process with Eternal Benefits

a. Essence of the Invitation

“*Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,*”

Grant Osborne: The essence of true discipleship is hearing and doing all that Jesus teaches (cf. **28:19**, “*teaching them to keep everything I have commanded you*”). This in fact is the meaning of “*righteousness*” in Matthew, living life by God's (and Jesus') rules (see **on 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33**). For Jesus (indeed, for the NT as a whole) to “*hear*” is to “*obey*,” to “*learn*” is to “*do*.”

Leon Morris: To be a follower of Jesus is to be a disciple and therefore a **learner**. It is not enough to indicate that one would like to be a follower of Jesus; to commit oneself to him means to commit oneself to a learning process. This is not meant to scare people or make them think that the way Jesus teaches is much harder than that of the rabbis. Jesus affirms that he is *gentle* and *humble in heart*. This taking of a lowly place is noteworthy. Leaders and teachers have always tended to take a superior place, but Jesus has no need of such gimmicks. He left his place in heaven and on earth took the form of a slave (**Phil. 2:7**). In heart locates these qualities at the

center of his being. It was not that he pretended to be humble and made a show of being lowly: he really was lowly, and that at the very center of all that he was. Because of what he is in his innermost being, meek and lowly, those who come to him find rest.

b. Characterization of the Master

“for I am gentle and humble in heart;”

Charles Swindoll: Before entering a permanent relationship, such as a marriage, you need to know the one to whom you’re committing. If you’re going to “yoke up” and share with someone both the direction and pace of life, you need to know that person’s character, convictions, personality, and passions. Hence, Jesus offers a description of Himself – *“gentle and humble in heart.”*

c. Promise of the Invitation

“and you shall find rest for your souls.”

Grant Osborne: As elsewhere this rest is inaugurated, present in the sense that the believer has peace in the midst of life’s troubles, and future because final vindication is promised for Jesus’ lowly followers (**Rev 7:13–15; 21:3–4**).

D. A. Carson: The “yoke” (*zygos*, GK 2433), put on animals for pulling heavy loads, is a metaphor for the **discipline of discipleship**. If Jesus is not offering the yoke of the law (Pirke Avot 3:6, cf. Sir 51:26), neither is he offering freedom from all constraints. The “yoke” is Jesus’ yoke, not the yoke of the law; discipleship must be to him. In view of **v.27**, “*learn from me*” cannot mean “imitate me” or “learn from my experience” (contra **Stauffer**, TDNT, 2:348–49) but “learn from the revelation that I alone impart” (cf. **Josef Schmid**, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* [Regensburg: Pustet, 1959]).

The marvelous feature of this invitation is that out of his overwhelming authority (**v.27**) Jesus encourages the burdened to come to him because he is *“gentle and humble in heart.”* Matthew stresses Jesus’ gentleness (**18:1–10; 19:13–15**). Apparently the theme is connected with the messianic servant language (**Isa 42:2–3; 53:1–2**; cf. **Zec 9:9**, cited in **Mt 21:5**) that recurs in **12:15–21**. Authoritative revealer that he is, Jesus approaches us with a **true servant’s gentleness. . .**

The implicit contrast between Jesus’ yoke and that of others is not between antinomianism and legalism, for in a deep sense his demands (**5:21–48**) are far more radical than theirs; nor between salvation by law and salvation by grace (contra **Barth**, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law,” 148 n. 2); nor between harsh attitudes among Jewish teachers of the law and Jesus’ humane and humble approach (**Klostermann**). No, the contrast is between the burden of submission to the OT in terms of Pharisaic regulation and the relief of coming under Jesus’ tutelage as under the authority of gentle Revealer to whom the OT, the ancient paths, truly pointed (cf. **H. D. Betz**, “The Logion of the Easy Yoke and of Rest [Matthew 11:28–30],” JBL 86 [1967]: 10–24).

2. (:30) Discipleship Demands Are Challenging But Not Burdensome

“For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”

Michael Wilkins: Jesus’ easy yoke is in stark contrast to the burden of Pharisaic Judaism. The Pharisees spoke of 613 commandments, and their *halakot* (binding interpretations) produced an

overwhelmingly complicated approach to life. In our quest to know God's Word it is good to remember that we can turn Jesus' yoke into an equally unbearable burden unless we consciously recognize that discipleship to Jesus is not essentially a religious obligation. Rather, ours is an **intimate relationship** with the One who calls, "Come to me" and "learn from me." As complicated as life may become, discipleship at heart simply means **walking with Jesus** in the real world and having him teach us moment by moment how to live life his way.

William Barclay: He says: 'My yoke is easy.' The word easy is in Greek *chrēstos*, which can mean well-fitting. In Palestine, ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not chafe the neck of the patient animal. The yoke was **tailor-made** to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country people came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: 'My yokes fit well.' It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Grant Osborne: The rules of the Pharisees never stopped burdening the Jews with endless regulations over every area of life. The so-called "freedom" of the libertine world of our time functions in the opposite direction, yet burdens even more terribly. Note the summary of **Doug Webster:**

... for those who live under the yoke there is absolutely no other way to live. Who in their right mind would go back to the gods of Self, Money, Lust and Power? Who would return on bended knee to the shrines of pious performance and judgmentalism? Is not love better than hate, purity better than lust, reconciliation better than retaliation? And is not "better" really "easier" when measured in character rather than convenience, rest for the soul rather than selfish pride?

Charles Swindoll: As Solomon once wrote, "The way of the treacherous is hard" (**Prov. 13:15**). Looking at those around Him who were overwhelmed with guilt and shame—even the hard-hearted unbelievers from the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—Jesus urged them to come to Him, to trade their rebellion for submission, their burdens for belief, their heavy yoke of sin and guilt for His light yoke of peace and joy. Jesus ended His harsh condemnation of the unbelieving Jews with an **open invitation to come!**

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of individuals are the "babes" or childlike ones to whom God graciously and sovereignly reveals Himself?
- 2) Why is Jesus the exclusive revealer of God the Father?
- 3) Is coming to Jesus different than taking His yoke and following after Him?

4) What type of rest have you experienced in your personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Ross: Jesus makes His appeal to people who have spiritual needs, not to the learned religious teachers who did not think they had any spiritual needs. Jesus' double designation "*weary and burdened*" covers both sides of human misery, those who have undertaken burdens themselves and are weary (the active sense) and those who have had burdens laid upon them (the passive sense). Based on other teachings of Jesus we may say that this burden included the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees: "*They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them*" (**Matt. 23:4**). It was hard enough to try to keep the Law; but the Pharisaical regulations made it a complete burden.

His invitation was with promise: "*Come to me . . . and I will give you rest.*" When rest is rest for the soul, burdens become light. In all probability Jesus was referring to the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah that the LORD would refresh the people (**31:25**); for those who followed Jesus by faith the rest would be both a present reality through the forgiveness of sin and relief of the burden of guilt, and a future guarantee of complete redemption. The important thing to note is that He, Jesus, and not the Father, gives this rest. He is claiming to be the LORD, Yahweh, of **Jeremiah 31**. His words are emphatic, "*I Myself,*" and they underscore the previous declarations (vv. **25, 27**) and affirms that He can and most assuredly will give this rest.

The call is for people to come to Him. This is ultimately a figure of speech, comparing believing in Him to the act of coming to Him. It indicates that one must believe in Jesus and seek forgiveness and salvation from Him. The act of faith would not be a momentary response, but it would be a **whole new orientation** to the spiritual life. Genuine faith will find expression in learning from Jesus, or taking His yoke. . .

The call of Jesus was a more involved call for faith than a simple acceptance of Him. It was a call for people to **exchange yokes**. In those days to take Christ's yoke would have meant to submit to Him as the religious authority in the place of the current Jewish leaders. To accept Jesus meant to turn away from the current religious authorities who were not meeting their spiritual needs. The yoke of Pharisaism was a heavy obligation; but the yoke of Jesus was light. Jewish piety often made the yoke heavy by taking on as many obligations as possible (an approach some Christian groups have followed by making their many additional rulings binding laws). But Jesus offered a yoke that was "*easy,*" meaning, good, comfortable or well-suited. Just as a yoke had to be tailor-made for oxen, the Lord's yoke fits well the needs and abilities His people. Essentially, Christ would bear the burden, and those who took His yoke by faith would find rest for their souls. . .

This is the call to faith that has gone out to the whole world, namely, that whoever would find rest for their weary souls must trust in Jesus Christ and not in their religious efforts or works of righteousness, for only He can give spiritual rest and well-being to the troubled soul. Some religions can give temporary rest for a time in this life through various spiritual disciplines. But the rest that Jesus promises last for eternity. It is a re-entry into the Sabbath Rest that was begun

at Creation. And such a commitment to Christ, will not only bring rest but will inevitably lead to righteousness because those who follow Him will learn from Him.

Daniel Doriani: God relates to a world of sinners to whom he owes nothing except judgment. When he conceals his truth, it is not as though he erases a trail from honest hikers who hoped to climb God's mountain. Quoting the Psalms, Paul says, "*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away*" (**Rom. 3:10–12; Ps. 14:1–3**). Therefore, it is no marvel that Jesus hides his truth from some. **The marvel is that he reveals it so clearly to win so many. . .**

God certainly has the right to build diversity into his creation. We ought to respect his work and give thanks for the variations that make life spicy. He also has the right to grant his favors as he pleases. God says, "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion*" (**Rom. 9:15; Ex. 33:19**).

God has the right to reveal his truth as he pleases. He has revealed his power and attributes to mankind in the pages of nature, but mankind has suppressed and perverted his truth (**Rom. 1:18–25**). He has the right to hide "*these things from the wise and learned*" and to reveal "*them to little children*" (**Matt. 11:25–26**). If we object to this, we object to the power and deity of the Lord. God is good and powerful and has knowledge we cannot fathom. **He does as he pleases**, and he always acts in a manner that expresses his eternal moral excellence.

Donald Hagner: Because of Jesus' identity and because of the reality he brings, an authoritative path can be cut through the thicket of elaborate human rules and regulations. Jesus invites all to come to him, to enter into relationship with him, and to follow him in discipleship. It is his yoke to which he calls; it is he who gives rest. That he places himself so much at the center is astonishing and separates him from all other Jewish teachers, who would only call others to obedience to the Torah. Jesus too in a way calls his disciples to righteousness in obedience to Torah. Yet there is a world of difference between the burdensome and tiring way of the Pharisees and the kind yoke and light burden of Jesus. The way of Jesus promises the confident rest and peace that anticipate eschatological blessing. The only explanation for this is the new era brought by Jesus. The fact that Jesus' yoke is kind and his burden is light must not be misunderstood to mean that the discipleship and righteousness to which Jesus calls are easy and undemanding. Discipleship demands nothing less than life commitment and comprehensive self-denial. The righteousness described in the Sermon on the Mount penetrates to the inner world of thought and motive. For Jesus, "*the way that is easy*" (**7:13**) leads to destruction, not to rest. In the last analysis it is only because of the dawning of the new era of grace and salvation, in Matthew's language "*the kingdom of heaven*" of realized eschatology, that the possibility exists of a kind yoke, a light burden, and thus rest for those who have toiled in frustration. In these new circumstances, and here alone, "*his commandments are not burdensome*" (**1 John 5:3**).

John MacArthur: What is the **Rest** promised in this passage?

In **verse 11**, most interestingly, he says, "*Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest.*" You cease from works in one sense, and yet, you labor to enter in, you strive to enter into that rest. And not to fall by the wayside, after the example and illustration of the people in the wilderness, who died because of unbelief. Now, that's just a little look at Hebrews that I hope will help you. Go back to **Matthew 11**. **What is rest, then?** And I believe you have the same concept here. Jesus says, "*Come unto Me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I'll give you rest.*"

“*You shall find rest for your souls.*” I think He is offering them **salvation**; saving rest. Now, just to take this a step further, I looked up in the dictionary, and you really don’t want to do Bible study out of a dictionary, but just to kind of deal with the - the English concept of rest, I looked it up and found there are five definitions given for rest, and they marvelously parallel what salvation rest is. Number one: the dictionary says that rest is to **cease from action or motion**; to cease from action or motion, to stop labor and exertion.

And that is a marvelous parallel to, I believe, the rest that our Lord offers. To enter into God’s rest means no more self-effort to earn God’s favor, no more fleshly works to seek His mercy. All works-righteousness systems end as a way to God. We rest from legalism, from self-righteousness. We rest in His consuming grace. Secondly, the dictionary says that rest is to be **free from whatever wearies or disturbs**. Sometimes you’ll hear somebody say, “You kids don’t give me any rest.” It’s just relief from whatever wearies or constantly disturbs.

In the spiritual sense, to enter God’s rest means to be at peace with God, to possess not only peace with God, but the peace of God which passes understanding. To have your heart totally calm in the midst of a storm, to have no more frustration and no more anxiety over life and destiny, no need to worry; sin is forgiven, no guilt is there. To be free from whatever wearies or disturbs. Thirdly, the dictionary says to rest is **to be settled or fixed**. Something rests somewhere. It’s fixed there, it’s settled there.

And I believe in a spiritual sense that’s a wonderful analogy as well. To enter God’s rest means to be positionally secured in God; to end the running from philosophy to philosophy, religion to religion, guru to guru; the vacillating that comes from terrible insecurity in not knowing the truth. But now, in Christ, we are settled, unmovable, firm, rooted and grounded in Him. Fourthly, to rest means **to remain confident or trustful**. And to enter into God’s rest means to enjoy faith without fear, to enjoy security, to have perfect trust that our time and eternity is in His care, and He loves us.

And fifthly, the word rest means **to lean on, or to repose, or to depend on**. And to enter God’s rest means from now on, we depend on Him for everything, and He supplies our needs. Now, what is rest? To cease from action, to be free from whatever disturbs, to be fixed and settled, to be confident and trustful, to lean on, to repose, to depend. All of that is embodied in our salvation. And now, you can go back and look at **verse 28** again. When our Lord says, “*I will give you rest,*” He is encompassing all of that, and infinitely more than that.

Now, let me take it a step further. **Rest was also a Jewish term for the Kingdom**. The Kingdom is called the time of rest, or the time of refreshing. **Rest is also a term for heaven**, for in the Revelation it says, “*She shall rest from her labors, and her works do follow.*” So, when the Lord says you will enter into rest, He **means personal, immediate, eternal salvation, with its Kingdom relationship, and its heavenly relationship as well**. The fullness of all that God can give to calm the troubled soul; rest. And this is what the Lord offers.

Jesus came into the world to give rest to those who would come to Him. And what did we say the word come means? To believe. For those who believe in Him, there is salvation; that is the simple gospel invitation that our Lord gives. But in its simplicity, there is profundity, for as you look at those verses - six choice verses - you find the five essential elements in a genuine invitation to salvation; five essential elements in a genuine invitation to salvation.

TEXT: Matthew 12:1-14

TITLE: TWO SABBATH CONTROVERSIES

BIG IDEA:

SHOWING LOVE AND MERCY DEMONSTRATES THE SUPERIOR AUTHORITY AND MERCIFUL PRIORITIES OF JESUS OVER LEGALISTIC FORMALISM

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: Three areas of controversy stand out in this chapter:

1. Jesus' attitude to the sabbath (vv. 1–14),
2. his exorcisms (vv. 22–37), and
3. the basis of his authority as it is challenged in the demand for an authenticating “sign” (vv. 38–45).

At each point we meet people in positions of religious leadership who confront Jesus and challenge his authority to act as he has been doing, “*the Pharisees*” in vv. 2, 14 and 24 and “*some of the scribes and Pharisees*” in v. 38. For them Jesus is a law-breaker (vv. 1–14), an agent of Satan (vv. 24–32) and a self-appointed “*teacher*” with no proper authorization (vv. 38–42). As a result already at this relatively early point in the story we hear of a formulated plan to eliminate Jesus (12:14), even though it will not in fact be in Galilee and under Pharisaic auspices that Jesus will eventually be executed, but under the priestly régime of Jerusalem. Matthew will have more to say of Galilean opposition to Jesus in 13:53 – 14:2; 15:1–20; 16:1–4, but already by the end of ch. 12 the main lines have been laid down. . .

Jesus' disagreement with this Pharisaic approach centers on two considerations.

- The first (which is in view in vv. 3–6 and 8) is that of **authority**: who has the right to declare what is and is not forbidden on the sabbath? For the christological implications of Jesus' claim to such authority see introductory comments on 12:1–45 above.
- The second (developed in vv. 11–12, and cf. v. 7) is the issue of **priorities**: as in 5:21–48, Jesus is concerned to get behind the regulations to the original spirit and intention of God's law.

Jesus' key pronouncements on these two issues are

- v. 8, “*The Son of Man is the Lord of the sabbath*” and
- v. 12b, “*It is permissible to do good on the sabbath.*”

The effect of these two positive principles together is to call in question the whole scribal industry of sabbath-regulation; no wonder they wanted to get rid of him.

John Nolland: Here we see the disciples operating under the yoke of Jesus, who declares them guiltless when they satisfy their hunger on the sabbath in a manner deemed contrary to the Law by the Pharisees. But with its fresh introduction of conflict with the Pharisees, this unit also looks forward: conflict with the Pharisees will be the unifying motif of **chap. 12**.

Daniel Doriani: In the present passage, two contrasting views of Sabbath law become the catalyst for conflict between Jesus and some Pharisees. The Pharisees act like parents with excessively

rigid rules. Jesus uses the occasion to teach two important lessons. First, he is Lord of the Sabbath. As its Lord, he designs it as a day for worship and service, for love of God and neighbor. Second, Jesus uses the dispute to teach us something about his identity and character. .

When the Pharisees charged Jesus with doing something illegal on the Sabbath, it was no friendly comment. They thought they caught him red-handed in serious sin. Their accusation, and Jesus' answer, lead to several lessons. First, God designed the law to promote mercy and love, not to be an end in itself. When people view the law as an end in itself, it can become their god. Second, Jesus is Lord and Master of the Sabbath. While he accepts the traditional view that the Sabbath is for worship and rest, he adds that it is also a good day for acts of kindness.

Stanley Saunders: The primary focus throughout these episodes is on Jesus' identity, the congruence of his words, actions, and mission, and the irony that his manifestation of God's mercy generates such resolute and violent resistance.

I. (:1-8) CONTROVERSY #1 = HARVESTING GRAIN ON THE SABBATH – WHO IS LORD OF THE SABBATH? SUPERIOR AUTHORITY OF JESUS

A. (:1-2) Accusation by the Pharisees

1. (:1) The Circumstances – Hungry Disciples Plucking Grain on the Sabbath

“At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.”

Grant Osborne: As in **11:25**, “*at that time*” (ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ) provides a **transition** from one event to the other. . . Galilee had particularly fertile land and contained many farms, with wealthy people buying large tracts of land and breaking it up into tenant farms . . . The σπορίμων were the “*grain fields*” and στάχυας the heads of wheat, which came ripe in March/April. Unlike today, when roads go around properties, in the ancient world roads went right through the fields, so that grain was growing right up to the walkway on both sides.

John Nolland: Though it is the behaviour of the disciples which will come under scrutiny, it is Jesus who heads into the grainfields; and he will take responsibility for the subsequent action of the disciples.

Craig Blomberg: The ripening of the grain suggests springtime, perhaps a few weeks after Passover. Matthew does not explain why the group was out traveling on a Sabbath, where they were going, or why they were hungry, merely that Jesus' disciples pluck some grain to satisfy their appetites.

Charles Swindoll: Definition given by **Charles Ryrie** for **legalism**: “a fleshly attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.” The code is man-made, often part of a system of traditional practices going back several generations. . .

The strangest thing about this account, though, is that the Pharisees were watching. Think about how close they had to be to see those tiny kernels going from the disciples' hands to their mouths. They were spying on Jesus, just longing for a glimpse of even a minor infraction of their man-made laws! As soon as they saw the disciples snacking, they pounced: “*Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath*” (**Matt. 12:2**). The way the statement is

phrased in Greek gives the impression that they were standing right there, pointing at something the disciples were doing at that very instant. How bizarre! But how typical of legalists.

It is interesting that the disciples didn't even think twice about what they were doing. They didn't ask permission from Jesus, nor did Jesus give any indication that the disciples might want to refrain from snacking so as not to offend the sensitive Pharisees. The disciples had been around Jesus long enough and had heard enough of his teachings to know the difference between the Mosaic Law and man-made traditions.

2. (:2) The Charge = Breaking the Sabbath Laws

“But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’”

Grant Osborne: The OT only stipulated that the Sabbath was to be holy and a day of rest from work (**Exod 20:8–11 = Deut 5:12–15**), but the Jewish people needed directions on what constituted work on the Sabbath, so the Mishnah developed thirty-nine rules on what could or could not be done then (m. Šabb. 7:2).⁷ They were strict enough that a mishnaic tract said, “The rules for the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many (m. Hag. 1:8).”

Leon Morris: Plucking the grain was reaping, rubbing it to separate the grain from the husks (Luke tells us that they did this) was threshing, blowing away the husks may well have been interpreted as winnowing, and for good measure they may have seen the whole as preparation of food, which they also regarded as prohibited (all food eaten on the Sabbath had to be prepared on the previous day).

B. (:3-5) Two OT Examples of Mitigating Circumstances

1. (:3-4) Example #1 – David Eating Showbread Intended for the Priests

“But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?’”

Grant Osborne: The story comes from **1 Sam 21:1–6**, when David was fleeing from Saul and was hungry. This occurred at Nob just a couple miles south of Jerusalem. . .

Jesus is making another *qal wahomer* argument (from the lesser to the greater; see those at **6:25–26** and **10:29–30**): If David and his men could break the Torah for the sake of hunger, how much more could Jesus and his disciples?

Daniel Doriani: David told them he left the king in such haste that he had no food. David asked what they could give him (**1 Sam. 21:1–7**). The priests said they had nothing but “*the consecrated bread*.” That bread came from the grain offerings of the people. From their gifts, the priests offered twelve loaves of bread to God to represent the gifts of the twelve tribes of Israel. Whenever the priests removed the bread, the law required that a priest eat that bread.

The priests faced a decision. The bread belonged to the priests, yet it also belonged to God, and David was God's anointed servant. The priests deliberated, then gave the bread to David, to keep the Lord's anointed king from going hungry. Technically speaking, everyone knew this was

illegal. The law clearly stipulated that none but a priest could eat the consecrated bread. But the priests understood the true purpose of the law: to lead the people to love and worship God.

As the Lord's anointed, David led the people in their spiritual service. He was God's agent, just as the priests were. Which was better: to feed God's anointed servant or observe a rule about priests and bread while sending the hope of Israel away hungry? The priests gave David the bread; Jesus approved and drew a lesson from the event. Just as the needs of God's king and his servants outweighed sacrificial regulations in David's day, so the needs of King Jesus and his servants outweigh Sabbath regulations. The needs of God's ordained leaders take precedence over ritual law. The king's men have a right to eat, whether those men belong to David or to Jesus. Jesus says the Pharisees should have seen this as they read the Old Testament and considered Jesus' work as Israel's true king.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus' point is not that analogous circumstances exist to warrant exceptional practices but that “*one greater than the temple is here*” (v. 6). By implication the point of v. 4 is therefore also that “*one greater than David is here*” (cf. 22:41-45). It is not, therefore, the particular situation in which Jesus finds himself that justifies his disciples' behavior but his very nature and authority which can transcend the law and make permissible for his disciples what once was forbidden.

S. Lewis Johnson: In other words, our Lord refers to the incident, points out that even in the Scriptures themselves, we have indications of the relative significance of the ceremonial and cultic laws as over against the laws of right and wrong: mercy, things of necessity for the preservation of life. And in addition, if we remember that David the King is a type of our Lord Jesus – he is in rejection; he is seeking food; and he is fed by the priesthood – all of this has application to our Lord who is in rejection with his disciples, hungry and seeking food, on a secret mission from heaven.

2. (:5) Example #2 – Priests Performing Work on the Sabbath

“Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?”

Donald Hagner: Technically the priests *desecrate* (βεβηλοῦσιν, a particularly strong word) the sabbath commandment, yet they remain ἀναίτιοι, “*guiltless*” (John 7:23 gives a similar instance). This is yet another special instance. The priests are about **the work of God** and thus are not bound by the normal regulations concerning the sabbath. So too it is implied by an *a fortiori* argument (or in rabbinic idiom, *qal wāḥōmer*) that Jesus and his disciples constitute a **special instance** and thus are not bound. They preeminently are about the work of God. Although this point is implicit and not explicit, the next saying depends on just such a conclusion.

C. (:6-8) Justification Provided by Jesus – Don't Fight against the Supremacy of Jesus

1. (:6) Superior Access to the Presence of God

“But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here.”

Grant Osborne: Jesus points to himself as not just “*greater*” than the priests but even “*greater*” than the temple (note the emphatic position of “*the temple*” [τοῦ ἱεροῦ])! The neuter (rather than masculine) “*greater*” (μείζον) is significant, pointing to the kingdom ministry and messianic office of Jesus and not just his person. The point is that if the temple service took precedence

over the Sabbath, then Jesus and his ministry have even greater authority over the Sabbath, for he supercedes the temple.

2. (:7) Superior Understanding of the Intent of God's Law

"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent."

Grant Osborne: Jesus is saying that mercy rather than legal observance is the heart of God's will and that he has correctly exemplified this with respect to his disciples, who are thereby "guiltless" before God.

Yang: (*Jesus and the Sabbath*) -- By quoting **Hos 6:6** in v. 7, Jesus shows what God's **original intention** for the sabbath was—that is, the sabbath was instituted **for the benefit of the people** and was presented not as a burden but as an **expression of mercy**; that intention is now fulfilled by Jesus himself, the merciful one, under whose authority the disciples are guiltless because they rightly understood and behaved according to the true meaning and intention of the sabbath.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus cites the priests because they work hard on the Sabbath. They teach, pray, slaughter animals, and drag them to altars for sacrifice. It is hard work, physically and mentally. If the true meaning of the Sabbath is "You shall never work," the priests work so hard that we can only call it desecration. But, of course, the law itself requires the priests to work on the Sabbath.

Clearly then, the law knows priorities. David's case shows that human need supersedes Sabbath regulations. The priests show that worship and service to the Lord do too. Jesus continues, "*Something greater than the temple is here*" (**12:6** ESV). That is, if priests may work to serve God in the temple, the space that represents the presence of God, then the disciples may work to assist Jesus, for he is the presence of God. . .

The temple merely represents the presence of God. Jesus is greater than the temple because he is the presence of God with us. Again, the temple represents the sacrifices that reconcile us to God, whereas Jesus is the sacrifice that reconciles us to God. The disciples are free to reap on the Sabbath, because, like the priests in the temple, they must be free to serve him.

D. A. Carson: Jesus' argument, then, provides an instance from the law itself in which the Sabbath restrictions were superseded by the priests because their cultic responsibilities took precedence: the temple, as it were, was greater than the Sabbath. But now, Jesus claims, "*something*" greater than the temple is here. And that, too, **takes precedence over the Sabbath**. This solution is entirely consistent with what we have perceived to be Jesus' attitude to the law in this gospel. The law points to him and finds its fulfillment in him (see comments at **5:17–48**). Not only, then, have the Pharisees mishandled the law by their *halakah* (**vv.3–4**), but they have failed to perceive who Jesus is. The authority of the temple laws shielded the priests from guilt; the authority of Jesus shields his disciples from guilt. It is not a matter of comparing Jesus' action with the action of the priests; nor is it likely that Jesus is suggesting that all his disciples are priests (contra **Lohmeyer**). "**Rather, it is a question of contrasting [new emphasis] [Jesus'] authority with the authority of the priests**" (**Carson**, "Jesus and the Sabbath," 67).

3. (:8) Superior Authority of the Son of Man

"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Grant Osborne: Everything said thus far has moved to this point. The “for” (γάρ) establishes both the reason for vv. 7–8 and the conclusion to all that has happened. The “Lord” (κύριος) is in the emphatic position and stresses the fact that Jesus has absolute authority over the Sabbath as cosmic Lord and the final interpreter of Torah (see on v. 6). “The Sabbath” (τοῦ σαββάτου) is an objective genitive, meaning that Jesus exhibits supreme lordship/authority over the Sabbath and its regulations. The use of the title “Son of Man” centers on the “one like a son of man” who is the glorified Lord of the universe in **Dan 7:13–14**.

In the OT God is master of the Sabbath, and here Jesus has that authority, continuing the high Christology of Matthew. Jesus is greater than the temple (that had precedence over the Sabbath) and thus is also Lord over the Sabbath. The Sabbath rest is embodied in Jesus, who offers “rest for your souls” in **11:28–30**. As in **5:17–20** Jesus has not abolished the Sabbath but has fulfilled it and now provides the true parameters for the people of God to experience the Sabbath rest.

D. A. Carson: The Sabbath conflicts are not the cause of the plotting but its occasion. Therefore, Sabbath disputes were not mentioned at Jesus’ trials; in themselves they were never as much an issue as Jesus’ claim to be Sabbath’s Lord.

Donald Hagner: As the promised one, the Messiah, Jesus is the authoritative and definitive interpreter of the Torah. Thus the demands of the sabbath commandment, however they be construed, must give way to the presence and purpose of Jesus, and not vice versa.

II. (:9-13) CONTROVERSY #2 = HEALING THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND ON THE SABBATH – MERCIFUL PRIORITIES

A. (:9-10) Accusation by the Pharisees

1. (:9) Home Turf for the Religious Leaders

“And departing from there, He went into their synagogue.”

Daniel Doriani: The Pharisees had an array of detailed laws about the right way to observe the Sabbath. Although their laws were extrabiblical, the Pharisees put them on the same plane as the written law of God. Their tradition said:

- No one can travel more than eleven hundred paces on a Sabbath.
- It is illegal to spit on the ground on the Sabbath. If the moisture dents the soil, the spitter is guilty of plowing. If a seed should be there, he is also guilty of sowing.
- It is permitted to write a short word on the Sabbath, but not a long one.

Among the Pharisees’ laws, one said healing is permitted only in life- and-death situations. If someone is merely sick, the healing must wait until the day after the Sabbath. This law soon led to another conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

2. (:10a) Huge Opportunity for a Dramatic Showdown

“And behold, there was a man with a withered hand.”

Grant Osborne: **Luke 6:6** tells us it was the **right hand**, emphasizing the seriousness of the situation. ξηράν means “dried up” and could be either shriveled or paralyzed. The main thing is

the sad condition of the man; since in that world everyone worked with their hands, he would have been especially handicapped.

3. (:10b) Healing Is Not the Issue on the Minds of the Pharisees

“And they questioned Him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—in order that they might accuse Him.”

Grant Osborne: The issue here is the real meaning and purpose of the Sabbath. The Pharisees had removed the joy and rest from the Sabbath by their detailed regulations; Jesus wants to return its true essence by doing good on it. The Sabbath is a time for healing and saving, not for hating and plotting. . .

By now the leaders have already made up their minds that Jesus is a false prophet who is dangerous to their cause. So they are not testing him but rather gathering evidence to be used against (“*accuse*”) him in a court of law (note how unconcerned they are with the situation of the man, in contrast to Jesus in **vv. 12–13**).

Donald Hagner: It is quite clear that the Pharisees did not believe it was lawful to heal on the sabbath, except in extreme cases of life or death (see m. Yoma 8:6: “Every case where life is in danger supersedes the sabbath”; cf. Mek. **Exod. 22:2; 23:13**). From their point of view, a man who had had a withered hand for some time could surely have waited one day more to be healed.

B. (:11-12) Common Sense Illustration of Mitigating Circumstances

1. (:11) What Would You Do?

“And He said to them, ‘What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out?’”

2. (:12a) What Do You Value More?

“Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep!”

3. (:12b) What Is Your Conclusion?

“So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

Grant Osborne: Jesus’ point is that the “good” must benefit people, not the religious establishment and its legal structure. It is the individual person that is of supreme value to God, so when a law allows an afflicted situation to continue, it is an inadequate law. As **Mark 2:27** says, “*The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.*” So Jesus was not breaking the law but fulfilling it (**Matt 5:17**) and allowing it to be an expression of God’s love rather than legalistic requirements.

D. A. Carson: Was the Sabbath a day for maleficent activity—such as their evil intentions in questioning him—or for beneficent action, such as the healing about to be done?

R. T. France: The corollary that “*it is permissible to do good on the sabbath*” goes far beyond the specific issue under discussion. Its very **lack of specificity** is in striking contrast to the rabbinic desire to leave nothing to individual judgment. As a guide to sabbath observance it could result in widely divergent practice, and it lends itself to use as a convenient self-justification for any chosen course of action. What especially distinguishes it from the rabbinic rulings, and indeed

from most of the OT laws themselves, is that it is **positive rather than prohibitive**. Like Jesus' version of the Golden Rule (7:12) it puts the onus on the individual to decide what is "good" and how it may or may not be squared with the equally "good" aim of the sabbath law, to provide a day of holiness and rest.

C. (:13-14) Confrontational Healing

1. (:13) Performing the Healing by the Mercy of Jesus

"Then He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand!'

And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other."

R. T. France: As in several other healing stories (8:5–13; 9:1–8; 15:21–28), the actual cure is related quite briefly; the focus of interest is on the **dialogue** which leads up to it rather than on the healing in itself—or, to use the terms of traditional form-criticism, this is a **pronouncement-story** rather than a miracle story. But the dialogue has set up a **dramatic tension**, and Jesus' decisive command resolves that tension in favor of "doing good" over against the Pharisaic rules. The healing, as usual with Jesus, is **instantaneous**. It is also **purely verbal**, so that no visible "work" is involved. It results from the man's obedience to Jesus' command. How far that obedience is a sign of faith depends on the nature and extent of the paralysis: if it was the whole arm that was paralyzed, Jesus has told him to do something impossible in stretching it out, but if it was only the hand the stretching out was not in itself remarkable. Matthew does not satisfy our curiosity on this point.

S. Lewis Johnson: We affirm man has a will, but he does not respond until God gives him power to respond. He does make the decision, but it's a decision initiated by God – that's the important thing. There is no such thing as human volition of itself, able to make a decision for God. Nobody's will ever makes a decision for Jesus Christ, until God, as **Dr. Barnhouse** used to say, "**Jiggles the willer.**" . . .

Someone says, well why preach to the dead? They are dead in sin, they are totally unable – why preach to them at all? If someone ever asked me that, I would say, well, don't do it. It's obvious if you believe that way, God has not called you to preach. God does not say because men are dead in their sins, and because they are unable, we should not preach the gospel to them. He says because men are dead in sins, and because they are unable, we must preach the gospel to them. And he works as the word is preached.

Charles Swindoll: The Pharisees had their opinion of the right interpretation of the Law. Jesus had His opinion. The Pharisees claimed higher authority as trained experts in the law. Jesus claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath. They couldn't both be right. But there they stood in that synagogue, face-to-face, toe-to-toe, in a sort of stalemate . . . until Jesus turned the theoretical into the practical. He turned to the man with the withered hand and said, "*Stretch out your hand!*" Instantly the man's hand was restored (12:13).

Think about it. With those four words, Jesus won the debate. The legalistic quibbling about the Sabbath that had spanned generations was tossed to the trash heap when the Lord of the Sabbath proved that He and he alone had the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. The rabbis could reason their way into condemning anybody who disagreed with them and could claim to be enforcing God's laws, but when the Author of Scripture Himself stepped into history and corrected their flawed interpretation, all arguments were over.

2. (:14) Plotting to Kill Jesus by the Hatred of the Pharisees

“But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.”

Grant Osborne: This is a shocking conclusion after the miracle and is meant to climax the growing theme of **rejection** (cf. **8:10–12; 9:3–4, 11, 14, 34; 10:17–19, 21–22, 28, 34–36; 11:11–12, 18–19, 20–24, 25; 12:2, 10**)—a terrible reaction that will increase to the passion itself (**12:24; 15:2; 21:23; 22:15; 26:4**). . .

The Jewish leaders were threatened by his popularity and repulsed by his messianic authority. It is not that there was little basis for their conclusion; rather, their **hardness of heart** is the emphasis. Jesus’ mercy is in complete contrast with their lack of it.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now as a result of this we read that they sought the death of the Lord Jesus. You see the result of unbelief is that it leads to a kind of callous ceremonialism. Incidentally, the reason that frigidity leads to formalism is that the cooler we become to the things of the Lord, the more we like to cover it up. And so, if we can cover up the fact that we do not have a vital relationship to the Lord Jesus by ceremony and ritual, by the repetition of prayers or other means by which we make our service appealing to the eye, if we do that, then we cover up the fact that we don’t really have that right relationship with the Lord. That is usually – I do not say always – but usually the origin of ceremonialism and ritualism, and particularly in our churches today. And this incident reveals the fact that this frigidity, which leads to formalism, provokes the fury of Jesus Christ.

Donald Hagner: The **authority of Jesus** thus supplants the authority of the scribal tradition of the Pharisees. But since the debate comes down finally to the person of Jesus, the Pharisees know intuitively that he must be removed if their system is to remain intact. The tragedy is not the failure to accept Jesus’ argument but the failure to be receptive to Jesus as the one who brings the kingdom.

R. T. France: They are determined to silence him, to put an end to his influence on the people, but how that might be achieved would probably not yet be clear, though the intention to “*bring a charge against*” Jesus (v. **10**) indicates one possible way forward. When eventually Jesus is “*got rid of*” in **ch. 27**, it will not be by these particular enemies, though their reports to their colleagues in Jerusalem may have helped to start the process.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When do we exalt legalism over showing mercy and love to meet the practical needs of others?
- 2) Why did Jesus’ claims to be greater than the temple and to be Lord of the Sabbath infuriate his religious opponents?

3) Why did Jesus go out of his way to stir the Sabbath controversy with His opponents when He could have waited an extra day before healing the man with the withered hand?

4) If someone has a disposition to find fault with Christianity and the Bible, is there any value in trying to reason with them using Scriptural arguments and examples?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: Our passage leads us beyond the example of Christ to the **person of Christ**. Our eyes can see Jesus and worship him, for he is the **merciful God**. The whole passage points to mercy—for the hungry disciples, for the crippled man. But the whole passage also leads us to Jesus. **He is greater than David**; anyone who helps him is caught up in the cause of God. **He is greater than the temple**; anyone who is with him stands in the presence of God. He shows the power and the mercy of God; he is the merciful and powerful God. What he did for that crippled man is one more manifestation of his mercy toward all who know him as Lord. Whether we see it or not, we all are wounded or withered in some way. The healing power Jesus showed long ago is the same power that he possesses and wields even today.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus gave a threefold reply to their accusation.

(1) He appealed to a king (vv. 3–4). The consecrated bread was to be eaten only by the priests, yet David and his soldiers ate it. Certainly the Son of David had a right to eat His Father’s grain from the field! And if David broke the law and was not condemned, surely Jesus could break man’s traditions and be guiltless (see **1 Sam. 21:1ff.**).

(2) He appealed to the priests (vv. 5–6). The priests had to offer a given number of sacrifices on the Sabbath (**Num. 28:9–10**) and yet were not condemned. In fact, their service was in obedience to the law given by God. This suggests that man’s traditions about the Sabbath were wrong, for they contradicted God’s own law.

(3) He appealed to a prophet (v. 7). The quotation is from **Hosea 6:6**, one that Jesus had already quoted (**Matt. 9:13**). The Sabbath law was given to Israel as a mark of her relationship to God (**Ex. 20:9–11; 31:13–17; Neh. 9:12–15**). But it was also an act of mercy for both man and beast, to give them needed rest each week. Any religious law that is contrary to mercy and the care of nature should be looked on with suspicion. God wants mercy, not religious sacrifice. He wants love, not legalism. The Pharisees who sacrificed to obey their Sabbath laws thought they were serving God. When they accused Christ and His disciples, they thought they were defending God. How like religious legalists today!

Note that **Jesus appealed to prophet, priest, and king**, for He is Prophet, Priest, and King. Note too the three “*greater*” statements that He made: As the Priest, He is “*greater than the temple*” (**Matt. 12:6**); as Prophet, He is “*greater than Jonah*” (**Matt. 12:41**); and as King, He is “*greater than Solomon*” (**Matt. 12:42**).

Donald Hagner: The **religious restrictions** elaborated by human beings into calcified codes of conduct often paradoxically **fight the purposes of God**. It is particularly grievous when insistence on the letter of the law results in the **neglect of genuine human need and thus hinders the expression of love**. A commandment-centered system such as that of the Pharisees,

however well intentioned, was bound to make this error. The issue in the present passage seems initially to be the question of exegesis of the sabbath commandment, the very sort of thing that the rabbis themselves would debate. But as we move through the passage, we see again that what is being asserted is not that Jesus' exegesis of the commandment is better than the rabbis (although such argumentation is provided) but that something (and someone with that something) dramatically significant is present, forcing the discussion to a completely different level. Jesus makes the astounding assertion that something greater than the temple is present. The Son of Man is with his people as sovereign Lord and messianic king and acts as the final and infallible interpreter of the will of God as expressed in Torah and sabbath commandment. The rest and rejoicing symbolized by the sabbath find fulfillment in the kingdom brought by Jesus.

R. T. France: This time the logic is explicit: "*something greater than the temple is here.*" It is hard to overestimate the **shock value** of this pronouncement. The tabernacle set up under God's directions in the wilderness, and the fixed temple which had succeeded it, were understood to be the focus of God's relation with his people. The temple was more than a place of worship. It was a **symbol of nationhood** (and the more so since political power had been assumed by Rome). Its priestly establishment was the nearest thing Israel still possessed to a government of its own. To threaten the temple, as Jeremiah had discovered long ago, was to commit unpardonable treason. As the story of Jesus unfolds, his negative attitude to the temple and its activities (**21:12–16, 18–22; 23:38; 24:1–2**) will become the central symbol of his challenge to the status quo (see **21:23–27**), and the issue which above all will unite the people against him. At his trial it will play a central role (**26:60–61**) and on the cross it will still be thrown against him (**27:40**). But in the discourse of **ch. 24** Jesus will explain how the **coming destruction of the temple** symbolizes the end of the old order, and in **27:51** the tearing of the temple curtain shows that that time has now come. This preliminary comment in **12:6** is a pointer to a recurrent and disturbing theme in Matthew's portrayal of what the coming of the kingship of God must mean for Israel and for the sacred institution which lies at its ideological heart.

John MacArthur: The Lord of the Sabbath

Now as this chapter begins by recording for us the crystallizing of their rejection, it does so by relating to us a very particular incident, and the key is in **verse 1**. "*At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath Day,*" and you can stop at that point. This is a Sabbath Day issue. The crystallizing of their rejection of Christ occurred because **He violated their Sabbath**; that was the last straw. Because the Sabbath Day, to them, was the absolute epitome of their legalistic system. Everything in their legalistic system ultimately focused in on that one day, and when He violated their rabbinical traditions on the Sabbath, He was **striking a blow at the heart of their system**. And that becomes the final straw that brakes the camel's back, as it were. . .

Now you want to know what the Sabbath was? **A pain in the neck**. I mean it was impossible to rest. You couldn't do anything. No wonder they were laboring and heavy-laden. No wonder they were sick to death of the system that had been imposed on them by the legalists. The Sabbath was the focus of everything. **Edersheim** says if a woman were to roll wheat to take away the husk, she would be guilty of sifting. If she were rubbing the ends of the stalk, she would be guilty of threshing. If she were cleaning what adheres to the side of a stalk, she would be guilty of sifting. If she was bruising the stalk, she would be guilty of grinding. If she was throwing it up in her hands, she would be guilty of winnowing. And the people were under this incredible burden. Now do you understand what it meant when Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest"? That's what the Sabbath was supposed to be, but as far as rest was concerned, it was a joke. And so Jesus came along and paid absolutely no

attention to any of that stuff, and it infuriated the religious leaders. This became the final act that crystallized their rejection. . .

God wants an obedient heart. The Pharisees were a million miles from that. He wanted mercy, but they hadn't got a clue. But especially on the Sabbath, wouldn't you think the Sabbath would be of all the days, the you would meet needs? Wouldn't you think? Wouldn't you think the Sabbath, of all days, would be the day to serve the Lord? Here they were, walking along serving the Lord, preaching the kingdom, reaching people, and they had to eat on the way. They were serving the Lord. Their needs had to be met. God wanted to be merciful to them. Wouldn't you think the Sabbath would be the perfect time for that? The whole point is a shocking thing. They indicted Him, and when He was done with His instruction, **He had indicted them as hard-hearted, external legalists who didn't even know the heart of God.** They were the violators of the Sabbath, because the Sabbath was for meeting needs, serving God, and showing mercy. . .

Jesus connected the Sabbath with the heart of God – **benevolence, mercy, kindness, goodness.** And that is the purpose of it all. Jesus came that we might enter into a relationship with God in which He pours out to us grace and goodness and mercy and kindness and peace and benevolence and tenderness. The Pharisees had absolutely obliterated that illustration in the Sabbath. Jesus' lesson is very clear: We broke a ceremonial law to meet our need. That's the heart of God. We broke a traditional law, not going more than so many feet to serve God. That's the heart of God. Because God wants mercy to be shown, not ritual. The only function that ceremony ever has is as an illustration of a right attitude. And if you stop and corrupt the illustration and never get to the right attitude, you miss the whole purpose.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Lord of the Sabbath

But the Pharisees were there looking for an opportunity to **attack** Jesus' teaching and His practices. It's clear from the very beginning of this passage, that these men's intentions were evil. These folks were not looking to uphold God's law, they were looking to tear down the messiah. And so we learn from this passage that even divinely appointed religious means, like the Lord's day, like the Sabbath, can be misused. Evil men can hold to the outward form, and yet miss the whole point, the inner spirit of the law. And so their attack gives Jesus an opportunity to respond to their **formalism**. He accuses them of misunderstanding and of misusing the law of God later in this passage. And passage, this attack, gives Him the opportunity to convey His positive teaching about the Lord's Day, and even to make a singular manifestation of His own divine authority. . .

strict observation of the ceremonial law is no excuse for ignoring neighbor love. In other words, you cannot ignore the love of your neighbor under the pretense of being so concerned about the observation of God's ceremonial law that you don't have time to love your neighbor. . .

In the third section of this passage in **verses 6-8** we learn another truth. Not only that even divinely appointed religious means can be abused, not only that deeds of necessity are lawful on the Lord's day, but we learn in **verses 6-8** that Jesus asserts His **divine authority** as the fulfillment of the Old Testament ceremonial system and as the Lord of the Old Testament ceremonial system. Jesus asserts His divine authority in this passage.

TEXT: Matthew 12:15-21

TITLE: MESSIAH CHARACTERIZED AS THE BELOVED SERVANT OF THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

AS THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED SERVANT OF THE LORD, THE CHOSEN MESSIAH WILL BRING JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES WITH COMPASSION AND POWER

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Thus far we have seen Jesus in the power and boldness of his miraculous ministry and prophetic preaching. Now we see the other side of Jesus, stated first in **11:28–30**. He is the **meek and humble Messiah** who is here to serve God and humankind. This is exemplified especially in the cross, when he becomes the atoning sacrifice for Jew and Gentile alike.

D. A. Carson: But even within this chapter, the twin themes of **Spirit** and **Gentiles** are programmatic (**Cope**, Matthew, 32ff.; **Hill**, “Son and Servant,” 10–11). God has poured out his Spirit on his Servant; so the exorcisms he performs by the Spirit constitute proof of the kingdom’s inauguration (**v.28**). Therefore, blasphemy against that Spirit cannot be forgiven.

Scott Harris: As we examine this text this morning, we are going to find in Jesus the example we need to follow. Success for the Christian does not come through attaining positions of worldly power, though God often does put Christians in those positions, for success for the Christian is not in having power, but in being a faithful servant of the omnipotent God. Jesus never attained any position of worldly power. He never sought such a position; instead He was God’s gentle servant. He was merciful, meek, chosen of God; quiet, sympathetic and unlimited in whom He would minister to as God’s representative.

Stanley Saunders: Because he is aware of the Pharisees’ murderous intent, Jesus withdraws but heals all who follow him. “*Withdrawal*” in Matthew is nearly always followed by healing (**4:12, 23–25; 14:13–14; 15:21–31**). Jesus’ flight and subsequent admonition to his followers not to make him known (**12:15–16**) do not signal fear. His calling is to bring healing, not to become captive to the conflicts the healing generates. Matthew uses the withdrawal and call to silence to make a christological assertion, by means of a fulfillment citation based on **Isaiah 42:1–4**, the opening portion of the first of Isaiah’s “**Servant Songs**” (**Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12**). **Isaiah 40–55** concerns God’s promise to return the exiles from Babylon. God has chosen a servant, either an individual or Israel itself, to bear witness, **to be a light to the nations**. In contrast to the force and violence of the powers that have enslaved Israel, this witness demonstrates God’s power through care and healing for the people. The analogy between Jesus’ ministry and God’s servant is clear, not only here in **Matthew 11–12**, but throughout the Gospel. The citation recalls language from Jesus’ baptism (**12:18; cf. 3:16–17**): Jesus is God’s chosen one, upon whom God pours the Spirit. He will announce justice, or judgment, to the nations (perhaps anticipating **28:18–20**). The remaining clauses of the citation emphasize the gentle, merciful character of the servant’s work: he does not quarrel or shout, and preserves both the damaged and worthless reed and the light of a flickering lamp until God’s justice is victorious (**12:19–20**).

Michael Wilkins: Matthew identifies Jesus with the messianic Servant of **Isaiah 42:1–4**. The identity of the Servant in Isaiah is perplexing, because it vacillates between the nation Israel as the Servant and an individual who leads the nation. Jesus emerges as the Servant Messiah who has a ministry and mission both to Israel and the nations and who is the gentle Spirit-endowed Servant with a mission of justice to the nations.

(:15-16) PROLOGUE – WITHDRAWAL OF JESUS

A. (:15) Continuing His Ministry of Healing

“But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all,”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus had to reckon with leaders, the Pharisees, who had the disease [of legalism] and had no interest in recovery. Jesus was not afraid to die, but he had to die at the right time. Therefore he withdrew from the hostile Pharisees to avoid provocation, for it was not yet the time for him to die.

Grant Osborne: Every time Jesus goes somewhere, the people enthusiastically follow (esp. **4:25; 8:1** with similar language). There is no hint of discipleship in “*followed*” (unless one sees here potential disciples).

Donald Hagner: Further healings by Jesus, apparently large in number, are now reported briefly in a summarizing fashion together with a paradoxical warning concerning the spreading of the news of his presence. The “messianic secret” motif is then supported by a long quotation—Matthew’s longest—from **Isa 42** that indicates how far this Messiah is from the popular expectation. In the present context of hostility and rejection, this passage takes on special significance. The unexpected side of the messianic deliverer as servant is but the fulfillment of the OT promise.

Robert Gundry: As in **4:25; 8:1**, the “*many crowds*” that “*followed*” Jesus stand for his **professing** disciples. Here they follow him in his exemplary withdrawal from mortal danger. That he “*healed them all*” displays his mercy, also exemplary, especially against the backdrop of the Pharisees’ lack of mercy.

B. (:16) Continuing to Guard against Revolutionary Populism

“and warned them not to make Him known, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, might be fulfilled, saying,” [Is. 42:1-4]

Charles Swindoll: He also continued to downplay his identity as the Messiah (**12:16**). Why would He do that? Think about it. There were a lot more followers of Jesus than credentialed scribes and committed Pharisees. Aware that many in the crowd had in their minds a false image of a battle-ready Messiah, Jesus knew that too much talk of his legitimate kingship in the wrong way or at the wrong time could have incited the crowd to band together against the establishment and revolt.

R. T. France: Jesus has withdrawn in the face of hostility and is anxious to prevent people forcing the issue of his Messiahship by inappropriate publicity. Controversies will continue in **vv. 22–45**, and the atmosphere will become even more highly charged, but by inserting this

quotation here Matthew helps his readers to put the confrontation in context: it is not of the Messiah's choosing. . . Jesus' withdrawal reflects the instruction he has already given to his disciples to move on when they meet a hostile reception (**10:14, 23**).

Grant Osborne: The fulfillment formula is unique to Matthew and found ten times (**1:22–23; 2:15, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10**) to indicate Jesus' fulfillment of OT messianic expectations. The emphasis is on God's sovereign control of salvation history in such a way that Jesus is the culmination of his plan.

Craig Blomberg: As part of the first of the suffering servant songs which culminate with chaps. 52-53, Isa 42:1-4 points to what Matthew will have Jesus make increasingly clear: his cross must precede his crown. He comes first to suffer before returning in splendor. His disciples must often follow a similar path (**16:24**). Still, Christians are not called to quietism and inaction in the face of injustice but to patience, prayer, and a prophetic voice that denounces evil. But they await ultimate vindication from God, to whom alone belongs vengeance and the ability fully to right the wrongs of this world (cf. **Jas 5:1-11**).

John Nolland: In some important sense Matthew sees the quotation as offering a cameo of the ministry of Jesus and thinks that now, just over a third of the way through his story, is a suitable time to make use of it.

Donald Hagner: Again we are made aware of the **paradoxical** character of Jesus' messiahship. Matthew has deliberately portrayed Jesus as powerful in both word and deed. And yet this is not the essence of Jesus' ministry, which is to be found not in power but in **servanthood** expressed through humility, meekness, and gentleness. Matthew identifies Jesus and the nature of his ministry directly with the servant described in the first of Isaiah's songs. The story of Jesus narrated in Matthew agrees exactly with Isaiah's portrayal of the servant. And thus the unusual, apparently unassertive Messiah, who fails to bring judgment to the enemies of God's people and justice to the earth and who accordingly was unacceptable to his contemporaries, is shown to have been prophesied by the prophet. The one who was uniquely related to God as his chosen and beloved, upon whom the Spirit uniquely rested, came also as a servant who was ultimately to die, in agreement with Isaiah's last Servant Song (**52:13 -- 53:12**). This strange sequence of events and this paradoxical Messiah are central to the gospel as Matthew relates it.

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

I. (:18a) DIVINE APPROVAL OF THE SERVANT

*“Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;”*

Matthew McCraw: Whereas Israel failed to live as a faithful servant of God, Jesus the Messiah would succeed as God's faithful servant.

Jesus the Messiah was God's beloved servant, who was chosen by God for this purpose, who was beloved by God, in whom God delighted, and on whom God's Holy Spirit would rest. This moment, this man, this mission was prophesied long ago and Jesus is living it out in **Matthew 12**.

By the way, you can notice all three members of the Trinity present in this prophecy. The Father is speaking about the Son, on whom the Holy Spirit will rest.

II. (:18b) DIVINE EMPOWERMENT OF THE SERVANT TO PROCLAIM WORLDWIDE JUSTICE

*“I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”*

III. (:19) MEEKNESS OF THE SERVANT DESPITE MALICIOUS OPPOSITION

*“He will not quarrel, nor cry out;
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.”*

Grant Osborne: The Isaianic Servant will not “*open his mouth*” (**Isa 53:7**). Jesus’ reaction to the loud, insistent opposition of the Pharisees will not be to retaliate verbally. As the humble messianic Servant, Jesus refuses to “*retaliate*” or “*make threats*” but rather “*entrusts himself to him who judges justly*” (**1 Pet 2:23**). This hardly means Jesus will not speak at all. He will “*proclaim justice,*” but he will not respond to his opponents. The public proclamation will be **positive**, not negative, related to the good news rather than defending himself against the leaders (the “*hypocrites*” who in **Matt 6:5** pray loudly “*on the street corners [to] be seen by others*”).

John Nolland: It is this verse that justifies Matthew’s location of the quotation. Jesus’ handling of the hostility of the Pharisees illustrates the fact that he is not strident or disputatious; his approach is not aggressive or self-assertive. ἐρίζειν means to quarrel or wrangle. κραυγάζειν means simply ‘*to call out*’, but in the context here it must have overtones of verbal violence. Matthew clearly does not intend to insist that Jesus never disagreed with others or disputed their opinions. **Attitude** and **approach** are in view.

Walter Wilson: The Son of David and lord of the Sabbath, then, is also a gentle and humble servant, one who cares for those bearing heavy burdens through his ministries of teaching and justice. Insofar as it draws attention to the servant’s demeanor in facing verbal confrontations, the description in **12:19** accords with the narrative context provided in **12:1–14** in another way as well.

IV. (:20) COMPASSION AND POWER OF THE SERVANT IN ACCOMPLISHING JUSTICE

*“A battered reed He will not break off,
And a smoldering wick He will not put out,
Until He leads justice to victory.”*

Grant Osborne: There is general agreement that the two are metaphors for the weak and helpless, the “*harassed and helpless*” of **9:36**, the “*weary and burdened*” of **11:28**. Reeds were proverbially noted for their frailty, and the flame of the wick was weak and about to go out. The gentle Servant would handle them delicately and make certain they were not lost or destroyed. He would not increase their burden but would instead give them rest.

John Nolland: What are these images to be applied to? In the context of Deutero-Isaiah the application would seem to be to the exiles as displaced and devalued people. In Matthew the shortest bridge is to the tax collectors and sinners, valued by Jesus but marginalised in their own community (9:10-13). After 12:1-8, the poor in their neediness may also be in view (and perhaps even the sick in their suffering after vv. 9-14).

V. (:21) ULTIMATE DOMINION OF THE SERVANT AS A BEACON FOR HOPE

“And in His name the Gentiles will hope.”

Matthew McCraw: The Jewish people were not only wrong about what type of Messiah Jesus would be, they were also wrong about the scope of His Messiahship, and praise God that they were wrong!

Jesus not only brought hope for the people of Israel; He brought hope for the nations!

John Nolland: That the God of Israel might be the hope of nations (beyond the Jewish) went far beyond normal Jewish thought. The claim is being made that the action of God now initiated through the Isaianic servant has goals as wide as humanity. The universal mission to invite people to participate in this hope is anticipated in 24:14 and established in 28:19-20 (the ‘name’ language used in 12:21 to express allegiance to Jesus recurs in 28:19). The **language of hope** is suggestive of a process underway, which fits well with the way the kingdom of God is conceived in Matthew.

Charles Swindoll: Matthew’s quotation also explains Jesus’ ministry methods. Instead of engaging His adversaries with swords, He engaged them with words. And His words were well chosen, terse, and few. This, too, was in keeping with the messianic prophecy of Isaiah. The mission of the chosen Servant was to be

- well-pleasing to God (12:18)
- accomplished through proclamation (12:18)
- free from quarreling or crying out (12:19)
- without ruckus or riot (12:19)
- considerate of the weak and vulnerable (12:20)
- focused on the goal of justice (12:20)

Daniel Doriani: The Messiah’s ministry will have four traits:

- He will proclaim and bring justice to the earth (12:18, 20).
- He will be quiet and humble, not a loud demagogue (12:19).
- He will be gentle to the weak and the bruised (12:20).
- The nations will hope to be saved through him (12:21).

Chiastic structure:

- a He is beloved of God (12:18a).
- b He proclaims justice (12:18b).
- c He has a gentle voice (12:19).
- c' He is gentle to the weak (12:20a).
- b' He leads justice to victory (12:20b).
- a' He is the hope of the nations (12:21).

The Bible teaches us to take each calamity as a call to get right with God. In the vision of **Revelation 8–9**, trumpets announce a series of disasters—lightning, fire, volcanic eruption, and a poisoning of ocean waters. The point of these, Revelation says, is to **call people to repent**. In true repentance, we turn away from sin, but we also turn to something, or someone, that is, Christ. It sounds overconfident to some Americans, but the Bible is clear. **Christ is the hope of the nations**. No one fully understands why disasters strike nations and individuals. No one can infallibly, exhaustively interpret history. But the Bible gives us glimpses into history’s meaning and here is one. Every disaster shows that humans are **bruised reeds, smoldering wicks**. Jesus is willing to strengthen and to heal every broken one who comes to him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does Christ as the merciful servant of God, extending hope to the Gentiles, not fit the expectations of the Jews of His day?
- 2) How can we participate in the mission of Christ to bring hope to the Gentiles?
- 3) How does Jesus demonstrate that there is no middle ground when it comes to making a decision about allegiance to His Lordship?
- 4) How can we be more careful in the words we speak?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Wilson: Insofar as its contents are attributed to the voice of God, the quotation presents the reader with an opportunity to view the identity and ministry of Jesus from a **divine perspective**, one that is accordingly broad in scope. This observation applies especially to the claim that in his capacity as the Spirit-endowed servant, Jesus will proclaim **justice to the gentiles (12:18)**, who for their part will have hope in his name (**12:21**). This declaration, somewhat surprising in light of **10:5** and **15:24**, has several components, all of which correlate with other passages in the gospel.

The scenario of proclamation to the gentiles, to begin with, is presented elsewhere in **10:18, 24:14, and 28:19–20**, though the agency ascribed in those passages to Jesus’s followers is here ascribed to Jesus himself. The last of these passages (**28:19–20**) is of special interest insofar as part of what is communicated to the gentiles there is the “*name*” of Jesus (cf. **1:21, 23, 25; 7:22; 10:22; 18:5; 19:29; 24:5, 9**). Comparison can also be made with **4:12–16**, where the withdrawal motif (**4:12**) is elucidated by an Isaian fulfillment quotation that speaks of the gentiles as beneficiaries of Jesus’s ministry (**4:14–16**; and note how **4:14** matches **12:17**). In both cases, the Messiah’s interactions with gentiles are projected into a realm of biblical fulfillment.

The scenario of accomplishing κρίσις (a term that here seems to encompass both “**justice**” and “**judgment**”) in **12:18** and **12:20**, meanwhile, brings to mind **25:31–32**, in which the Son of Man (cf. **11:19; 12:8**) sits in judgment over all the ἔθνη, and, more proximately, the warnings of **11:22–24** and **12:41–42**, in which gentiles are compared favorably to Israelites in situations of

κρίσις (cf. 12:36). The reference to πνεῦμα (12:18), finally, supplies a scriptural foundation for the assertion made in 12:27–28 (cf. 12:31–32): Jesus casts out demons not by Beelzebul but by the Spirit bestowed upon him by God (cf. 3:16–17, alluding to Isa 42:1). His campaign against the realm of Satan (12:25–29), then, can be understood as an extension of his ministry as the chosen servant of God’s kingdom, whose “victory” (12:20) is assured.

J. Ligon Duncan: Christ’s Anonymity

In this passage **Jesus’ character** comes through clearly. Matthew is relating to us something of Jesus’ heart here. He really began that in Matthew chapter 12, verse one, when He told you the story of the meeting between the Pharisees and the Lord Jesus. He’s showing you what Jesus is like. He’s revealing Jesus’ character to you and He’s providing, for contrast, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Now remember, the Pharisees have had a bad name for about 2000 years amongst Christians, but these were very well-respected religious leaders. These were lay people, part of a movement designed to revitalize religion in Israel. They were highly exalted in the eyes of the people, and yet Matthew contrasts their hearts and their desire to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ to the Lord Jesus’ compassion for the sick, for the downcast, for the marginal, and so we see Christ’s character in stark contrast to the Pharisees. **Matthew Henry** says, “As in the midst of Christ’s greatest humiliations, there were proofs of His dignity. So in the midst of His greatest honors, He gave proofs of His humility.” And so even as He does these works – these miracles – and speaks words of grace, He had opportunity here in this passage to show His humility.

And that’s precisely what Matthew points us to.

I. (:14-16) Jesus’ actions reveal His character.

There are many truths that we learn in this passage before us but even as we contemplate Jesus’ character revealed by His actions, we are taught the truth that **actions reveal the heart**. You can see the hearts of the Pharisees by the way they act in this passage. Their desire is not to see the saints built up. Their desire is to see the Messiah torn down. The heart, the meanness, the wickedness, the evil of the Pharisees is seen in their action. You can’t see through to their hearts, but you can see what they’re doing. So, also, you can see the heart of Jesus by His compassion. When He is obstructed by the Pharisees, He continues ministering to those in need. His heart of love, His heart of kindness, His heart of sympathy, is so apparent. And Matthew provides bold relief, stark contrast, between the heart of the hearts of the Pharisees and the heart of Jesus.

II. (:17-21) Jesus’ character is revealed in Old Testament prophecy.

The focus of this passage and the reason that Matthew quotes it in the main you find in verses 19 and 20. There, the character of the Messiah is given. And Matthew wants to contrast the character of the Messiah with the character of these people who claim to be followers of God. And so He quotes for us verses 19 and 20. Look at those words: “*He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory.*”

First of all, we’re told that the Messiah will not be found shouting in the streets. Certainly the Lord will not be out there drawing attention to Himself in the streets. The shouting spoken of is not religious shouting, by the way, it’s quarreling; almost like you would hear after a team has lost a game and the fans are out in the streets arguing and haranguing about that particular

matter. And we're told by Matthew in **verse 19** that the servant of the Lord will carry out His work without ostentation, without drawing attention to Himself, with humility, with self-denial, with unpretentiousness. This is how the servant of the Lord will be and Matthew is saying, "Look, that's exactly like Jesus is. He's humble. He's unpretentious. He's not simply trying to draw attention to Himself. He is doing the will of the heavenly Father and He's looking out for your best spiritual interests. He's not wondering what He can get out of you. He's wanting to give you something that the heavenly Father has sent Him to give.

Notice also in **verse 20**, that Jesus' ministry and the Pharisees' ministry are contrasted: "*A battered reed He will not break off, a smoldering wick He will not put out,*" as opposed to the Pharisees, who were quick to censure, who were quick to dismiss and judge. The Lord Jesus Christ is patient. The Pharisees are cruel. They are plotting His destruction. They are vain. They pretend to be righteous but they're actually empty. They are interested in displaying righteousness. They pray on the street corners. Jesus, by contrast is kind, He is reserved, He is meek. The servant of the Lord will carry out His work, Isaiah says, without severity or rigor. He will be tender with those who are weak and as opposed to censoring and judging them will gently build up the spiritual life in them, and stoke it into a flame, caring for them, showing compassion.

Matthew's main point is that Jesus will treat with profound sympathy and tender concern the very people that the Pharisees despised. Jesus will show tender concern for those who are weak and will ask Him for help. He will help the sick. He does in **verse 15**. He heals them. He will show kindness and compassion to tax collectors and sinners. Matthew has already told us that, in **chapter 9**. He will comfort mourners. He will help those who are fearful. He will aid those who are doubting, those who are famished. He will be tender and compassionate. The Lord Jesus' tenderness and compassion is designed to draw sick sinners to Himself. They fear that they will be judged by God because they know that they ought to be judged by God, and yet they are met with the visit of the Savior who is tender and compassionate and will hold them and build them up.

David Anderson: Matthew is deliberately showing the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The differences:

1. The Pharisee cared about externals. Jesus cares about internals—the heart.
2. The Pharisees were public and wanted attention for their deeds. Jesus retreats, and tells people to keep quiet.
3. The Pharisees were merciless, and created all kinds of extra rules for people. Jesus merciful and offers rest for the soul.
4. The Pharisees yoke is heavy and burdensome. Jesus yoke is easy and light.
5. The Pharisees are conspiring how to kill; Jesus is conspiring how to save.
6. The Pharisees are plotting how to bring injustice; Jesus is bringing justice.

David Thompson: When Jesus Christ first showed up on the scene as King of Israel, things were exciting. However, as time went on things became much more difficult. Yet every move of Jesus Christ was in precise conformity with the eternal program of God. Everything Jesus Christ did while He was here on earth was perfectly consistent with the will and program of God. It didn't matter if He were slamming over tables in the temple, healing people or hiding out—every move was precise.

Now this passage of Scripture is absolutely amazing because it establishes that not only does Christ know what is happening with Israel, but that the animosity aimed against Jesus Christ was within the sovereign program of God so His program could swing to the Gentiles.

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO JESUS CHRIST, EVEN THE NEGATIVE THINGS, WERE NOT ONLY FULLY KNOWN BY JESUS CHRIST, BUT WERE ACTUALLY A FULFILLMENT OF THE PROGRAM OF GOD.

Nothing was happening by chance. No matter how negative things became, God was still sovereign and His program was still operative.

PART #1 – The response of Jesus to the Pharisees. 12:15a

Jesus Christ was completely aware that the Pharisees were plotting to destroy Him. He knew what these Sabbath controversies were all about—they were plots to destroy Him. His response was to withdraw from the area. Now this is a critical point as we will see in a moment for this is a point in time when Jesus begins to withdraw from Israel. This is a key turning point in the program of God. God only lets people reject Him for so long and then He withdraws from them. When God convicts, His conviction only lasts so long and then it is gone. The program of God does not last forever with any group or any individual. God, in His grace, gives people time to respond; but when His Word and will are abandoned, He shuts His program down.

PART #2 – The response of the people to Jesus. 12:15b

The people were still following Jesus, many of whom had diseases and sicknesses, and Jesus healed them all. Even though things were hostile and hateful against Him, He still kept ministering. Their motive for following Him was mostly because He was a miraculous healer, not because they believed He was the Messiah. It is not easy to keep at it when you know there are people against you. The tendency can be to throw up your hands and say forget about ministry. But it is very Christ-like to keep ministering even when your own world is negative.

PART #3 – The response of Jesus to the people. 12:15c-21

(Response #1) - The physical response.

Christ physically healed everyone. Not one disease was left out. The power of God can heal every kind of disease and illness. What is so sad is that many experienced the healing power of God, but not the spiritual power of God. Their sicknesses were healed but they still had their sin. People today receive many blessings from God, but they still do not deal with their sin.

(Response #2) - The verbal response.

Verbal Response #1 - Jesus warns people not to make Him known. **12:16**

To publicize Him would be to invite more opposition at the present time and it was not time yet for Christ to go to the cross. Jesus must have looked like a common Jew, for apparently He could mingle among people and had to be pointed out.

Verbal Response #2 - Jesus informs people that this is a fulfillment of prophecy. **12:17-21**

The rejection of Jesus Christ by Israel did not take God by surprise. In fact, this is precisely what Isaiah predicted would happen. Now the quote is from **Isaiah 42:1-4**. I doubt seriously that most

who read these verses see the Messianic importance of them, but the truth is these verses in Isaiah are a series of Messianic prophetic predictions.

John MacArthur: (:14-21) -- God's Beloved Servant – 9 Characteristics

- 1) Now let's look, to begin with, at **verse 14**, and we see the first characteristic of Christ. The beloved servant of God is, number one, **condemned by false servants** – condemned by false servants. . .
- 2) Now this brings me to the second characteristic of Christ: He was **conformed to God's plan**.
- 3) That brings me to a third characteristic of the Beloved Servant. He was **concerned for the needy**. . .
- 4) But it brings us to a fourth characteristic of Christ. He is **commended by the Father** – commended by the Father. Look at **verse 18**. . .
- 5) Fifthly, commissioned by the Spirit. It says there in **verse 18**, "*I will put My Spirit upon Him.*" That was a promise in **Isaiah 42**, that when the Messiah came, the Spirit would be upon Him. Now we know that that happened for certain in a unique way at His baptism, because it says the Spirit of God descended like a dove. We know that. But I don't believe that's when it started; I believe Jesus Christ was indwelt by the power of the Spirit of God from the time He was conceived. It says of John the Baptist in **Luke 1** that he was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. And if that was true of a human being, believe me, that must have been true of the God-Man. It also says in **Matthew 1:20** that He was *conceived of the Holy Spirit*. Now what does this mean? I mean, if He's already God, and the Father and the Son and the Spirit are already one in Him, what does it mean to have this special putting of the Spirit on Him? The only way we can understand it is to see it in a twofold manner.
 - First of all, it was a **granting of power to His human nature**. . .
 - But there was a second feature, and I believe that's tied to His baptism, and I think that was the **unique anointing** of the Spirit at that point for His royal service.
- 6) here's another one – **communicating the message**. The end of **verse 18**, "*He will show justice*" – or rightness – "*to the heathen.*" The Hebrew in Isaiah says, "*He will bring out right.*" He will bring out what is right. He's going to give the right message.
- 7) There's a seventh principle – and this is where we come right to the heart of the passage. He was **committed to meekness**.
- 8) And then eighth, He is characterized by **comforting the weak**. **Verse 20** – beautiful statement – "*A bruised reed shall He not break and smoking flax shall He not quench.*" What does that mean? Reeds were used for a lot of things, and once a reed was bruised, it wouldn't stay straight. I don't know if you've ever had a straw like that. Once it gets soft somewhere, it just doesn't straighten. You crunch it and throw it away and get a new one. Shepherds and people out in the fields used to like to pick reeds and make them into little flutes and play them. And after they played them for a while, of course, their fingers and their saliva and all would cause them to get soft in a place and they wouldn't stay straight and they couldn't be played right. And they'd just crush them and throw them away.

And then there was the smoking flax. They used to take flax and make a wick out of it. And it's smoldering flax that you see here. In other words, the fire is just about out. It's just kind of smoldering on the edge of the wick. What is this picture? This picture is the hurting people, the people everybody else steps on, discards, throws away; the bruised reeds that don't play the tune anymore, the smoking flax that can't give any light; they can't illuminate the situation; their light is almost out. The weak, the powerless, the helpless, the ones destroyed by sin and suffering, the people who are bowed down with care, the unworthy, the ones with no spiritual resources, the whole world of trampled, despised, ignored people, suffering people, hurting people. The kind of people that human conquerors have no time for, the kind of people that the Pharisees just walked all over, the broken people. But those are the kind of people the Lord goes to; He doesn't break those kind of bruised reeds and He doesn't put out what's left of the smoldering.

9) at last, consummating the victory. The end of **verse 20**, the day will come when "*He sends forth justice unto victory.*" What that's saying is simply that ultimately the right will win. In spite of all the persecution and in spite of all of the difficulty and in spite of all of the rejection, in the end, He will win the victory. At the great consummation, sin will be banished forever. And as Amos said, justice shall roll down like waters, and as Isaiah said, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the ocean is full of its own water. Great promise – **ultimately, He shall win the victory**. He shall consummate the victory. Oh, what a Savior is mine.

Van Parunak: Isaiah's original oracle has three paragraphs that mention "*judgment.*" Matthew quotes the first two, but not the third. **v. 21** is the end of **Isa 42:4**, but the first half of the verse is missing (see chart below).

This passage has two central themes: **judgment and the Gentiles**.

The word "*judgment*" משפט appears three times, and divides the text into three paragraphs. The word is derived from the verb שפט, usually translated "*to judge.*" However, this translation is misleading because of our modern separation of government into legislature, executive, and judiciary. This distinction would not make sense to the ancients. In Israel's history, the judges שפטים described in the seventh book of the OT are not just a judiciary. They exercise all the functions of government. In many cases, we can translate the word, "**government.**"

Isaiah only uses the word "*Gentiles*" גוים "*nations*" once, in the first paragraph. However, the word "*isles*" in v. 4 refers to the coastlands around the Mediterranean, which Matthew correctly interprets as Gentile lands. In addition, we will see that the bruised reed and smoking flax are images of the Gentiles. So the second theme of the passage, also repeated in each paragraph, is that the Messiah comes for the sake of the nations, not just of Israel. When Israel's spiritual leaders, the Pharisees, have decided to destroy him (**v. 14**), Matthew reminds us that the promise of the Messiah was for the Gentiles as well.

We can summarize the three paragraphs in Isaiah's original text.

1. The agent of God's judgment: Back in ch. 11 Isaiah promised the coming of a descendant of David who would rule in the power and under the direction of God's Spirit. These ancient promises are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

2. The purpose of God’s judgment: to promote the truth. He will bring forth judgment unto, or for the sake of, truth. This is very different from the objective of most governments, which is to extend their power, not to promote truth. In general, we don’t expect truth from politicians, but our Lord’s ministry promoted truth over power.

3. The effect of God’s judgment: He will set judgment in the earth. That is, his government will be realized in the physical world. Ultimately he will destroy evil-doers and establish his rule over all. This has not yet happened, but will take place when the Lord returns.

Matthew’s Application of Isaiah 42

Matthew omits the third paragraph, except for the final reference to the “isles,” the coastlands, which he uses to reinforce the initial emphasis on the Gentiles. At our Lord’s first coming, he did not establish judgment, did not carry out its requirements. This will happen when he returns, but Matthew omits that paragraph because it was not fulfilled in the first advent.

	Isaiah 42	Matthew 12
Agent	1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, <i>in whom</i> my soul delighteth;	18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased:
	I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles .	I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles .
Purpose	2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.	19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.
	3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.	20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.
Effect	4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.	21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Table 2: Matthew's Citation of Isaiah 42

By retaining this last line of Isaiah’s quotation, Matthew reinforces to us what is going on. The Jews are rejecting their own Messiah, but he is turning that rejection into an opportunity to shift his focus to the Gentiles.

TEXT: Matthew 12:22-32

TITLE: THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

BIG IDEA:

ATTRIBUTING WORKS OF JESUS TO DEMONIC POWER UNLEASHES A POWERFUL REFUTATION DENOUNCING THIS UNPARDONABLE SIN

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: After the brief respite of Jesus' withdrawal, the confrontation with the Pharisees is resumed. The trigger in this case is not an act which can be criticized in itself, but the demonstration of Jesus' authority over demonic possession leads to polarized opinions, the crowd in general discussing whether Jesus is the Messiah, but the Pharisees, unable to deny his power, questioning its source. It is their outrageous allegation which provokes Jesus into a withering response, in part consisting of reasoned argument (vv. 25–29), but leading on to a quite melodramatic warning of the possible consequences of their entrenched refusal to recognize his divine authority for what it is. . .

The accusation of complicity with the devil is not only extremely offensive, but is intended to destroy Jesus' credibility in the eyes of a God-fearing public. It is also potentially extremely serious, since sorcery was, according to the Mishnah, a capital offense. But it is a step too far, as Jesus' reply will warn them. Not only is the accusation in itself patently ridiculous (vv. 25–29); it also indicates a fundamental choice to take sides against Jesus (v. 30) and, even more seriously, against the Spirit of God by whose authority he acts (vv. 31–32); by making this accusation they have revealed their true character, and will be judged for it (vv. 33–37). The Pharisees are playing with fire.

Matthew McCraw: The **power of Jesus** is on full display throughout His ministry, yet some, such as the Pharisees, doubt and critique His power.

In this passage, Jesus has a strong response to those who doubt His power. He not only logically defends His power, but He also issues a dire warning about where this doubt and lack of repentance may lead. . .

Jesus was proving time again that He really was sent by God, that He really was ushering in the kingdom of God, and that He really was doing the work of God.

D. A. Carson: The NT reveals how close one may come to the kingdom - tasting, touching, perceiving, understanding. And it also shows that to come this far and reject the truth is unforgivable. So it is here. Jesus charges that those who perceive that his ministry is empowered by the Spirit and then, for whatever reason - whether spite, jealousy, or arrogance - ascribe it to Satan, have put themselves beyond the pale (of forgiveness). For them there is no forgiveness, and that is the verdict of the one who has authority to forgive sins.

Scott Harris: **Matthew 12:22-32** not only marks an **irreversible point** in Jesus' relationship with the Scribes and Pharisees, but it also marks a change in His presentation of Himself. Up to this time His major method of teaching the people was direct with illustrations to make the point.

After the confrontation that is recorded in this passage, Jesus' major method of teaching will be in **parables**. Why? **Matthew 13:11-14** tells us specifically that it is so the truths of the kingdom can be revealed to those who belong to it, while at the same time those truths will be hidden from those that do not belong to the kingdom. A person can only understand the parables if they have the Holy Spirit.

The rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders of Israel marks a change in the offer that Jesus was presenting to the people. Up to this point, it has been "*repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" It was a real offer of the kingdom of God to be established. From this point on it will still be "*repent,*" but the **kingdom is now in their midst**. The offer of the physical kingdom is gone, but the spiritual kingdom is present. This is a major theme of the parables of **Matthew 13**.

What precipitated such an event that would result in such a confrontation and then end with such far reaching results? Remember that we have been seeing the relationship between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees **deteriorate** for some time. Starting in **Matthew 11**, the strain in their relationship with one another declines at an even faster rate. They accused Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard and the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners (**Matthew 11:19**). They ignored the many miracles that Jesus did including healing every manner of disease and sickness, casting out demons, power over nature, and even raising people from the dead (**Matthew 11:20-22**). They accused Him and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath when in fact all Jesus and His disciples had done was to follow the Mosaic Law and refused to follow their legalism (**Matthew 12:1-8**). They became so incensed when Jesus proclaimed that He was Lord of the Sabbath and healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (which was in direct violation of their legalistic rule that compassion could only extend on the Sabbath to keeping a person from getting worse) that they began to plot in conjunction with their arch foes, the Herodians, to find a way to kill Jesus (**Mark 3:6; Matthew 12:14**).

As we saw two weeks ago as we looked at **Matthew 12:15-21**, Jesus came as a gentle servant of God the Father. In His deity, He is God Himself. In His humanity, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit which was the means by which His humanity was able to be in complete accord with His deity. He came to offer hope to all people – both Jew and Gentile. He came and proclaimed the truth of God's kingdom, but He did not quarrel and shout in anger. He had compassion on sinful men including those most rejected by society, the battered reed and smoldering wick of verse 20, and offered them hope of redemption as well.

Jesus kept his priorities in order and did things according to God the Father's plan for Him. He did not seek out confrontation with the religious leaders over their falsehood in order to put them down and gain their power. We find times when Jesus walked away from them because to argue with them would not serve the Kingdom of God (**Matthew 12:15**). We find instead that Jesus would simply proclaim the truth, sometimes in a very direct and powerful manner, and then let the truth do the work. When an escalation of the confrontation would serve the kingdom of God, Jesus was not shy to do so. Such is the case we find in this morning's text.

I. (:22-30) CONFRONTATION REGARDING THE SOURCE OF JESUS' POWER

A. (:22-24) Reactions Differ to the Miraculous Exorcism and Healing

1. (:22) Healing / Exorcism Accomplished by Jesus

"Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man who was blind and dumb,

and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw.”

J. Ligon Duncan: in verses 22 and 23 you will see an amazing healing, and you will see an amazing response from the crowd. There in those verses, we see that Christ’s deeds and doctrine show him to be the messiah. In that passage Matthew gives a testimony to us that Christ is indeed the Messiah. He shows us His messiahship by the deeds that He does. Christ is brought a man who is demon-possessed, and the physical manifestation of that demon-possession is that he is blind and speechless. Now we know that Christ makes a distinction. He does not say that all physical manifestations are the result of demon-possession, but in this case these physical manifestations are the result of the work of demonic activity. And the Lord Jesus Christ does a great sign in connection with that demon’s possession of the man. He casts out the demon. The man is instantaneously healed. And the miracle again shows the heart of Jesus.

Matthew is once again showing you the compassion of Christ towards those who are not merely physically disabled, but those who are spiritually in the bondage of Satan. Christ loves them and has compassion for them and longs for them to be freed from the conquest of Satan. We also see here the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in a test that He is sovereign, that He is the Son of God, that he is the Messiah, that He has the power to bind Satan, and to release those who are under the control of demons. And the crowd is absolutely astonished. The Lord Jesus has done miracles like this before even in the gospel of Matthew, but apparently the people who were witnessing this one had not seen Jesus do a miracle like this for they were amazed.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now this was, I think, a final, climactic Messianic sign because, in the next chapter the Lord begins to speak of Israel’s blindness and of the necessity of judgment upon them.

So it would seem, then, that this is the final test posed the nation concerning their response to the Messiah. He says in the **28th** verse, *“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.”* This is the final proof that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah, and the kingdom has come with the King.

2. (:23) Amazed Reaction of the Multitudes – Speculation Regarding Identity of Jesus

*“And all the multitudes were amazed, and began to say,
‘This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?’”*

R. T. France: They are beginning to draw the conclusion which Jesus had expected John the Baptist to draw from his miracles (**11:2–6**). The immediate juxtaposition of this acclamation with the Pharisees’ accusation suggests that the latter have recognized the dangerous state of public response to Jesus, and decide to stamp on it before it is too late.

3. (:24) Hostile Reaction of the Pharisees – False Accusation

*“But when the Pharisees heard it, they said,
‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.’”*

The miraculous healing accomplished by Jesus obviously required supernatural power. There are only two possible sources of such power. Here the Pharisees choose to malign the work of the Holy Spirit and attribute the miracle to the power of Satan. Jesus immediately refutes this false accusation.

B. (:25-29) Refutation of the False Accusation

1. (:25-26) Absurdity of the Accusation

a. (:25) General Principle = Division Leads to Kingdom Destruction

*“And knowing their thoughts He said to them,
‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste;
and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand.’”*

Daniel Doriani: The charge is that Jesus’ miracle was nothing but a satanic trick, designed to delude the people. Watch carefully how Jesus replies.

- First, he refutes the charges. He dismantles them, at a logical level. He appeals to the mind and teaches everyone about the true source of his power.
- Second, he preaches to the Pharisees and other doubters. He appeals to the heart and the will and calls them to faith.

b. (:26) Specific Application to Kingdom of Satan

*“And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself;
how then shall his kingdom stand?”*

Richard Gardner: It is absurd to think that the one who rules the forces of evil would invite someone to attack those forces (vv. 25-26). Such a course would lead to the collapse of Satan’s kingdom.

R. T. France: Jesus’ first counter-argument is the **common-sense point** that it is absurd to imagine that the demon king would attack and defeat his own demonic forces. This would mean civil war in the demonic kingdom, and that can only be a recipe for disaster, as human experience of divided loyalties illustrates. Note that Satan is assumed to have a “*kingdom*,” which we will hear in v. 28 is under attack from the “*kingdom of God*.” The term “*kingdom*” here carries its normal dynamic sense of “**rule**.” Satan cannot for long remain king if his forces are divided. For Satan’s claim to kingship in the world see on 4:8–9; cf. also Rev 2:13, where Satan has a “*throne*.”

2. (:27-28) Inconsistency of the Accusation

a. (:27) Double Standard of Their Reasoning

*“And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons,
by whom do your sons cast them out?
Consequently they shall be your judges.”*

Richard Gardner: Jesus suggests that the position of his critics leaves them vulnerable: If my power over demons comes from the devil, Jesus says, what does this say about the exorcists among your own ranks.

Grant Osborne: Jesus’ logic is irrefutable. He takes the opposite tack: “Let’s say you are correct and my power over demons comes from Satan himself. Then what does that say about your own followers?” The phrase “*your sons*” (οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν) could mean either Jewish exorcists in general or, more likely, the Pharisees’ own followers. Rabbi/disciple relations were often spoken of as “*father/son*.”

Exorcism in the first century was a thriving business, both in pagan and Jewish societies. Those performing it would employ complex incantations (which they said came from Solomon),

magical charms, and even visual effects (cf. Josephus, Ant. 8:45–48; Tob 8:2–3), so Jesus is saying that their practices would be endangered as well. There is an implicit contrast between Jesus (“I”) and the “sons” of the Pharisees, for Jesus needed only an authoritative word. Jesus’ deeds are superior to theirs, as seen in **9:33** when the crowd said, “*Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.*” If Jesus’ superior power comes from Satan, how much more their inferior authority? “*They will be your judges*” means that the practices of the Pharisees prove them wrong about Jesus.

“*They would ‘judge’ them for ascribing to Satan what they, the exorcists, knew came from God.*” The future “*they will be*” (ἔσονται) may point to the final judgment, but there is a realized aspect as well. The very presence of such exorcisms in their own ranks proves them wrong.

S. Lewis Johnson: So, the Pharisees, evidently, were linked with people who claim to be performing mighty miracles. Now that’s a very interesting thing, because it illustrates just exactly what we have today in Christendom. For, we have whole groups of people today who claim to be working mighty miracles. So, I think we can learn from this that there are claims for the miraculous that are not necessarily genuine claims.

- b. (:28) Divine Presence Revealed by Exorcism
“*But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*”

Grant Osborne: Now he points out the **true source of his ministry**, saying that his power actually comes “*through* [instrumental ἐν in both cases] *the Spirit.*” It is not demonic power but **divine presence** that has led to the authoritative demonstrations.

3. (:29) Proof that Jesus is Opposed to Satan and More Powerful
“*Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.*”

Craig Blomberg: Jesus now illustrates the correct interpretation of his exorcisms with an analogy or short parable. One cannot attack a well-protected home without first rendering the guard powerless. So, too, Jesus must first bind Satan before he can plunder (carry off or rob, from the same verb stem as “*lay hold of*” in **11:12**) his house, i.e., cast out his demons. The exorcisms demonstrate that God in Christ is decisively defeating the devil. As has often been noted, D-Day has come, though not yet V-Day. Satan is in his death throes. His last flurry of activity, to change the metaphor, is like that of a chicken (or perhaps better a snake!) with its head cut off.

Daniel Doriani: When Jesus enters this world with power, God enters the world with power. The process of restoration and renewal has begun. With this, the logical argument is complete. Now the preaching begins.

D. A. Carson: The argument has thus advanced: if Jesus’ exorcisms cannot be attributed to Satan (vv.25–26), then they reflect authority greater than that of Satan. By this greater power Jesus is binding “*the strong man*” and plundering his “*house.*” So the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing.

**C. (:30) Revelation Always Demands a Response –
Application: No Possibility of Neutrality Towards Jesus**

*“He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”*

Craig Blomberg: The point here is that Christ leaves no room for **neutral ground**. If people cannot accept his teaching and work, they are in danger of God's judgment.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus was able to cast out demons because He had first defeated Satan, the prince of the demons. Jesus entered Satan's kingdom, overcame his power, and claimed his spoils. His victory was through the Spirit of God (*“the finger of God,”* **Luke 11:20**) and not in the power of the evil one. This means that God is Victor over Satan, and that men must decide on whose side they will stand. There can be no compromise. We are either with God or against God.

Matthew McCraw: Jesus has no room for neutrality. You are either with Him or against Him. If you're against Him, you are rejecting the work of the Spirit and you are on dangerous ground because you may soon move beyond your ability to repent.

II. (:31-32) CONDEMNATION OF THE UNPARDONABLE SIN OF BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. (:31) Uniqueness of the Sin of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

*“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men,
but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.”*

Charles Swindoll: So the prospect of this unpardonable sin, from which there was no opportunity for repentance, was unique to the eyewitnesses of Jesus' miracles and message – those who rejected it knowingly, willingly, and persistently. In that narrow sense, such blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is no longer possible because Jesus' earthly ministry is over. However, in a more general sense, the sin for which there is no hope today would be to persist in the rejection of Christ throughout one's life and then die in that state of rejection. There is no biblical support for the idea of a second chance after death. But until that moment, anybody can believe and be saved.

Craig Blomberg: Probably blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is nothing more or less than the unrelenting rejection of his advances. Jesus' teaching thus parallels **Acts 4:12**. If one rejects the Spirit of God in Jesus, there is no one else in all the cosmos who can provide salvation. But we dare never label anyone as having committed this sin. Only God knows human hearts, and we would often make the wrong guess. Moreover, professing believers who fear they have committed the unforgivable sin demonstrate a concern for their spiritual welfare which by definition proves they have not committed it.

D. A. Carson: The distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit is not that the Son of Man is less important than the Spirit, or that the first sin is prebaptismal and the second postbaptismal, still less that the first is against the Son of Man and the second rejects the authority of Christian prophets. Instead, within the context of the larger argument, the first sin is rejection of the truth of the gospel (but there may be repentance and forgiveness for that), whereas the second sin is rejection of the same truth in full awareness that this is exactly what one is doing—thoughtfully, willfully, and self-consciously rejecting the work of the Spirit, even though there can be no other explanation of Jesus' exorcisms than that. It thus becomes a declaration that one is against God (see **Verseput**, Rejection of the Humble Messianic

King, 236–38). For such a sin there is no forgiveness, “*either in this age or the age to come*” (cf. **13:22; 25:46**)—a dramatic way of saying “*never*” (as in **Mk 3:29**).

B. (:32) Unforgivable Nature of This Sin Emphasized Again

1. Contrasted with Rejection of Jesus

“And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him;”

2. Condemnation of Rejection of the Holy Spirit

“but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come.”

Richard Gardner: Interpreters differ on the meaning of this distinction. According to some, the saying distinguishes between rejection of Jesus during his ministry to Israel and rejection of Jesus’ work as risen Lord through the Holy Spirit. It is more likely, however, that the saying distinguishes between rejection of Jesus as God’s messenger and rejection of the One who empowers Jesus. To criticize the messenger is a forgivable offense, but to discredit the power of God by which the messenger frees and heals is an offense without pardon.

Daniel Doriani: Blasphemy against the Spirit is the sober, clear-minded, deliberate rejection of Jesus—as a very agent of evil—despite full knowledge of his work and in the face of the Spirit’s full testimony to him. This blasphemer has heard the gospel proclaimed with clarity and power. He has watched Christians live good lives. Yet he hates Jesus and Christianity and views it as wickedness and deceit. He hears, understands, and despises. We see why this sin is unpardonable: How can one turn to Christ and be saved, when he has seen all the evidence and rejected it as a terrible evil?

Donald Hagner: To blaspheme against the Spirit was in this case to attribute the work of God’s Spirit to Satan and so in the most fundamental way to undercut the very possibility of experiencing the reality of God’s salvation. In other words, this blasphemy by its very nature makes forgiveness impossible (in that sense, it is analogous to apostasy; cf. **Heb 6:4–6**). . .

The failure to understand Jesus is yet forgivable but not the outright rejection of the saving power of God through the Spirit exhibited in the direct overthrow of the kingdom of Satan. The only unforgivable sin is that of deliberately denying God in a fundamental way, one which goes against plain and obvious evidence. Such hardheartedness is the result of one’s own deliberate insensitivity and cuts one off from forgiveness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where does our society call Good, Evil . . . and Evil, Good?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about the importance of unity in the local church?
- 3) How does Jesus demonstrate that there is **no middle ground** when it comes to making a decision about allegiance to His Lordship?

4) What is different about the particular sin committed by the Pharisees in this context that makes it **unpardonable**? Can people commit a similar sin today (cf. the references in the book of Hebrews)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: Re So they were poisoning the people, and they were saying, “*He does this by the power of Beelzebub.*” Now I want to give them credit. They really saw the issue clearly, and there was no question in their mind. They saw the issue clearly. What He did obviously took supernatural power. There was no way they could avoid that. They knew that. Now let me tell you something people, that is a monumental apologetic for the life of Christ, when His enemies who hated Him the most could do nothing but conclude that what He did He did by supernatural power. That’s His enemies. There was no way to argue that. And a person who comes along and tries to argue that is a fool. You not only have the testimony of His friends, but you have the testimony of His enemies, that He was doing things that were beyond human capability. You can’t come along with any of that patronizing stuff about His a good man, nice guy, good teacher. His friends won’t let you and neither will His enemies. That is a category of information that Jesus does not allow you to stand in.

You must conclude that He’s supernatural. Then it becomes an issue of whether you think it’s God or Satan, because those are the only two supernatural kingdoms that exist. Now obviously, they weren’t going to assign Him to God, so they only had one alternative. You see, they see the issue very clearly. And the Pharisees, then, from my standpoint, become some of the greatest defenders of the supernatural character of Christ. . .

So we go from the activity to the amazement to the accusation. Let’s look at the answer, and this is marvelous. Jesus answers their accusation by telling them that there are **three things** wrong with it. **Number one, it is absurd.** Okay? It is absurd. That means illogical, unreasonable, stupid, inane. Watch **verse 25**, “He said to them, ‘*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.*’” Now that’s what we call a **truism**. You don’t have to be a Phi Beta Kappa to figure it out. You don’t have to have a PhD to know that. A kingdom divided against itself is going to fall. A house divided against itself is going to fall. A city divided against itself is going to fall. You can’t have civil war and survive. You can unify one against another and survive, but you can’t destroy the one. You can’t have chaos in a house, chaos in a city, chaos in a nation, without having the whole thing begin to fall apart. A kingdom divided against itself can’t stand; that’s simply a truism. I mean, anybody can understand that, and so they should understand it. And he makes the application in **verse 26**, “*If Satan casts out Satan, then he is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?*”

Secondly, it is prejudiced. It is prejudice. It shows the rotten, evil bias of your own hearts. **Verse 27**, He says, okay, “*If I, by Beelzebub, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?*” Now what do you mean by that. Well, in other words, “Don’t your sons do the same thing?” Who are our sons? Well, it’s simply a reference to the sons of the Pharisees, a way of saying the disciples of the Pharisees, such as in 2 Kings chapter 2 verse 3 were it talks about the sons of the prophets. There were certain people who sat at the feet of the Pharisees to learn their system, their legalism, their approach to life. They became known, as it were, as the sons or the

disciples of the Pharisees. And among those were groups of the sons of the Pharisees she were involved in exorcisms. They were going around – Josephus talks about them – with strange incantations and strange activities, trying to cast out demons. . .

Thirdly, His answer says you are rebellious. And this is just the climax. You're rebellious. Not only is your accusation absurd and biased and inconsistent, but it shows your rebellion against the kingdom. **Verse 28**, "*But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.*" Oh, man. What a statement. Now the truth is that He does cast out demons by the power of the Spirit of God. Right? Anything else would be absurd. So we know it is God's power. And by the way, Jesus, in His incarnation as a servant, restricted the use of His own prerogatives, was obedient to the Father, and energized by the Spirit. So the Spirit was doing this through Him. Underline that in your Bible. That's the key to understanding the unpardonable sin, which we'll get into next time. . .

And so the activity led to the amazement, which led to the accusation, which led to the answer. And Jesus says, "You are absurd; you are prejudiced; and you are rebellious." Then He adds the **anathema**. And that word means a curse. And this is the sum of it that we want to look at in **verses 31 and 32**, the anathema. And this is a passage that has confused many people and has been interpreted in all kinds of ways. I hope we can get some good understanding of it as we look at its simplicity in the context of **Matthew 12**.

They had cursed the Spirit of God, and now God through Christ is going to **curse them**. They have committed a sin that is unforgivable – unforgivable. **Verse 31**, "*Wherefore*" – in other words, based on all that He has said and all that has gone on – "*I say to you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men.*" Now stop there. "*All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men.*" That is a very simple statement. Sin and blasphemy are, in a sense, distinct. Although blasphemy is sin. Sin is an act. Sin is a large category of evil deeds or thoughts or attitudes. Blasphemy is one kind of sin within that broad category. Blasphemy is the unique sin of speaking evil against God, of saying things about God that are not true about Him, of speaking of God in a derogatory manner. That is blasphemy. It is a defiant irreverence. It is to speak evil of. . .

"But" – watch this – "*when you speak against the Holy Spirit, that will not be forgiven you, not in this time period or in the other time period to follow.*" Because when you begin to speak against the Spirit, then you are saying, "I recognize the supernatural, I see the supernatural, only I think it's hell, not heaven." For that, you won't be forgiven. If you're looking on the human plane and that's all you perceive and that's all you've understood, you could be brought along to believe and to understand. But if, when you have seen the supernatural and the ministry of the Spirit of God through Christ and you conclude that it is of the Devil, you can't be forgiven. Because now you are speaking against the Spirit of God, the power of God, the energy of God, as made manifest through Christ. And so, in a real sense, you're speaking against His deity, His divine nature, and calling it satanic.

S. Lewis Johnson: He calls it **blasphemy** against the Holy Spirit in **verse 31**. What is blasphemy? Well, blasphemy is **slander**. To blaspheme God is to slander God, to affirm of him things that are not true. For example, if we were to say God is not wholly holy, we would be blaspheming God. We would be slandering him. If we were to speak of him in a way in which we denied his attributes, we would be slandering him. It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that is one thing that is said.

And the second thing is that it is sin against the Holy Spirit, specifically. Not sin against the Son of Man. Not sin against the Father, specifically. But sin against the Holy Spirit. It's blasphemy and it's against the Holy Spirit.

Now specifically, in the light of the context, it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the king and his kingdom. In the **28th verse** we read, "*But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you.*" It is evident that the reason the Holy Spirit performed these miracles through the Lord Jesus was to give the unshakeable testimony to the kingship, the Messianic kingship of the Lord Jesus.

And that is evident by the words he speaks in **verse 29**, "*Or else, how shall one enter into the strongman's house and spoil his goods except he first bind the strongman.*" He is testifying to the fact that he is able to enter into the house of Satan and spoil his goods, and only the Messianic king can do that.

So to sum it up, then, it is the sin of blasphemy. It is sin against the Holy Spirit, and it is specifically his **testimony to the king**. And we may sum it by saying that it is **the sin of refusing the kingdom and the king, brought about through the clear testimony of the Spirit in the miracles performed through the Lord Jesus**.

It is something like this. To the presentation of the credentials of the King, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Israel the nation is saying, "These are not the credentials, they are the credentials of hell." And in that they slander the Holy Spirit. In that, they refuse the testimony to the kingdom and the king.

There is a text in the Old Testament which is very much of an admonition and warning that speaks of the same thing we have here. Isaiah says, "*Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*" Or it's like those who say with the witches in MacBeth, "Fair is foul and foul is fair." What they're doing is they have finally come to the place where in the light of the plain testimony of God through the supernatural miracles of the Spirit, they reject them – not only reject them – but say that they really come from Satan and not from God. . .

What we have here in this climactic miracle is this final evidence of opposition after a lengthy period of rejection by him, so that what we're seeing is the operation of a fixed attitude of rejection of the testimony of God through Christ, and so that we have finally reached a kind of climax, and this sin precludes forgiveness because it precludes repentance. That is, these individuals, by rejecting the truth of the word of God for so lengthy a period of time have now become the recipient of the hardening ministry of the Holy Spirit. . .

Let me conclude. What is, then, the unpardonable sin? The unpardonable sin is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit's supernatural work of performing miracles prevalent in the days of the supernatural miracles. It may be committed by hardened, impenitent men.

But now having said that, two other things ought to be said. In the first place, there is an unpardonable sin today. It is not the unpardonable sin to which our Lord refers, but it is the unpardonable sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. In John chapter 3 and verse 18, the Lord Jesus in the continuation of the passage in which he has had his interview with Nicodemus says, "*He that*

believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed already in the name of the only begotten Son of God,” so that personal faith in Jesus Christ – if it does not come – sin is unpardonable.

There is such a thing as the unpardonable sin, historically, and there is such a thing as an unpardonable sin throughout this present age. And it is possible for us to commit unpardonable sin in that sense. And furthermore, it is possible for there to exist a prolonged rebellion that leads to retributive judgment and hardness of heart. That is still possible today. It is my own opinion that that is what is referred to in Hebrews chapter 6, when we read that it is impossible to bring certain people to repentance, who have had great privilege but have turned away from them. They apostasized from the apprehensive sense of truth that they possessed, and there is no hope.

In the Old Testament, we read that God sent the prophets to Israel, and they ministered to them and ministered to them, but they rejected them and rejected them, and then we read “*til there was no healing.*” **Retributive judgment must set in.**

Walking Together Ministries: In 1942 **C.S. Lewis** made his famous argument concerning the identity of Jesus that is known today as “**The Lewis Trilemma.**” Here it is:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.

Christians and non-Christians alike have argued about the validity of Lewis' argument since he first made it on BBC radio and then again when it appeared in his classic work *Mere Christianity*. The debate is over the logical cohesion and force of the argument. That particular issue is not my concern here. What is my concern here is the fact that Jesus, in our text, appears to offer something similar. I am not saying that the **Lewis Trilemma** is in the New Testament. Rather, I want to show that Jesus shows the Pharisees that if He was not who they alleged He was then He must be the one that they did not want to admit He was! In this way, there is a parallel between the **Lewis Trilemma** and **Matthew 12:22-32**.

In this passage, we see three proposals offered concerning who Jesus might be.

Proposal #1: Jesus is a King Who Restores Israel

It is possible, then, that “*the people*” were close to the truth and even possibly saw a part of the truth—that Jesus was the Messiah—but that their understanding was flawed by the idea that the Messiah would be a national political figure that would cast off the fetters of Rome and restore national Israel. But Jesus the Messiah turned out to be quite different than their understanding of what the Messiah would be: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This, then, is our first proposal: the Messiah/Restorer of Israel. At least the possibility of it was suggested by “*the people*” in their question, “*Can this be the Son of David?*”

Proposal #2: Jesus is a Demon-possessed Deceiver

The second proposal was an obscene proposal. It came from the Pharisees. . . the blasphemous idea that Jesus was operating with satanic power.

Proposal #3: Jesus is the King of Kings

Argument #1: If Jesus is operating under the influence of Satan then the realm of Satan is collapsing (v.25-26).

Argument #2: The Pharisees’ own followers cast out demons but have not received this kind of skepticism (v.27).

Argument #3: For Jesus to cast out demons He must be stronger than the devil, and this would mean that His exorcisms are evidence that God has come among them (v.28-29).

<https://www.walkingtogetherministries.com/2021/03/19/matthew-1222-32/>

TEXT: Matthew 12:33-37

TITLE: EXPOSING THE SOURCE OF EVIL -- SPEECH MATTERS

BIG IDEA:

SPEECH REVEALS ONE'S INNER CHARACTER AND WILL BE JUDGED

INTRODUCTION:

Walter Wilson: Sins such as blasphemy and slander warrant particular scrutiny in meting out judgment because **speech reveals a person's true character**, a point illustrated by three examples of causal correspondence, namely,

- the correspondence between a tree and its fruit (**12:33**),
- the correspondence between a person's heart and his or her mouth (**12:34**), and
- the correspondence between a treasure and the "things" its owner brings out of it (**12:35**)

If the structure of **12:31–32** relies especially on parallelism, the cluster of sayings in **12:33–37** is noteworthy for its use of **antithesis**.

Brian Evans: According to recent research done in the UK, Working men average 2000-3000 words per day, females from 10,000-20,000. However, both average about 500-700 words of actual value (i.e. words which have intent to communicate to another person an item of importance to both).

I'm not going to make any comments on this data except to say we all probably speak too much especially in light of the fact that we are going to give an account of every careless word we say.

Donald Hagner: The pericope can be outlined thus:

- (1) the tree and the fruit, consisting of
 - (a) the good tree/fruit and
 - (b) the bad tree/fruit, these in perfectly symmetrical parallelism, and
 - (c) the conclusion of knowing by fruit (**v 33**);
- (2) the relation between the heart and words of the mouth, consisting of
 - (a) a question directed to the Pharisees and
 - (b) the concluding point (**v 34**);
- (3) the speech of good and bad persons, consisting again of two perfectly symmetrical clauses (**v 35**);
- (4) the danger of careless words (**v 36**); and
- (5) a concluding and summarizing principle, stated in two perfectly symmetrical clauses (**v 37**).

As the metaphor of the tree and its fruit was used in **7:16–20** to refer to works, so the same metaphor is used here in relation to words. Both works and words reveal the **true nature** of a person. The words of the Pharisees revealed their failure to receive the good news of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. It is in this sense that they were bad and they spoke bad things; indeed, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit (**v 32**). This passage calls attention to the **importance of**

all speech; it warns of irresponsible or thoughtless speech as well as bad speech. It reminds the Christian readers of Matthew that on the day of judgment they will be held accountable for all the words they speak as well as the deeds they do. Righteousness consists always of both word and deed (cf. Col 3:17).

R. T. France: The Pharisees' malicious charge now provides the setting for some further reflections on the **power and significance of words** (vv. 33–37); this complex of sayings is clearly applicable to what the Pharisees have said, but may also be more widely applied, and may originally have been preserved independently of this particular narrative setting.

The imagery of the tree and its fruit recalls 7:16–20 (using the same terms “good” and “rotten”), but this saying is much more **concise**, and is expressed as a **second-person imperative** (“make the tree good/rotten”) which probably reflects a popular **proverbial style**, as in our “Give him an inch and he’ll take a mile” or “Give a dog a bad name.” It can hardly be intended as an actual command in view of the second clause: are we exhorted to create a rotten tree? The point of the proverb is the same as in 7:16–20: a person’s true nature is perceived by how they behave. The relevance of this piece of proverbial wisdom in context will be drawn out in the following verses with special reference to words, whereas in 7:16–20 it was probably more concerned with actions.

Bruce Hurt: **Axiomatic** means evident without proof or argument, self-evident, self-explanatory. If something is axiomatic, it seems to be **obviously true**. What Jesus is doing in this section is pointing out the **root of the Pharisees' problem**, beginning with the axiom that a tree produces after its nature and is easily recognized by its fruit. Given the fact that the Pharisees have just uttered the most damning words a human being can speak, Jesus launches into a discussion of the tongue in Mt 12:33-37, concluding in verse 37 “*by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” Thus it behooves us to pay careful attention to this section so that we come to understand the **importance of our words** and how they relate to our eternal destiny!

I. (:33-35) ASSOCIATION OF SPEECH WITH HEART CONDITION

A. (:33) Correspondence between Tree and Fruit – Speech Reveals the Nature of the Heart

*“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good;
or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad;
for the tree is known by its fruit.”*

Scott Harris: The verb “make” here is in the sense of “consider to be” in the same way we might say that “*so and so is not the genius that some people make him.*” The tree and its fruit must be considered either good or bad together. In effect Jesus is saying, “*Either consider me and what I do as good, or consider me and what I do as bad. What I am will be known by what I do.*” Who Jesus is must be determined by what He says and does regardless of personal feelings. Jesus’ words and works point undeniably to His goodness and Divine power.

Grant Osborne: Challenges the crowd to judge carefully between the Pharisees and Jesus. The “good tree” is Jesus, who proclaims God’s truths, and the “bad tree” is the leader who opposes God in Jesus and speaks against him. “*A tree is known by its fruit*” (cf. 7:20) challenges the hearers to differentiate between the evil talk/blasphemy of the Pharisees and the kingdom truths

of Jesus. The point is that the Pharisees have “made” (double meaning) themselves evil, and so their proclamations have become evil.

John Nolland: It is from the **fruit** that the quality of a tree is finally to be discerned. Despite their pretensions to religious righteousness, these Pharisees have given themselves away by their reaction to what they have experienced.

William Hendriksen: Fruit and tree belong together. They must not be separated. Therefore to say that while the deeds of Jesus, such as demon-expulsion, healing the sick, etc., may be beneficial, yet he himself is bad, being a tool of Beelzebul, makes no sense. Who Jesus is must be determined by what he does: a tree is judged by its fruit.

Bruce Hurt: Ultimately their words put them in a bind as He pointed out in **Mt 12:27**. Why so? Because if they said what He was doing was evil, then their own sons were doing evil. But they considered what their own sons did as good. So He boxed them in a corner. They were trapped by their own words. Jesus is commanding them to be consistent because the character of His own life (GOOD) should have been clear to them from the good fruit He accomplished (healings and exorcisms were “good fruit”). Thus they should have called Him a “good tree” instead of a “bad tree.”

Brian Evans: The dynamic is that doing good things doesn’t make you good, doing good things shows you already are good through the work of the Holy Spirit has made you righteous so the righteous person does righteous things. The healthy tree produces healthy fruit.

B. (:34) Correspondence between Heart and Speech – Speech Reflects the Overflow of What Fills the Heart

*“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?
For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”*

Walter Wilson: In the current context, the emphasis falls on **bad fruit**, that is, the **evil speech** of the Pharisees, and as we know from **3:10**, any tree that does not produce good fruit “*is cut down and thrown into the fire*” (cf. **13:30; 21:19, 43**). That being the case, challenge (**12:33**) gives way to reproof (**12:34**), the latter formulated as an invective (**12:34a**), an ironic question (**12:34b**), and a supporting aphorism (**12:34c**). The last of these elements drives home the main point: **sooner or later the mouth will disclose the content of one’s heart, that is, one’s true nature**. Being evil themselves, the Pharisees are incapable of speaking anything that is good, blasphemy being among the sins that proceed from the heart, thereby defiling the entire person (**15:18–19**; cf. **Jas 3:6**).

Stanley Saunders: Adopting John the Baptizer’s epithet (cf. **3:7**), Jesus calls the Pharisees “*a brood of vipers*” (cf. **23:33**). Like the serpent in the garden, they are cunning orators, but their words deceive and destroy. They may sound “*wise*” and “*intelligent*” (cf. **11:25**), but they will be held to account for their “*useless*,” “*fruitless*” words, uttered in order to discredit Jesus and deny God’s power. Whether by their actions or their words, the Pharisees demonstrate what tree they have fallen from.

C. (:35) Correspondence between Treasure and Product – Speech Reflects Consistency with the Moral Condition of the Heart

*“The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good;
and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.”*

D. A. Carson: It is the mouth that reveals what is in the heart. How, then, can those who are evil say anything good? What is needed is a change of heart.

Daniel Doriani: The people must have marveled at this dispute. Jesus healed a man who bore terrible burdens and suffered terrible bondage. **His act was so obviously good; how could anyone criticize it?** Jesus explained that the heart drives such antagonism. Words are hostile or mean-spirited when hearts are full of such thoughts: *“You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him” (12:34–35).* Those who have an evil heart speak evil; those with a good heart declare good things. The Pharisees slandered Jesus because there was slander in their hearts. We must have good hearts if we hope to say good things. . .

Jesus says **humans act according to their nature**. If the heart is full of hate, the mouth says hateful things. The Pharisees slandered Jesus because there were slander and hatred in their hearts. Today, we gossip and criticize others because our hearts desire to promote self by condemning others. Cursing and insults, judgment and condemnation are the same. We speak from the abundance of the heart.

John Nolland: The point is probably that one’s actions (here one’s words) reveal what one most deeply values; they are what one brings out from one’s treasure trove to give to others.

D. A. Carson: It is the mouth that reveals what is in the heart. How, then, can those who are evil say anything good? **What is needed is a change of heart.**

Brian Evans: In Jesus’ day this word meant **treasure house** or **storehouse**. It also has in mind our definition a storehouse of words or a treasure chest of words.

Our Lord is telling us that when we speak it’s as if we go into our storehouse of words and pick from the treasure chest of words. The evil person only has evil words to pick from. Their treasure chest only has evil in it. Their speech comes from their deposit of words...slander, complaining, gossip, lying, manipulation and deceit. That’s what they say because that’s all they have.

The righteous person who is born again also has a treasure chest of words. We speak using words from our thesaurus.

II. (:36-37) ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SPEECH

A. (:36) Words Will Be Judged

*“And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak,
they shall render account for it in the day of judgment.”*

John Nolland: ἀργός means idle, unemployed, lazy, useless, or unproductive.

Warren Wiersbe: The phrase “*idle word*” in **Matthew 12:36** means “words that accomplish nothing.” If God is going to judge our “small talk,” how much more will He judge our deliberate words? It is by our conversation at unguarded moments that we reveal our true character.

R. T. France: The point is not the casualness of the utterance, but its **fallaciousness**: “not ... ‘thoughtless’ words, such as a carefree joke, but **deedless ones**, loafers which ought to be up and busy about what they say, the broken promise, the unpaid vow, words which said, ‘I go, sir’ and never went (**Matt. 21:29**).” The Pharisees’ charge against Jesus, which was far from “casual” or “thoughtless,” is such an utterance, **purporting to be a defense of God’s truth but all the time working against his saving purpose**. Reading this saying in its context therefore helps to avoid the excessive rigorism which a literal rendering of these words out of context can promote, and which can easily turn conscientious disciples into humorless pedants who are afraid to relax or to join in social banter. . .

What we say about Jesus and his miracles reveals who we are, and we are judged accordingly. This is Jesus’ diagnostic for our soul. He asks, “What do you say about me? What do you say in your most casual words to others?”

B. (:37) Words Determine Justification or Condemnation

*“For by your words you shall be justified,
and by your words you shall be condemned.”*

Brian Evans: Their words did not sentence them to hell. Their words **exposed** a person who was already bound for hell. The charge that Jesus was really doing these miracles by the power of Satan shows what sort of blasphemers these people really were. The Holy Spirit was working through the ministry of Jesus and they were blaspheming His work.

Grant Osborne: This is a key passage in Matthew, the high point so to speak of opposition in the book. At the same time, the authority of Jesus is never more clear, and we see here that Satan is already defeated and bound by Jesus. Further, there is a stress not only on the Pharisees but also on the accountability of all of us before God for the words we speak. . .

What we say shows the kind of person we are. Jesus in **vv. 33–35** shows how the mouth reflects the heart, i.e., the true person within us. **James 1:19** states this well: “*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*” In other words, “*watch your mouth,*” for as in **Jas 3:5** the tongue is a small spark that sets a great forest ablaze. We must weigh our words carefully, avoid rudeness, and make certain that we edify rather than tear down others. **James 3:1 – 4:12** especially concerns slander, but we must realize that gossip is passive slander and in some ways worse than slander, for slander at least is honest, wanting to hurt another person (cf. **2 Cor 12:20**). Gossip doesn’t care enough to worry who is hurt but turns slander into entertainment!

Richard Gardner: In the final two verses, Jesus warns of the **consequences** for those who utter careless words, words that fail to serve a worthy end. Because the words we speak reveal who we are (cf. **15:18-19**), God will acquit or condemn us on the basis of our words. For Matthew, this warning applies not only to Jesus’ contemporaries, but to later generations as well. It rebukes rabbinic critics of Jesus’ community in Matthew’s day. And it admonishes the community itself, especially those called to teach (cf. **5:19; James 3:1-12**).

Robert Gundry: The traditional translation, “*every idle word*,” leaves the misimpression that Jesus is talking about random remarks. A truer translation is “*every deedless word*.” It goes without saying, at least for the moment, that in the Day of Judgment people will give an account of all their deeds (see 7:22–23, for example). Jesus is saying here that in the Day of Judgment people will give an account of their words as well as, and even apart from, their deeds—that is, whether or not their words had issued in deeds. “*Every*” individualizes the words and takes in all that’s spoken, whether good or evil. Whether or not followed up by a corresponding deed, speaking against the Holy Spirit examples an evil word that will lead to conviction. But a word of repentance, as in the confession of sins (see 3:6 with 3:2), that produces good deeds (“*fruit in keeping with repentance*” according to 3:8)—now there’s a basis for justification in the Day of Judgment!

William Hendriksen: The judgment passed upon the individual in the final day (see **verse 36**) is going to be “*by*,” in the sense of “*in conformity with*,” “*in accordance with*,” “*in harmony with*,” his words, considered as mirrors of the heart. These words will reveal whether he was a professed believer or an unbeliever; if a professed believer, whether his faith was genuine or faked. To be sure, a man is saved by grace alone, through faith, apart from any works considered as if they have earning power. Nevertheless, his works – this includes his words – supply the needed evidence showing whether or not he was and is a child of God. Moreover, if this judgment turns out favorably, the works, reflecting the man’s degree of loyalty to his Maker and Redeemer, figure in the determination of his degree of glory. They figure similarly in establishing the degree of punishment for those who perish. Jesus wants each individual to meditate upon this important truth, that he may be justified (declared righteous in the sight of God) and not condemned.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can we be deceived by a person’s external words and works so that we fail to rightly discern the condition of their heart?
- 2) In what sense were the Pharisees a “*brood of vipers*”?
- 3) Understanding that our heart is deceitful and we tend to judge ourselves in a more favorable light than deserved, how can our words serve as a barometer of our spiritual condition?
- 4) How can we be more careful in the words we speak and what types of sins of the tongue do we need to guard against?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: First there was doubt, then there was criticism, then there was indifference, then open rejection, and finally **blasphemy**. They’re no longer just wondering, they’re no longer indifferent, they’re no longer just rejecting Him, they are turning on Him in overt vile blasphemy. And that is what we read in **Matthew 12:22-32**. That is the record of the blasphemy

of the Jewish leaders against Jesus Christ. And the substance of their blasphemy is in **Mt 12:24**, and it is really the key to understanding our passage for today. For in that they say, “*This fellow,*” referring to Christ, “*doeth no cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.*” And of course that is a name for Satan. So they watched Jesus cast the demons out of a man who was blind and dumb and no doubt deaf, in **Mt 12:22**. They saw the amazement of the people in **Mt 12:23**, and the people began to wonder if Jesus might not be the Messiah, the Son of David. And they were immediately threatened by the musings of the people. They were threatened by the thought that they might assume Jesus to be the Messiah, so they hurriedly and publicly affirmed that He did what He did by the power of the Devil – by the power of the Devil. And thus they spoke against Jesus Christ the most terrible words that have ever been spoken in human history, the most terrible words that ever fell from human lips, to have called Jesus Christ satanic, to have said of the lovely spotless gift of heaven that He was from hell. They had concluded the very antithesis of the truth and they had blasphemed the Lord and the Holy Spirit who worked through Him. They had committed a crime unequalled in human history. Now that conclusion leads us to the next passage. Jesus has condemned them in **Mt 12:31-32**. He told them that that kind of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, who was at work through Christ, could never be forgiven. In other words, if you have all of the revelation there is to have – you’ve seen the miracles, you’ve heard His teachings, you’ve seen the quality of His life, you’ve seen His attitude, you’ve been able to be exposed to everything there is about Him - and your conclusion is that He is from the Devil, you are **unredeemable**. Because you have concluded the very opposite with the fullness of revelation. They were lost and they could never be saved; they were lost forever. And their words became that which ultimately damned them. Now may I hasten to say, they were not so much damned by their words as their damnation was made evident by what they said. It was clear they were to be damned by the words that came out from within them. It is not that you are damned by your words; **it is that you are damned because your words will reveal the corruption of your heart**. That is the issue. That is the substance of the passage. So they were, in effect, rendered hopeless in **Mt 12:31-32** because of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as He ministered through Christ, but their words became the mark of their hopelessness. The words that they spoke were the objective external evidence of their corrupt and vile and wretched, wicked hearts.

Charles Swindoll: Up to this point, Jesus had been addressing the visible manifestation of deep depravity, not its invisible source. He confronted the results, not the causes; the actions, not the reasons. However, as a follow-up to His strong warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, He dug deeper to the core of the problem. When we understand the **root of a problem**, we’ll better understand the nature of its solution.

Jesus was still **directly addressing the Pharisees**, now focusing on the **source of their wickedness**. This wasn’t just a superficial, easily changeable faux pas they had committed. They didn’t misstep or experience a slip of the tongue. They didn’t momentarily lose their tempers and lapse into a temporary fit. Their problem was **deep-seated**. As fruit is to a tree, their actions were to the condition of their eternal souls. If the fruit of a tree is bad, it means the tree itself is diseased. And if the fruit of a tree is good, then the tree itself is healthy: “*The tree is known by its fruit*” (**12:33**).

By their external words and actions, then, the **Pharisees revealed their true inner natures**. They were a “*brood of vipers*” who, being evil, could only speak what came from their hearts – evil (**12:34-35**). The results of their lives were reliable indicators of the inner condition of their souls. By contrast, the “*good man*” produces good things from the treasure of his heart. The

contrast in the immediate context was between Jesus Himself and the Pharisees. His words and works promoted and resulted in nothing but good –healing, deliverance from wickedness, repentance, good works, and righteousness. But if people followed the dictates of the Pharisees, the results would be wickedness, oppression, division, dissension, and yes, even murderous plots against an innocent man!

The truth is, the heart is like a well of values, priorities, thoughts, and attitudes deep within us. The tongue is like the bucket that draws from that well. Until others actually drink from that invisible well, they won't know whether the water is good or bad, life-giving or toxic. The Pharisees' hidden well of wickedness had been revealed by their words of blasphemy. Jesus' warning to them was severe: "*Every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment*" (12:36).

There are consequences for our words and actions. And while some people are justified by their right words, which manifest true, believing hearts, so, too, will some be condemned by their wicked words, which reveal sinful, unrepentant hearts (12:37). As Paul said, "*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation*" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Clearly, the Pharisees had neither believed in their hearts nor confessed with their mouths that Jesus was Lord. Rather, they believed in their hearts and confessed with their mouths that He was worse than a liar or lunatic; He was, they said, the devil! And now they had to face a terrible truth: Nobody attributes the works of God to the power of the devil and gets away with it.

R. V. G. Tasker: The Pharisees for all their religious pretensions were fundamentally evil, *a generation of vipers*, as Jesus now calls them, following the example of John the Baptist (see **iii. 7**). Their words were evil, because they overflowed from an evil heart (34). What the mouth utters is often what has been occupying the thoughts for so long that it must now find vocal expression. It was while he was musing, the psalmist said, that the fire kindled, and at last he spake with his tongue (see **Ps. xxxix. 3**). If therefore the affections and thoughts of men are evil, their utterances must also be evil (35). And if speech is such an unfailling indication of character, it is very natural that it is by men's words, no less than by their deeds that they will be either acquitted or condemned on the day of judgment (36, 37).

J C Ryle: There are few of our Lord's sayings which are so heart-searching as this. There is nothing, perhaps, to which most men pay less attention than their words. They go through their daily work, speaking and talking without thought or reflection, and seem to imagine that if they do what is right, it matters but little what they say. But is it so? Are our words so utterly trifling and unimportant? We dare not say so, with such a passage of Scripture as this before our eyes. **Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts**, as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" The lips only utter what the mind conceives. Our words will form one subject of inquiry at the day of judgment. We shall have to give account of our sayings, as well as our doings. Truly these are very solemn considerations. If there were no other text in the Bible, this passage ought to convince us, that we are all "*guilty before God,*" and need a righteousness better than our own, even the righteousness of Christ. (**Phil. 3:9.**) Let us be humble as we read this passage, in the recollection of time past. How many idle, foolish, vain, light, frivolous, sinful, and unprofitable

things we have all said! How many words we have used, which, like thistle-down, have flown far and wide, and sown mischief in the hearts of others that will never die! How often when we have met our friends, "our conversation," to use an old saint's expression, "has only made work for repentance." There is deep truth in the remark of **Burkitt**, "A profane scoff or atheistical jest may stick in the minds of those that hear it, after the tongue that spoke it is dead. A word spoken is physically transient, but morally permanent." "*Death and life*," says Solomon, "*are in the power of the tongue*." (**Prov. 18:21**.) Let us be watchful as we read this passage about words, when we look forward to our days yet to come. Let us resolve, by God's grace, to be more careful over our tongues, and more particular about our use of them. Let us pray daily that our "*speech may be always with grace*." (**Coloss. 4:6**.) Let us say every morning with holy David, "*I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not in my tongue*." Let us cry with him to the Strong for strength, and say, "*Set a watch over my mouth, and keep the door of my lips*." Well indeed might James say, "*If any man offends not in word, the same is a perfect man*." (**Psalms 39:1, 141:3; James 3:2**.)

Scott Harris: Salvation – justification – is not produced by either words or deeds, but the words and deeds are **clear manifestations of salvation**. They are the objective, observable evidence of a person's spiritual condition whether it be good or bad.

We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for "*good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (**Ephesians 2:10**). In the same way, true salvation also produces good words. **Romans 10:10**, "*With the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation*." In **Romans 15:18**, Paul's praise to the Lord was that the gospel resulted in "*the obedience of the Gentiles in word and deed*."

Salvation includes **regeneration of the heart** in which the individual is transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. What was once dead in trespasses and sin is made alive unto God. **The treasury of the heart is changed**, and thus salvation will result in good words, words that confirm the reality of what has taken place in the heart.

By the same token evil words, bad words, careless words mark what is really in the heart of that individual, and so it is by them that they will be **judged**. They are the confirming evidence of an evil heart. God is a holy God and that is why judgment must come. God is also a just God and He will judge fairly and accurately by the very words that people say. He will not need witness to verify the truth, the words of the individual himself will verify along with record of the person's deeds the truth of what his heart is like. **Revelation 20:11-15** records the **Great White Throne Judgment** in which all who have not received the redemption from sin that is offered in the Lord Jesus Christ will stand before Him and be judged "*from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds*." **Revelation 20:15** adds, "*And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*."

For the true Christian there will be an accounting as well. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*." Of course these judgments will not be in condemnation, for Paul had already written in **Romans 8:1** "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*." The condemnation is gone, but there will still be an accounting for what we have said and done whether it be "*wood, hay, and stubble*" which will be burned up, or "*gold, jewels, and precious stones*" which will reap rewards in heaven (**1 Corinthians 3:12-15**).

What are these “*careless words*” Jesus speaks of? The basic meaning of the word is “*useless, barren, unproductive, that which does no useful work and is therefore ineffective in producing any good result.*” These would include flippant speech, irresponsible speaking, inappropriate talk, as well as words of hypocrisy. The Scriptures are full of warning about our speech and include as evil words those that express lust, “*For the lips of a strange woman drop [as] an honeycomb, and her mouth [is] smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword*” (**Proverbs 5:3,4**),

deceit, “*Their tongue [is as] an arrow shot out; it speaks deceit: [one] speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in heart he lies in wait*” (**Jeremiah 9:8 AV**),

cursing and oppression, “*His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue [is] mischief and vanity*” (**Psalms 10:7 AV**),

lying, “*A worthless person, a wicked man, walks with a perverse mouth*” (**Proverbs 6:12**). “*Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight*” (**Proverbs 12:22 AV**),

destruction, “*By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked*” (**Proverbs 11:11 AV**),

vanity, “*For when they speak great swelling [words] of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, [through much] wantonness, those that are just escaping from them who live in error*” (**2 Peter 2:18**),

flattery, “*A lying tongue hates those who are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth works ruin*” (**Proverbs 26:28**)

foolishness, “*The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness*” (**Proverbs 15:2 AV**),

verbosity, “*A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?*” (**Ecclesiastes 10:14 AV**),

falsehood, “*Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain*” (**Titus 1:11 AV**),

pride, “*There they cry, but none gives answer, because of the pride of evil men*” (**Job 35:12 AV**),

vulgarity, “*But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth*” (**Colossians 3:8 AV**),

hatred, “*They surrounded me also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause*” (**Psalms 109:3**),

and **gossip**, “Where no wood is, [there] the fire goes out: so where [there is] no talebearer, the strife ceases” (**Proverbs 26:20 AV**),

Careless speech is anything that does not fit the injunction in **Ephesians 4:29** to “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

How careful are you about what you say? This should be a sobering passage for all of us, but especially for non-believers who will face a judgment of condemnation and their very words. Their words, both those evil by deliberate design and those evil just by carelessness, will testify against them. But believers should also be serious about this as well. Are we careful about what we say? And are we careful for the right reason? You see, some of you may be bothered by Jesus’ words here, but it is for the wrong reason. But on the other hand, some of you may not think this applies to you at all. The problem is one of Legalism and License.

Legalism & License

In the past couple of months I have talked about legalism several times, but I have not mentioned its opposite which is license. Today I want to use this passage to show you the nature of the way the Lord wants you to live and why **both legalism and license are wrong**.

Legalism is what entrapped the Pharisees into a system of false religion. The essence of legalism comes from the thought that God will approve of me if I do certain things and do not do certain other things. Usually the particular things that are either done or not done start with a basis in Scripture, but since Scripture, especially the New Testament, is more a compilation of principles and precepts rather than a series of specific rules and regulations, man quickly fills in the specifics and comes up with his own list of what is and is not acceptable before God. Man’s law replaces God’s precepts.

Legalism says, “I am good, I have gained God’s approval because I have done thus and so and not done thus and so.” It views spirituality from the outside and judges itself and others based on what it thinks is or is not godly. Legalism results in attitudes which are self-righteous and condemning. And before anyone here gets proud about not being a legalist – take warning. This is an extremely simple error to slip into and I dare say that every person in this room has fallen into this at some point and may still have some views that are legalistic.

Now the opposite of Legalism is License. License results from an overemphasis on the grace of God to the exclusion or near exclusion of His holiness. The basis of thinking is, “I am good, I have gained God’s approval because Jesus has forgiven me, and it does not really matter that much what I do.” It views spirituality as being inside and therefore indiscernible to anyone else. Generally a person with such a view would pride themselves on their ability to tolerate sinful behavior in others. These are those that are quick to partially quote **Matthew 7:1, 2** with “judge not lest you be judged.” Such a person will stress their liberty in Christ to the point that they needlessly offend their Christian brothers (see **Romans 14** or **1 Corinthians 8**), and open themselves up to practicing clearly sinful behavior which brings open shame to the name of Jesus Christ.

What is the truth? Is spirituality outside or inside? Look again at what Jesus says here in **Matthew 12:33** and **35**, “. . . for the tree will be known by its fruit . . . The good man out of his

good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.” **True spirituality is both inside and outside!**

The Libertine needs to understand that a person’s behavior and words do reveal what is on the inside and that toleration of sin is an affront to God’s holiness. In addition, though Christians are not under the Law of Moses, they are under the Law of Christ (**1 Corinthians 9:21**). The Great Commission includes, “*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.*”

The Legalist needs to remember that “*all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment*” before Him. We are not good because of what we do or do not do; we are good because of what Jesus Christ has done for us and in us. We are good because the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and given us new hearts. Out of an evil heart come evil deeds. A person may be able to fake it for awhile and play Christianity talking the talk and walking the walk outwardly, but eventually the truth will come out. We do good, not to gain God’s approval, but out of our love for Him and desire to please Him.

What is it that marks true righteousness? What makes a good tree? **Good fruit that comes out of the treasure of a heart that is good.** True spirituality is both inside and outside. The person truly walking with Christ cares about pleasing Him instead of conforming to the opinions of other people.

https://www.gracebible.org/exposing_the_heart_matthew_12_33_37

TEXT: Matthew 12:38-50

TITLE: WARNING ADDRESSED TO THIS PRESENT EVIL GENERATION

BIG IDEA:

REJECTION OF MANIFEST TRUTH LEADS TO SEVERE JUDGMENT WHILE TRUE DISCIPLES PRIORITIZE SPIRITUAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION:

The emphasis in this passage on “*this evil generation*” reinforces the interpretation of the unpardonable sin as applying to the present generation who witnessed and rejected the awesome works performed by Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

Richard Gardner: The dispute over Jesus’ power in **12:22-37** finds its sequel in the controversy in **12:38-50**. In fact, the two units share a common narrative setting. It is the same Pharisees who accuse Jesus of being in league with Satan in **12:24** who, along with the scribes, insist that Jesus show them a sign in **12:38**. Unfazed by Jesus’ words condemning blasphemy against the Spirit, they challenge him to prove his claim that he acts with divine authority. Does God really stand behind Jesus’ work, or is Jesus only an imposter (cf. **21:23**)?

In constructing this unit, Matthew draws on several pieces of material from his sources. One of the pieces presents the **debate over a sign**, including Jesus’ sayings about this generation (vv. **38-42**). For this core material, Matthew is indebted both to **Mark 8:11-13** and to a saying also found in **Luke 11:29-32** (cf. **11:16**). The second component is a saying about the **return of the unclean spirit** (vv. **43-45**). In the Lukan parallel (**Luke 11:24-26**), the saying is included in the dispute over Jesus casting out demons. Matthew uses it, however, to expand Jesus’ critique of this generation.

To complete the unit, Matthew turns to a Markan story linked to the **dispute over casting out demons** (vv. **46-50**, cf. **Mark 3:31-35**). In this story Jesus’ relatives come looking for him, and Jesus uses the occasion to identify his “**true**” family. What we have then in the unit is a “gallery of contrasting attitudes” (**Senior**, 1977:130), much like the two panels in **11:20-30**. The larger canvas depicts an evil and adulterous generation, faithless Israel as represented by the leaders who reject Jesus. But alongside this dismal picture is a portrait of the disciples, who accept Jesus’ claims and do the will of God.

Walter Wilson: The Pharisees continue their assault on Jesus (cf. **12:1-24**), this time accompanied by the scribes, who we see join them in asking for a “**sign**,” presumably referring not simply to another exorcism (cf. **12:22-24**) but to an extraordinary wonder that will authenticate the claims he has been making about himself and his agency on behalf of God’s kingdom. Jesus counters with a portrayal that likens his contemporaries to the faithless wilderness generation and himself to the prophet Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of a whale, a veiled allusion to the time between Jesus’s death and resurrection, the latter constituting the ultimate “**sign**” of his messianic identity. Because his contemporaries have failed to recognize the something “*greater*” in their midst, the day of judgment will for them be a day of condemnation. Indeed, in an ironic twist of fate, even gentiles and outsiders will rise up to condemn them. This dire picture is then elaborated by an extended image that shows how the

unresponsiveness of “*this generation*” resembles the predicament of a house that is initially plagued by a single unclean spirit but eventually is inundated by a host of them, thus ending up in a worse state than it was before. The arrival of members from his biological family then provides Jesus with an opportunity to draw a contrast between this corrupted “*house*” and his own, **messianic household**, the membership of which is determined by obedience to the will of the heavenly Father.

Grant Osborne: Rejection governs every aspect of this passage. First Jesus’ enemies reject him in their demand for a sign; then Jesus rejects them in his proclamation of their future judgment by Nineveh and the Queen of the South. At the same time, Jesus is also proclaiming his exalted status by saying he is “*greater than Jonah*” and “*greater than Solomon*.” Finally the parable of the return of the demons shows the true nature of “*this evil generation*” as under the control of Satan (a reversal of their charge in **12:24**).

I. (:38-42) THIS EVIL GENERATION CONDEMNED BY TWO OT WITNESSES FOR THEIR REJECTION OF MANIFEST TRUTH

A. (:38) Disingenuous Desire to Witness Some Special Miraculous Sign

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’”

D. A. Carson: A sign was usually some miraculous token to be fulfilled quickly, or at once, to confirm a prophecy. The Jews were not asking for just another miracle, since they had already persuaded themselves that at least some of those Jesus had performed were of demonic agency (**v.24**); they were asking for a “*sign*” performed on command to remove what seemed to them to be the ambiguity of Jesus’ miracles.

Robert Gundry: Since the Pharisees have charged that Jesus was casting out demons by Beelzebul/Satan (**12:24**), now they’re asking for a sign not subject to interpretation as satanically aided. In effect they’re saying, “You deny you’re casting out demons by Beelzebul. Show us that you’re not. We want evidence, not assertion.”

Richard Gardner: The problem with the demand for a sign in Matthew 12 is not that signs have no place in what Jesus is doing (on the contrary, cf. **11:2-6**). The problem is, rather, that this particular demand is the product of unfaith. To put it another way: Signs are for those who seek to discover, not dispute.

Charles Swindoll: In their hypocrisy, the religious leaders were feigning honor for Jesus in front of the crowd. They reinforced this ruse by addressing Jesus with the seemingly respectful title “*Teacher*,” which in Aramaic would have been *Rabbi*. But as **A. B. Bruce** notes, we readers should realize what’s going on: Their demand for a sign “was impudent, hypocritical, insulting.”

Why would they ask for a sign, then? Maybe the Pharisees thought that if they could just get Jesus to do enough of His “signs,” which they regarded as fake, they would be able to figure out how He really did them. It would be like telling a magician, “Do it again . . . do it again . . . do it again” in order to expose the sleight of hand. In any case, we know Jesus’ opponents weren’t coaxing Him to do more signs so that more of the crowd would believe, though that’s what would inevitably happen. Nor were they interested in the healing benefits of the miracles; after all, they had not cared enough about people to allow a man to be healed on the Sabbath. No, the

scribes and Pharisees wanted to set Jesus up as a phony. They had already made up their minds that Jesus was a tool of the devil; now they just wanted to see exactly what it was about His “signs” that would give Him away.

R. T. France: The idea of an authenticating “*sign*” (cf. **John 6:30**) has a **good OT pedigree**. Moses, in the expectation that his God-given authority would be challenged, was given miracles to perform (**Exod 4:1–9, 29–31; 7:8–22**); Gideon requested and received a sign to confirm God’s promise (**Judg 6:36–40**); Elijah called down fire from heaven (**1 Kgs 18:36–39**); Ahaz and Hezekiah were offered signs to authenticate Isaiah’s prophecies (**Isa 7:10–14; 38:7–8**). All these signs took the form of miraculous or otherwise inexplicable events.

Donald Hagner: Now they ask to see a sign, presumably a miracle performed just for them, something that would amaze them while presenting irrefutable evidence that his claims were true (cf. particularly **John 6:30**). Yet this is precisely the kind of miracle—a **demonstrative display of power for the purpose of impressing**—that Jesus would not perform. His miracles were never done for the sake of creating an effect or of overpowering those who witnessed them; they were much more a part of his proclamation and thus designed solely to meet human needs. Even if Jesus had performed some astonishing sign for them, such was their unbelief, it is implied, that they probably would have charged Jesus with sorcery and thus have used it against him.

Van Parunak: Why does asking for a sign show that they are “*evil and adulterous*”? Because they are presuming that they have the right to sit in judgment on whether he is or is not the Messiah. By coming to Jesus in this way, they are offering him acceptance in their club. Similarly, Nicodemus in **John 3** is inviting the Lord to join the Pharisees, based on his criticism of the Sadducees’ temple market in **John 2**. Like the Jews in **Matthew 12**, he and his colleagues thought that they were the ones to decide whether Jesus was legitimate. But the creature has no right to sit in approval over the creator. . .

We live in an age that is more Greek than Jewish. People are more likely to ask us for “*wisdom*” (logical proofs of Christianity) than for “*signs*.” But both are inappropriate. God’s way is neither signs nor wisdom, but **simple preaching**—the proclamation of the truth. If his Spirit is working in a needy heart, preaching is all that is needed—and if his Spirit is not working, all the signs and arguments in the world will have no effect.

B. (:39-41) The Condemning Witness of the People of Nineveh

1. (:39) Sign of Jonah the Prophet

*“But He answered and said to them, ‘An **evil and adulterous generation** craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;’”*

D. A. Carson: “*Adultery*” was frequently used by OT prophets to describe the spiritual prostitution and wanton apostasy of Israel (e.g., **Isa 50:1; 57:3; Jer 3:8; 13:27; 31:32; Eze 16:15, 32, 35–42; Hos 2:1–7; 3:1**). Here Jesus applies it to his contemporaries, as did his brother James later on (**Jas 4:4**). Israel had largely abandoned her idolatry and syncretism after the exile. But now Jesus insists that she is still **adulterous in heart**. In the past God had graciously granted “signs” to strengthen the faith of the timid (e.g., Abraham [**Ge 15**]; Gideon [**Jdg 6:17–24**]; Joshua [**Jos 10**]). Here, however, Jesus says that signs are denied “*this wicked and adulterous generation,*” because they are never to be performed on demand or as a sop to unbelief (cf. **1Co 1:22**).

John Nolland: The generation is being likened to those sent into exile. ‘*Generation*’ here alludes back to **11:16** (see discussion there of ‘*this generation*’ as the generation privileged to experience the initiative of God in salvation and judgment) and will be picked up with ‘*this generation*’ in **Mt. 12:41-42, 45**. The Pharisaic scribes here take on a **representative role**, speaking for their generation in its unbelief. . .

Why is seeking a sign thought to characterize an evil and adulterous generation? It can hardly be that such a request is always and everywhere considered to be an evil. The difficulty must be the request in the context of Jesus’ ministry as readily available for scrutiny. Given what is visibly present, such a request amounts to nothing more than **evasion**.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus refuses to play their game. He does not work wonders on demand and especially not for skeptics. Their request reveals their evil intent and lack of faith (as in **vv. 34-35**).

R. T. France: Their demand for a sign after so much clear evidence (note especially **v. 28**) betrays their **fundamental opposition** to God’s purpose as it is now focused in the ministry of Jesus. If they have not been convinced by what has already happened, what sort of sign can hope to persuade them?

J. Ligon Duncan: Their problem is not, however, that Jesus had not supplied them with enough evidence, or even with enough spectacular evidence. **Their problem was in their heart.** They did not want to believe and so no amount of proof could convince them. Have you ever seen the sad picture of a mother outside a courtroom when a son has been clearly and evidently convicted of a crime. And you’ve seen that mother crying in disbelief, “No, no, no, it’s not true, it’s not true.” And you’ve seen the evidence, and the jury has seen the evidence, and the judge has seen the evidence, and it’s true. But she doesn’t want to believe it. The Lord Jesus is saying the hearts of the Pharisees don’t want to believe My claim. It’s not that the evidence is not there. It’s not that the truth is not clear. It’s not that there’s insufficient proof. It’s that they do not want to believe. The problem is with their hearts. Their hearts are opposed to God. That is the root of their problem. The evidence is enough to convince them, but they have no wish to be convinced.

2. (:40) Significance of Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus

“for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

D. A. Carson: It is the sign that Jonah himself was, not the sign given him or presented by him. This interpretation commonly accepts the view that the Ninevites learned what had happened to Jonah and how he got to their city. Jonah himself thus served as a “sign” to the Ninevites, for he appeared to them as one who had been delivered from certain death.

Van Parunak: It may be useful to digress here for a moment to counter an argument that is being made by Islamic apologists who attack the notion that our Lord truly died. They cite this verse and say, “See, Jesus’ “death” was like Jonah’s, but Jonah didn’t really die. He was alive while he was in the fish. So Jesus didn’t really die, either.” Should you encounter this argument, please call people’s attention to what the book of Jonah actually says:

Jon 2:1 *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell שאול cried I, and thou heardest my voice. ... 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from **corruption** שחת] **the pit**], O LORD my God.*

Jonah did not pray for deliverance from the fish's belly. His prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving, reporting an earlier prayer for deliverance. That prayer came not from the belly of the fish, but from **Sheol**, in the **grave**. Jonah did indeed die. We know from the history of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom (**Luke 16**) that **people are conscious after death**, and in that state he cried to the Lord, who brought him back to life and sent a great fish to snatch him from the bottom of the sea. When he finds himself alive again, in the fish, he prays a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, and the Lord gives him a second chance.

Craig Blomberg: "Three days and three nights" represents a Semitic idiom for any portion of three calendar days.

Richard Gardner: But what is this sign? According to **Luke 11:30**, the sign consists of someone coming to **preach a message of repentance**. Jonah served as such a sign to the people of Nineveh, and Jesus played the role of Jonah in his ministry to Israel.

Matthew, however, relates the sign to a different feature in the Jonah story. According to **verse 40**, the sign consists of a **miraculous deliverance from death**. Just as Jonah was delivered from the belly of a great fish (**Jon. 1:17; 2:10**), so Jesus will be delivered from entombment in the earth. This will be God's way of validating Jesus' work (although it too will be disputed; cf. **28:11-15**). Whatever meaning is assigned to the sign of the prophet Jonah, **it is a sign that judges those who refuse to repent**.

Daniel Doriani: This recapitulation of Jonah's life clarifies what the sign of Jonah is. Jonah performed no signs, he simply spoke. But the presence of Jonah in Nineveh is significant, for Jonah was as good as dead, expected to be dead, and considered dead for three days. But after three days, he showed himself alive. The "*sign of Jonah*," therefore, will not be a miracle that resembles a miracle Jonah performed. Rather Jonah himself is the sign. The very fact that Jonah was alive—and preaching—after spending three days in the belly of a huge fish was the sign that God was active in Nineveh. The sign consisted of Jonah himself. The man was the sign. Just so with Jesus. The sign that will lead Jesus' adversaries to believe will not be a sign Jesus performs. The sign will be Jesus, alive and visible three days after his death (**12:40**). His life will indicate that he is the Lord and the Savior, who gives eternal life.

Consider how Jesus is greater than Jonah:

- Jonah went to enemies, whom he hated; Jesus went to his people, whom he loved.
- Jonah came without preparation to a hostile people; Jesus came to the people of God, after he had long prepared them to receive their Redeemer.
- Jonah declared impending judgment; Jesus preached the gospel.
- Jonah came with words; Jesus came with words and with deeds that verified them.
- Jonah was a man of God; Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jonah preached reluctantly, hoping his audience would not repent and taste God's grace; Jesus was willing to pay any price to impart God's grace.

3. (:41) Supremacy of Person and Preaching of Jesus over Jonah

*“The men of Nineveh shall stand up with **this generation** at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”*

D. A. Carson: The first point of comparison between Jonah and Jesus is that they were both **delivered from death**—a deliverance that attested the trustworthiness of their preaching. The second point of comparison is the **different responses** of the hearers. The men of Nineveh repented. But even though “*something* [neuter, as in **12:6**; NIV, ‘one’] *greater than Jonah is here*”—the reference is to Jesus, not his deliverance, because the comparison is with Jonah, not his deliverance—the people of Jesus’ day—“*this generation*” (cf. **v.39**)—did not repent. Therefore men of Nineveh (the nouns are anarthrous) “*will stand up with*” this generation at the final judgment; i.e., they will rise to bear witness against them.

C. (:42) **The Condemning Witness of the Queen of the South**

*“The Queen of the South shall rise up with **this generation** at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”*

John Nolland: The two examples nicely balance a **prophetic** figure and a **royal** figure, a figure who went to his hearers with one who was visited by one from afar, and possibly the negative judgment preaching of Jonah and the positive availability of wisdom with Solomon. Jesus and his ministry correspond to all of these in a that-much-more manner. After **8:11-12**, the Gentile identity of the Ninevites and the queen of the South should probably be taken as a quiet pointer to the place for non-Jewish people in the future that Jesus’ ministry is forging, as by and large this generation of Jews abandon the place that is naturally theirs.

R. T. France: If “*something more/greater*” than all these key authorities is now present, and if moreover all their functions have now been brought together into a single person, Jesus’ questioners have a thought-provoking basis on which to consider the question of **his authority**. Temple and priesthood, prophet, king and wise man—something greater is now here.

GotQuestions.org: Jesus mentions the Queen of the South in the context of Israel’s rejection of their True King. Though she was a Gentile, she traveled a long distance to hear Solomon, and the treasures she brought showed her respect for him and the wisdom he possessed. In contrast, the Jews of Jesus’ time were unwilling to travel any distance to hear the King of kings. The Queen of Sheba’s lavish respect for Solomon stood in stark contrast to Israel’s flat-out rejection of Christ. Yet Christ is greater than Solomon (**Matthew 12:42**). Solomon was a son of David, but Jesus is the Son of David. Solomon was rich, but Jesus is the Creator of all riches. Solomon possessed the gift of wisdom, but Jesus is wisdom personified.

Donald Hagner: If Jonah and Solomon were respectively persuasive and thus elicited an appropriate response, Jesus and his message should **all the more** have elicited a positive response from the scribes and Pharisees. . . . That the Pharisees did not respond positively to such conspicuous evidence as Jesus had given them makes them all the **more culpable**. Jesus and his kingdom far exceeded all else that Israel had witnessed in her history. Ironically, the Gentiles will be able to see what the Pharisees cannot. . . .

The request for a sign only becomes unjustified and intrinsically wrong when one is already surrounded by good and sufficient evidence one chooses not to accept. In that case, unreceptivity and unbelief are the root problem, and it is unlikely that any sign would be sufficient to change such a person's mind.

Robert Gundry: The **condemnation** of Jesus' persecutors at the Last Judgment stands as an encouragement to his persecuted disciples, who can expect like **vindication**.

II. (:43-45) THIS EVIL GENERATION HEADED FROM THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE OF SEVERE JUDGMENT BECAUSE HUMANISTIC REFORMATION FAILS MISERABLY

Craig Blomberg: Jesus now returns to consider the incident that started this whole discussion, the exorcism of v. 22. He wants the man who was liberated, along with everyone else present, to realize that freedom from demon possession is not enough. **Ownership by the devil must be replaced with ownership by Christ** (cf. **Rom 6:15-18**). Otherwise one's release is only temporary. **Moral reform without Christian commitment always remains inadequate**. Jesus likens the situation to a house made ready for new occupants which still stands vacant. Squatters will soon move in. No person can live long without serving someone. Satan will always return to attack that which is left defenseless, and each success leads him to increasingly worse designs, whether, as here, to literal repossession by an even greater number of demons (the number seven may indicate completeness of possession) or with the more widespread degeneracy of repeated sin, which characteristically renders humans more insensitive to their guilt (cf. **Rom 1:18-32**). The "rest" the evil spirit seeks here contrasts sharply and ironically with the rest Christ offers (**11:29**) and links this controversy with the Sabbath controversies of **12:1-14**. The "wicked generation" ties back in with v. 39 and is a uniquely Matthean addition. Matthew will vividly demonstrate the truth of vv. 43-45 by depicting the growing hostility against Jesus throughout the remainder of his narrative.

Charles Swindoll: What does this parable have to do with the hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees? The comparison is subtle but clear. The Pharisees had attempted a superficial reformation through strict religious observances, by external legislation and enforcement, and perhaps even by casting out demons through rites and rituals common in their day. They were law-abiding but unconverted. The resulting condition was worse than before because with their self-help approach to righteousness, they had deceived themselves into thinking they were actually clean and holy. This false righteousness brought self-deception and opened the door for an even more wicked state. It set them up for committing the unpardonable sin: the rejection of the Messiah and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

A. (:43) Humanistic Reformation Fails to Adequately Deal with Evil

*"Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man,
it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it."*

John Nolland: No good parallel has been cited for the journeying in waterless places, but the imagery is probably based on the idea that the demons will move naturally in realms where conditions are antithetical to human well-being, and devoid of the blessing of God. We should probably understand that the demon unsuccessfully seeks transit-accommodation. It is of no

interest to the flow of the story why this should be so. This is simply a suitable turn of events for turning the demon back on its tracks.

B. (:44) Humanistic Reformation Creates an Environment Conducive for Severe Relapse

*“Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’;
and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.”*

R. T. France: Their “liberation” has been rather through seeing and hearing in the ministry of Jesus a new power and orientation (summarized in the slogan “the kingship of heaven”) which has set them free to make a new beginning; but if they now fail to take the road of discipleship, they are in danger of relapsing into a condition worse than before. Half-hearted repentance without a new commitment will not last. The message reflects that of v. 30: if they are not positively “for” Jesus they will turn out in the end to be “against” him.

Grant Osborne: Jesus could be addressing especially the crowds here, who have taken a strict **neutrality** toward him, excited at his obvious authority but not willing to commit (see 12:30, “the one not with me is against me”). Yet Israel as a whole is certainly intended because of “this generation” in 12:45d, and the point is that in rejecting their Messiah, they are left **empty** and **unprotected** (primary thrust, with the crowds a secondary emphasis). Jesus’ ministry had cast out the uncleanness and readied “this generation” for a new, unprecedented time of plenty, but the people have rejected him and so are left devoid of content.

C. (:45) Humanistic Reformation Exchanges Temporary Relief for Long Term Escalation of Misery

1. Verdict = You End Up Worse Off

*“Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself,
and they go in and live there;
and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”*

Richard Gardner: According to Matthew, Jesus has broken the grip of Satan in Israel’s life through casting out demons (cf. 12:28-29). But unless Israel aligns itself with God’s redemptive purpose, its final state will be more pathetic than was the case before Jesus appeared.

Grant Osborne: The number **seven** stresses completeness. This is a full contingent of demons.

2. Application = This Evil Generation Headed for an Awful Fate

*“That is the way it will also be with **this evil generation**.”*

John Nolland: Matthew provides a final sentence to focus the application on ‘this evil generation’. The words recall language from v. 39 (cf. vv. 41, 42) and indicate that this is a parable about those who are **refusing to embrace what Jesus brings**. They may have appreciated its immediate benefits but have kept themselves safely distant from its deeper challenges and larger significance. Their houses may have been tidied, but they remain empty; so an **awful fate** awaits them. Outside the story world it is not clear what the awful fate is that Matthew has in mind. It may be the judgment threatened in vv. 41-42, it may be judgment in history as anticipated in Mt. 24, or it may be something that is expected to operate more locally at the communal and personal level. Precision is not intended; **warning** is.

Donald Hagner: Matthew's added sentence οὐτως ἔσται καὶ τῆ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῆ πονηρᾷ, "thus it will be also for this evil generation," applies the parable to the unbelief and resistance Jesus has encountered primarily from the Pharisees. If we draw guidance from the context, the basic analogy is simple. This evil generation (cf. v 39) had experienced the powerful deeds of Jesus, which included demon exorcism, and to that extent had benefited. But there had been no repentance, no acceptance of and commitment to Jesus and his cause, and thus this generation would be as susceptible to the power of evil as ever; indeed, the judgment it would later experience would be far worse than when Jesus began his ministry. . .

The burden of this passage is in the implicit call to **respond to Jesus**. Those who do respond in faith and commitment need not worry about the return of demons, nor need they quaver at future, but temporary, setbacks from disease and even death itself. Those who do not respond in faith and commitment have only worse miseries to expect in the future.

III. (:46-50) BY CONTRAST, TRUE DISCIPLES PRIORITIZE SPIRITUAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

John Nolland: The chapter climaxes with a challenge to the crowds to distance themselves from the Pharisaic stance which they have been witnessing and unite with the disciples of Jesus in doing the will of his Father, the content of which it is the burden of Jesus' ministry to make clear. The mention of Jesus' birth family allows **12:46-50** to function, along with **13:54-58**, as a frame around the parables collection of **13:1-53**.

R. T. France: This little cameo, apparently set inside a house, concludes the narrative section which has prepared the way for the discourse of **ch. 13**. **Chapters 11-12** have revealed a wide variety of reactions to Jesus among his Galilean contemporaries, and the parables of **ch. 13** will explain how such a divided response has come about. Most of the reactions noted, especially in **ch. 12**, have been hostile, but at the end of **ch. 11** the mood was lightened by a brief glimpse of the "little ones" who have been able to perceive the truth (**11:25-30**), and now another ray of light concludes the section. As well as the seeds which have failed or are failing, there is also seed growing in good ground.

A. (:46-47) Limitation of Blood Family Relationships

1. (:46) Teaching Time Interrupted by Arrival of Family Members

"While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him."

D. A. Carson: The most natural way to understand "brothers" is that the term refers to sons of Mary and Joseph and thus to **brothers of Jesus on his mother's side**. To support the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity, a notion foreign to the NT and to the earliest church fathers, Roman Catholic scholars have suggested that "brothers" refers either to Joseph's sons by an earlier marriage or to sons of Mary's sister, who had the same name (cf. **McHugh**, *Mother of Jesus*, 200ff.). Certainly "brothers" can have a wider meaning than male relatives (**Ac 22:1**); yet it is very doubtful whether such a meaning is valid here, for it raises insuperable problems.

Donald Hagner: The fact that no mention of Jesus' father is made implies that he was no longer alive.

Grant Osborne: Matthew links this closely to the preceding controversy by saying Jesus was “*still* (ἔτι) *talking to the crowds*” (another temporal genitive absolute, see **1:18, 20; 2:1**) when his mother and brothers arrived. Out of the wreckage of the nation’s rejection of him, Jesus has forged a **new kingdom community**. The use of “*look*” (ἰδοῦ) three times in this pericope stresses the dynamic nature of the story.

Michael Wilkins: No reason is given for why his family wishes to speak to him. Mark indicates that his family wants to take control of Jesus and alter his ministry, because people think he is crazy (**Mark 3:21**; cf. **John 7:5**).

2. (:47) Teaching Moment to Address Priority of Spiritual Family

“And someone said to Him, ‘Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.’”

J. Ligon Duncan: Notice how Jesus turns a common event into an opportunity to reflect upon spiritual truth. It’s a very standard question. Jesus, “Your mother and brothers are on the outside. They want to speak to you.” He turns that interruption into an opportunity to ask His audience to reflect on the far more important spiritual question, “Who is in the family of God? Who belongs as a child to God the Father? Who is in the family of faith?” He takes a common event to focus us on a very important spiritual lesson. And we ought to do that as well. It is one of the gifts that God has given us as believers to have a spiritual outlook on the world. And if we will not call on people to look at common things with spiritual eyes, who is going to?

B. (:48-50) Priority of Spiritual Family Relationships

1. (:48) Issue Raised Regarding Spiritual Family Relationships

“But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’”

D. A. Carson: Jesus’ searching question (**v.48**) and its remarkable answer (**vv.49–50**) in no way diminish his mother and brothers but simply give the **priority** to his Father and doing his will.

Walter Wilson: Jesus has already warned his followers that **commitment to the messianic household (10:25)** will bring them into **conflict** with both the “*house*” of Israel (**10:6**) and with members of their natural households (**10:36**), the latter including both parents and siblings (**10:21, 35**). Put differently, becoming his spiritual kin entails forfeiting the honor that accrues to one through conventional categories of birth and status, embracing instead an elective family as the source of personal identity and affective cohesion (cf. **19:29**). The public exposure of tensions between the Messiah and members of his own family dramatizes this reconfiguration of status, even as it suggests how expectations governing relations between surrogate kin mirror those operative between biological kin.

Michael Wilkins: Jesus did not come to abolish the family, because he will continue to uphold the law that demands children to honor their father and mother (**15:4**). Instead, he stresses preeminence of a person’s commitment to Jesus and the kingdom of heaven above all other commitments. This will form a **new spiritual family of disciples of Jesus**.

2. (:49) Intimate Relationship with Spiritual Family Members

“And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Behold, My mother and My brothers!’”

Craig Blomberg: Given the strong family ties in ancient Palestine, Jesus' attitude here would have proved as shocking as in **8:22** and **10:37** (on which see comments there). More positively he points to believers as people who should care for each other as if they were family members.

Grant Osborne: Spiritual roots are even deeper than genealogical roots, an incredible point in the society of that day that treasured genealogical lines.

J. Ligon Duncan: He's teaching us there, among other things, that our ties as Christians, our ties as believers, are more important even than family ties. We have a saying that 'blood is thicker than water,' and over and over in our culture and community, we find that to be a practical truth. But Jesus is saying here that those for whom He has shed blood have been brought into a family that is even closer than families of blood kin. The Lord Jesus is teaching us that spiritual ties are the most important ties that there are. And then He waves His arms towards His disciples and He says, "*These are My mother and My brother.*"

3. (:50) Identification of True Disciples = Spiritual Family Members

*"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven,
he is My brother and sister and mother."*

R. T. France: While presumably all religious people, including the Pharisees and Jesus' family, would aim to "*do the will of God,*" the phrase as used by Jesus, with the more relational title "*my Father who is in heaven,*" clearly has a more specific focus on the sort of discipleship which he has outlined in **chs. 5–7** and which was summed up as a "*greater righteousness*" than that of the scribes and Pharisees (**5:20**).

Robert Gundry: So in the midst of persecution Jesus' disciples may comfort and encourage themselves that they belong to the family to which he belongs, the family of his caring heavenly Father.

Leon Morris: Jesus is not saying that earthly familial ties are unimportant, only that they are not all-important. **Doing the will of God is all-important.**

Donald Hagner: The **essence of discipleship** is doing τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, "*the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (cf. **7:21**, for the same phrase practically verbatim). The will of the Father is the righteousness taught by Jesus and is inseparable from the dawning of the kingdom and discipleship to Jesus.

Walter Wilson: Intimacy with Jesus is not a given, but is predicated upon obedience to the will (θέλημα) of the same Father to whom the Son himself owes obedience (**26:42**). This identification not only furnishes a theological foundation for reformulated relational ties (cf. **11:25–27**) but also generates for participants specific practices and modes of behavior (cf. **6:9–10; 7:21; 18:14; 21:31**).

Grant Osborne: Jesus alone knows the mind of the Father (**11:27**), so those rules for conduct are found in Jesus' teaching. We are at the heart of Matthew's gospel, where a life of **faithfulness to God's will** is the core responsibility of the kingdom people. The idea of God's guiding will is dynamic and especially related to **Jesus' kingdom teaching** in Matthew's gospel. Those who follow and keep these precepts are the family of God, Jesus' "*brother and sister and mother.*"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How am I embracing and applying the manifest truth that God has revealed to me?
- 2) Is the Holy Spirit at home in my heart as the change agent to cause me to grow in righteousness and in obeying the will of my heavenly father?
- 3) Why are self-reformation and self-help approaches so deceptively dangerous?
- 4) Does Christ have top priority in my life – even over my relationships with my closest family members and do I value fellowship with other believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: These snippets of the growing controversy surrounding Jesus’ teachings cover a lot of territory. A disingenuous request for a sign stemming from deep unbelief . . . a parable about evil spirits and the dangers of self-styled reform . . . a startling contrast between Jesus’ earthly family and His spiritual family. These episodes from Jesus’ ministry lead me to three crucial questions we ought to consider.

First, related to the Pharisees’ hypocritical request for a sign: **Am I becoming a cynic?** This is a chief sign of Pharisaism. . . Ask yourself, Have I changed over the last year because I’ve sat under the ministry of the Word. . .

Second, related to the deep-seated moralism and self-reform of the Pharisees, illustrated by the self-scrubbed demoniac: **Am I relying on the Spirit’s work in my life to change my mind and heart from the inside**, or am I engaging in mere behavior modification to conform to external standards? . . .

Third, related to prioritizing our relationship with Christ: **Am I placing Christ first in my life, even above my earthly family?**

David Thompson: THOSE WHO ARE CLOSELY RELATED TO JESUS CHRIST ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM AND NOT THOSE WHO LOOK FOR A SIGN FROM HIM.

Now I want you to notice how **verse 38** begins with the adverb “*then*.” This connects us to the preceding context in which the scribes and Pharisees are telling people that Jesus Christ is satanic. Their goal is not to come to terms with truth; their goal is to discredit Him and to get rid of Him. Now there are three stinging messages that Christ sends to all around Him.

STINGING MESSAGE #1 – Those who seek for a sign are evil . 12:38-42

The scribes and Pharisees were sign-seekers. I want you to carefully notice how they identify Christ in verse 38—as “*a teacher*” (anarthrous construction, not articular). The Greek indicates

that they saw Him as the character and quality of a teacher, not as “the” teacher of God. They are living a lie when they say, “If I could just see a sign, I would believe.” Christ had already performed many miracles and they absolutely refused to believe. Now carefully notice Christ’s response:

(Response #1) - Those who continually (present tense) seek a sign are evil and adulterous.

12:39a

This is how God views sign-seekers. Those who are not content with hearing and understanding the Word of God, but go to church to see some sensational sign or have some emotional experience are evil and adulterous.

(Response #2) - Those who are seeking a sign will not get one. **12:39b**

Jesus said you can seek signs all you want, but I won’t give you one.

(Response #3) - The only sign any will get is the sign of Jonah. **12:39c-40**

Now this is important news to Israel. Jonah is the only O.T. prophet who was given an assignment to go to a Gentile land to the capital of Assyria, who was dominating Israel, and preach to Nineveh. Before Jonah went to Nineveh to preach, he ended up in a great fish’s belly for three days and three nights. Jesus said if you want a sign, here it is: I will rise up from the dead in three days and I will take my program to the Gentiles. In other words, the sign to Israel, which is still operative to this day, is that Christ arose from the dead and the program of God went to the Gentiles.

(Response #4) - At the judgment, many Gentiles will condemn many from Israel. **12:41-42**

Now there are two specific examples that Christ uses to bring home a sober point—you will be judged to hell as unbelievers by Gentiles who were believers: Gentile

Judge #1 - Israel will be judged by the Gentiles of Nineveh. **12:41**

The people of Nineveh repented through preaching. When Jonah preached to Nineveh, the city repented. At the Great White Throne Judgment, those unbelievers of Israel will see those believers from Nineveh and the Israeli unbelievers will be condemned. A preacher far greater than Jonah was preaching—Jesus Christ. The Word was preaching the Word and it didn’t faze most in Israel. Gentile

Judge #2 - Israel will be judged by the Queen of Sheba. **12:42**

An Arabian, Gentile queen from Sheba came to faith in the O.T. through the teachings of Solomon (**I Kings 10:1-13; II Chron. 9:1-12**). Jesus was far greater than Solomon and His teachings were much more profound and Israel rejected Him. Therefore, Gentiles would judge them.

STINGING MESSAGE #2 – Those who reject Christ are demonic . 12:43-45

Demons fled from the presence of Jesus Christ. However, those who did not believe in Christ would discover that eventually the demonic forces would come back sevenfold. The program of God has swung away from Israel today, but she is not responding to Jesus Christ. When the Tribulation occurs, demons will invade Israel and it will be a terrible time of persecution.

STINGING MESSAGE #3 – Those who are really related to Christ are those who believe in Christ. 12:46-50

We know that several of Christ's own family members thought He was out of His mind (**Mark 3:21**). We also know that many in His own family did not believe in Him before He was raised (**John 7:5**). Jesus said I'll tell you who my real family is; those that do my Father's will and believe in Me. The Father sent the Son to make it possible for the nation Israel to have the necessary righteousness to get into the kingdom. But the nation rejected Him. It is a hard thing to admit that you love faithful people of God more than your own brothers, sisters, mother or father, sons or daughters. But it is true. No religion or family relationship will make you right before God; only faith in Jesus Christ.

TEXT: Matthew 13:1-23

TITLE: GERMINATION OF THE KINGDOM -- INTRODUCTORY PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

BIG IDEA:

VARYING RESPONSES TO THE WORD OF GOD HIGHLIGHT FRUITFULNESS AS THE KEY EVIDENCE OF GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Warren Wiersbe: This chapter records the events of a crisis day in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He knew that the growing opposition of the religious leaders would lead to His crucifixion. This fact He had to explain to His disciples. But their logical question would be, “What will happen to the kingdom about which we have been preaching?” That question is answered in this series of parables. So, He first explained the truth concerning the kingdom, and then later explained to them the facts about the cross.

Our Lord’s use of parables puzzled the disciples. He had used some parables in His teaching already, but on that day He gave a series of seven interrelated parables, then added an eighth. The word parable means “to cast alongside.” It is a story, or comparison, that is put alongside something else to help make the lesson clear. But these are not ordinary parables; Jesus called them “*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*” (**Matt. 13:11**). In the New Testament, a “*mystery*” is a spiritual truth understood only by divine revelation. It is a “sacred secret” known only to those “on the inside” who learn from the Lord and obey Him.

In this series of parables, Jesus explained **the course of the gospel in the world**. If Israel had received Him as King, the blessings would have flowed out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But the nation rejected Him, and God had to institute a new program on earth. During this present age, “*the kingdom of heaven*” is a mixture of true and false, good and bad, as pictured in these parables. It is “Christendom,” professing allegiance to the King, and yet containing much that is contrary to the principles of the King.

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Two reasons were given:

- because of the sluggishness of the people (**Matt. 13:10–17**) and
- because it was prophesied in **Psalm 78:2** (**Matt. 13:34–35**).

Jesus did not teach in parables to confuse or condemn the people. Rather, He sought to excite their interest and arouse their curiosity. These parables would give light to those with trusting, searching hearts. But they would bring darkness to the unconcerned and unrepentant.

John Walvoord: **Chapter 13** faces the question, What will happen when the rejected king goes back to heaven and the kingdom promised is postponed until His second coming? The concept of a kingdom postponed must be understood as a postponement from the human side and not from the divine, as obviously God’s plans do not change. . .

This chapter, accordingly, does not only introduce a new subject and a new approach but also involves a new method of teaching, namely that of parables. . . As **Tasker** expresses it, “Jesus deliberately adopted the parabolic method of teaching at a particular stage in His ministry for the

purpose of withholding further truth about Himself and the kingdom of heaven from the crowds, who had proved themselves to be deaf to his claims and irresponsible to His demands . . . From now onwards, when addressing the unbelieving multitude, He speaks only in parables (34), which he interprets to his disciples in private.

David Thompson: JESUS CHRIST USES PARABLES TO TEACH WHAT GOD'S PROGRAM WILL BECOME ON EARTH UNTIL HE COMES BACK AS JUDGE TO ULTIMATELY SET UP HIS KINGDOM.

If you read most commentators, they will suggest that there are seven parables in this chapter. . . However, if we carefully look at the chapter we discover that technically there are **eight** because **verse 52** presents the "**Householder**."

In these parables, Jesus describes what will happen on earth in the arena of religion until He comes back to eventually establish His kingdom.

Daniel Doriani: Although the seed is the same, the results vary. The controlling factor is the **character of the soils**. The farmer does his work, but the results hinge on the nature of the soil on which the seed falls.

Walter Wilson: The action stops so that the audience can hear Jesus deliver another speech, this time employing figurative language to portray the profound—and often mysterious—**impact that the arrival of the kingdom is having on the world**. On a more specific level, the speech provides the audience with a series of pictures that explain the **unresponsiveness** Jesus has experienced from "*the world*" up to this point, the emphasis throughout falling on the dual images of contrast and separation. Accordingly, before beginning the discourse, Jesus is seen physically separating himself from the audience, sitting in a boat while the crowds stand on the shore. In the first part of the speech, acceptance of the kingdom message is likened to bearing fruit, while non-acceptance is visualized as different kinds of agricultural failure. Despite the lavish manner in which the farmer sows seed, three of the four soils yield no harvest, though the good soil seems to compensate for this series of setbacks by producing a bumper crop. Before describing the meaning of this imagery to the disciples, Jesus shows to them why he is using parables in the first place, that is, by describing the people he has been trying to reach as having closed ears and hardened hearts. He then shifts the viewer's attention to those who do hear and do see, namely, the disciples themselves, who are the beneficiaries of Jesus's ministry because they have been gifted with divine revelation. The interpretation of the imagery, then, reveals that it is to be interpreted symbolically, inasmuch as practically every detail of the description is assigned meaning. Jesus's final (and perhaps most important) point is that a great harvest awaits the disciples, thanks both to the work of the sower and the generosity of God, the ultimate source of all growth. . .

In the parable itself, the sowing of the seed has the effect of revealing the nature of the different kinds of soil upon which it falls, either good or bad. According to the parable's internal logic, the reason for success or failure is attributable neither to the sower nor to the seed, but entirely to the condition of the soil, which cannot be altered. By the same token, the soil is incapable of producing fruit on its own but for this relies on the initiative of the sower. Without his seed, even the good soil lies dormant. The fact that three of the parable's four scenarios report failure with respect to productivity communicates a pessimism that accords with the basic narrative trajectory observed in the previous section (**chapters 11–12**). The "sower" encounters mostly non-

acceptance, though there are still some who produce “fruit” by obeying the will of their heavenly Father (cf. 12:50).

Van Parunak: The main purpose of the parable, revealed in the interpretation, is instructing those who sow what they should expect in their ministry. We are not to be discouraged because of lack of response. The nature of the field in which we labor is that it is beset by birds, stones, and thorns, and we are to expect this full range of responses.

(:1-3a) TRANSITION IN TEACHING APPROACH

A. (:1-2) Teaching Environment

“On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea.

2 And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach.”

Michael Wilkins: Local tradition locates the place of this discourse at a distinctive inlet called the “Cove of the Parables.” It lies approximately a mile (1.5 km) southwest of Capernaum, halfway to the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount near Tabgha. The land slopes down like a natural, horseshoe-shaped amphitheater around the cove, providing environmental acoustics for Jesus’ voice to have carried over one hundred meters from the boat to a crowd of perhaps hundreds gathered on the shore. Israeli scientists have tested the acoustics in modern times and found them to be realistic for Jesus’ parables to have been heard.

John MacArthur: *“On the same day, He went out of the house and He sat by the seaside.”* Now, I know that’s just a geographical footnote, and I know it doesn’t convey any profound spiritual truth.

And I suppose I stopped at that point and said to myself, “Why is all that there? Why does it even bother to say that. It doesn’t even really matter?” You could have started in **verse 3**, *“He spoke many things unto them in parables.”* You don’t even need one and 2, because 1 says, *“He went out of the house and sat at the seaside,”* and 2 says, *“Great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a boat and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore.”* Is that important?

Well, I think it’s important if for no other reason than just as an interesting way to remember the **transition** here. If we can extend ourselves a little bit and use this as an illustration or a symbol...though that is not its purpose or intention...it can serve as an illustration for us. We could liken the house to what group of people? Israel.

And throughout Scripture the sea is likened to what group of people? Gentiles. And we can remember the chapter’s transitional nature by remembering that as Jesus went out of the house and to the sea, at this point He turns from Israel to the Gentiles. **Something new is happening**. He’s left the house. This serves as an illustration, a symbol of a sort.

B. (:3a) Teaching Methodology = Parables

“And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying,”

Michael Wilkins: Parables have distinctively different purposes for the crowd and for the disciples. Jesus has already given several parables, but this is the first time that Matthew uses the term “*parable*” (parabolē). Underlying the term parable is the Hebrew *māšāl*, which refers to a wide spectrum of ideas based on comparison or analogy, including by-word, proverb, wisdom sayings, and story. As used by Jesus, the parable is a way of communicating truth through a narrative analogy in the service of moral or spiritual argument. They are often deeply, even frustratingly, perplexing. The analogies or comparisons Jesus uses to make his point come from everyday experiences, but they press the listener to search for the intended meaning. That is why in popular preaching Jesus’ parables are often referred to as “**an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.**”

Daniel Doriani: They are like jokes: they catch us up in a story, then spring a surprise, a punch line, at the end. They are like illustrations: they make a lesson memorable by engaging the imagination. They are like allegories: the surface meaning may not be its deepest or final meaning.

Walter Wilson: The reader of **chapter 13** knows that Jesus’s words are intended not only to **instruct** but also to **divide**. From this perspective, the discourse can be seen to blend elements of wisdom discourse, with its emphasis on fruitfulness of speech and action, with elements of apocalyptic discourse, with its emphasis on the problem of evil, the revelation of transcendent mysteries, and the “gathering” of God’s holy people.

John Walvoord: The first paragraph does not have the precise formula of the later paragraphs: “*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto,*” but is, rather, an **introductory parable**, serving as a basis for all that follows.

Van Parunak: Parables do not simplify the truth. They are actually a means of **hiding the truth** from those who are not really interested, and forcing the hearer to think more closely about what is being said. This role of parables explains why this is the first time Matthew uses the term of our Lord’s teaching. Matthew reserves the term for enigmatic sayings that the Lord begins to employ at the Great Schism, when the Pharisees have made up their minds to destroy him.

I. (:3b-9) PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SOILS

(:3b) Prerequisite to the Variety of Responses to the Sowing of the Seed

“Behold, the sower went out to sow;”

The bottom line is that there will be no response to the gospel message apart from the sowing of the seed of the Word of God. This must be the starting point.

Michael Wilkins: Jesus’ listeners are well aware of farming techniques, because most everyone took care of his own fields and gardens or worked the fields of his landlord. We are not certain of the type of seed that the sower (NIV “*farmer*”) was sowing, but we may think of wheat to help illustrate the scene, since wheat was one of the most important crops in Israel, and it appears as the subject of a later parable (**13:24–30**).

A. (:4) Hard Hearts -- Paved Road – Word Snatched Away

“and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.”

Michael Wilkins: Seed was sown “broadcast” style by scattering it in all directions by hand while walking up and down the field. The average rate of sowing wheat varies from twenty pounds per acre (22.5 kilograms per hectare) upward, which allowed for wasted seed. Fields were apparently plowed both before the seed was sown and after, plowing across the original furrows to cover the seeds with soil. The desired depth of plowing under wheat seed was usually one to three inches (2.5 to 7.5 centimetres), but it could be less in certain areas where the topsoil was shallow. In the rabbinic listing of the thirty-nine main classes of work, plowing follows sowing (m. Šabb. 7:2). It was common for seed to be scattered on the hard paths that surrounded the fields. Birds would swoop down as the farmer walked on and eat the seed.

John MacArthur: Now, in Palestine which was just literally crisscrossed with fields, the fields were usually long, narrow strips and men could’ cultivate those fields. The strips were separated from other strips and other fields by paths, the paths being about three feet or so wide, narrow paths.

Those were used by the farmer to get in between the fields to get to whatever field he wanted to reach. They were also used by the travelers who were going from one part of the country to another. We find even in Matthew **chapter 12**, that the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples were walking through the fields of grain. And no doubt they were walking on those little paths that were for that purpose. There were no fences around the fields, there were no walls surrounding the fields, just these little narrow paths for travelers and for the farmer to get around in his area.

And no doubt this is what the Lord has in mind when He talks about the wayside. The dirt would then be packed down, beaten hard, uncultivated, never turned over, never loosened. And by all of the continual pounding and pounding, and because of the dryness of that part of the world it would be compacted to the point where it was like a road. It was as hard as pavement. . .

God does not call on us to create our own message. God says, “Take that which has already been sown and sow it again.” We are not to produce a new supply of information. We are to build upon the revelation of the Word of God and we are utterly dependent, then, upon divine revelation as much as we are dependent on God creating the seed in the first place which reproduces itself and brings to us the fruit that we eat even today. So, the seed is the Word. The seed is the Word.

And may I just add as a footnote, that the Word encompasses the written word but inside of it is the living word. It’s as if the Bible is the husk and the living Christ is the seed within the husk. So, initially, it’s Christ sowing the Word of God containing the seed, which is Himself. He is both sower and seed. We are the sowers who sow the seed. The husk is the Word of God and in it contains the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. (:5-6) Shallow Hearts -- Rocky Places – No Root – Superficial Interest Only

“And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.”

Michael Wilkins: Conditions for farming in many areas of Israel were not favorable. The hardships that many people experienced included insufficient amounts of water and soil. The terrain in most cases was uneven and rocky, with only thin layers of soil covering the rock. Seed

that landed on this shallow soil could begin to germinate, but it couldn't put down deep roots to collect what little moisture was in that parched thin layer of earth. Sprouting seed would soon wither and die in the hot sun (13:6). James gives a fitting commentary: "*For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed*" (James 1:11).

John MacArthur: And so right beneath the soil is this hard rock bed and as the seed falls in and begins to germinate and tries to shoot its roots down, they hit the rock bed. They have nowhere to go. All of the moisture and the sun that's there generates life upward so they spring up, probably higher than the other grain and the other seed which is going both ways and using its energy to go both ways. This flourishes immediately, but when the sun comes out, it dies because its roots are not strong enough to maintain moisture or to find moisture, and the rock bed hinders them and it dies in the heat of the summer. . .

This is the person who hears the Word and immediately with joy receives it. And the indication is that there's not a lot of thought involved. It's just sort of a quick response, a wow, you know. It's sort of emotional, sort of euphoria, sort of instant excitement without counting the cost, without understanding the real significance.

C. (:7) Distracted Hearts -- Thorns – Word Choked Out

"And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out."

D. (:8) Receptive Hearts -- Good Soil – Fruitful Disciple

"And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

(:9) Exhortation to Receptivity

"He who has ears, let him hear."

Donald Hagner: The phrase "*who has ears*" refers to a receptivity concerning the underlying truth of the parable. It amounts to an appeal to hear positively and to respond appropriately. The same exhortation is found verbatim in v 43 and 11:15.

Van Parunak: *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.* -- Here is our first clue that the Lord does not intend his words to be understood by all. He is picking up a **consistent theme** throughout the Scriptures, that begins in the Pentateuch, runs through the prophets and the Psalms, and extends into the Revelation, where it ends each of the letters to the seven churches. As with other cases of such repetition throughout Scripture, it is worthwhile to trace the development of the idea.

The command to hear lies at the root of God's covenant with Israel. Through Moses, God gave Israel their basic confession, which they were to write upon the doorposts of their homes and bind upon their foreheads and their hands, begins with this central command:

Deu 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

This command is called the **Shema**, which is the Hebrew word with which it begins, the command "*Hear.*" The Lord alludes to it repeatedly in this chapter.

Note two features of this command. They are to hear attentively, and they are to love the Lord

exclusively. If you love the Lord with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your might, there isn't any part of you that's left to love anything else.

Now let's recall two characteristics of the Babylonian captivity, when Israel ceased to be a nation. The history of Israel is one of repeated failures to hear, and when the major prophets come to warn of the coming captivity, each of them speaks of ears that do not hear. Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular use a phrase very like our Lord's (chart):

Jer 5:21 *Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:*

Eze 12:2 *Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.*

So the nation violated the first part of Deut 6:4. They did not hear. They also violated the second part, the command to love the Lord alone. The captivity results not only from a failure to hear, but also from Israel's infatuation with pagan gods, going all the way back to the golden calf in the wilderness, the failures in the book of Judges, and Solomon's support of his wives' deities. The captivity was a graphic enforcement of the people's choice of other gods:

Jer 16:10 *And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? ... 11 Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, ... 13 Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour.*

Because they chose to serve other gods, the Lord put them in a totally pagan environment where they could experience the depravity of those gods to the full.

I've called your attention to two features of the eighth century prophets: **their reference to the ear that can't hear**, and the **idolatry** against which they preached and that ultimately led the people into the captivity of which they warn. There is a connection between them. We have seen that already from the Shema, which warns against them both. This same connection is made evident in scriptures that were probably written after the captivity.

The fifth book of the Psalter (107-150) contains many psalms that by their content give evidence of being written during or after the exile. The most notable example is Psalm 137,

Psa 137:1 *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*

Two of these psalms, 115 and 135, draw a striking connection between idols and ears that can't hear. Here is the passage in Psalm 115; 135:15-18 is very similar.

Psa 115:4 *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have*

they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8 They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

These Psalms contain a very deep insight. If we have made up our mind to follow our own idols, we are not willing to understand the Lord's commands. It's not so much that we cannot hear, as that we will not hear. Spiritual hearing problems can often be traced to a divided loyalty, to something else in our lives that we are not willing to give up, that is pulling us away from the Lord.

Our Lord uses the exhortation of v. 9 three times in Matthew: here, again in v. 43 after the parable of the tares, and once previously in 11:15 after describing John the Baptist as Elijah. The next time we see it is in the Revelation. It concludes the warnings to each of the seven churches:

Rev 2:7 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; [also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22]*

When we remember that these are Gentile churches, planted in idolatrous communities, the warning is particularly appropriate. Believers in an unbelieving world are particularly susceptible to being seduced by the idols worshipped by their friends and neighbors, and need to remember their first loyalty. The final occurrence is when the beast out of the sea appears in **ch. 13**. Again, the encouragement to hear is in contrast with the worship of a false deity:

Rev 13:8 *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9 If any man have an ear, let him hear.*

Not everyone who hears words actually understands what they say. The response to the Lord in **Matt 12** suggests that many who might be thought most likely to understand, actually are dull of hearing. And the OT background of the Lord's warning in **13:9** suggests a reason for this hardness: **pre-commitment to an alternative god**, in this case **their own pride and prestige**. Here is a sober warning to us not to confuse knowledge of the words of Scripture with understanding and obedience.

II. (:10-17) PURPOSE OF PARABLES IN GENERAL – TIED TO THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

A. (:10) What's the Point?

“And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’”

Donald Hagner: Parables function in a dual manner. For those who have responded positively to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, the parables convey further insight and knowledge, while for those who have rejected Jesus and his message, the parables have the effect of only darkening the subject further. Thus belief and commitment lead to further knowledge; unbelief leads to further ignorance.

B. (:11-12) Purpose of Both Revealing and Concealing at the Same Time

1. (:11) Sovereign Election Reflected in Revelation and Illumination

“And He answered and said to them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.’”

John Walvoord: *Mysteries* . . . refers to truth that was not revealed in the Old Testament but is revealed in the New Testament. . . It is not necessarily a reference to a truth difficult to understand, but rather to truths that can be understood only on the basis of divine revelation.

The Old Testament reveals, in clear terms, the earthly reign of Christ when he comes as King to reign on the throne of David (which truths are not *mysteries*). **Matthew 13** introduces a **different form of the kingdom**, namely the present spiritual reign of the King during the period He is physically absent from the earth, prior to His second coming. The mysteries of the kingdom, accordingly, deal with the period between the first and second advent of Christ and not the millennial kingdom which will follow the second coming.

Homer Kent: The glories of the Messianic reign were clearly sketched in the OT. But the rejection of Messiah and the interval between his first and second comings was not understood. These parables describe the strange form of the Kingdom while the King is absent, during which time the Gospel is preached and a spiritual nucleus is developed for the establishment of the Messianic reign (**Co. 1:13; Mt 25:34**).

2. (:12) Receptivity / Accountability Tied to Divine Initiative in Revealing / Concealing

“For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”

C. (:13) Purpose of Veiling the Truth

“Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

Daniel Doriani: Jesus says he veils his truth from his foes as punishment for their unbelief (**13:13**). Jesus speaks in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear and understand. That is, because they failed to heed the evidence they had, Jesus’ parables now hide the word, taking it away from people even as they stand before Jesus.

Amos says it this way: *“The days are coming,”* declares the Lord, *“when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD”* (**Amos 8:11**). It is an acute judgment for God to remove his word from people who have heard it and rejected it. They are left with the silence of God.

D. (:14-15) Prophetic Support from Isaiah

“And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.’”

E. (:16-17) Purpose of Blessing Believing Disciples with the Mysteries of the Kingdom

1. (:16) Receptivity of Kingdom Mysteries = Sign of Divine Blessing

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.”

2. (:17) Revelation Coupled with Illumination = Blessing of Great Privilege

“For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

III. (:18-23) PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SOILS INTERPRETED

(:18) Exhortation to Receptivity

“Hear then the parable of the sower.”

A. (:19) Hard Hearts -- Paved Road – Word Snatched Away

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.”

B. (:20-21) Shallow Hearts -- Rocky Places – No Root – Superficial Interest Only

“And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.”

C. (:22) Distracted Hearts -- Thorns – Word Choked Out

“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

John MacArthur: “*And the care of this age –*” Worldliness, folks – “*and the deceitfulness of riches –*” which is the heart and soul of worldliness. Living for the mundane, living for the things of this world, the cares of this age. Your career, your house, your car, your job, your wardrobe, your prestige, your looks.

D. (:23) Receptive Hearts -- Good Soil – Fruitful Disciple

“And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

J. Ligon Duncan: There is a final soil that the Lord Jesus speaks of and it is the only soil which is believing. Don't be fooled! There are people who will preach this parable as if it describes three kinds of Christians and one kind of unbeliever. Don't you believe it. The Lord Jesus Christ has already defined for you what a believer is: “*One who does the will of Him who sent Me.*” And in this final soil, in **verse 8** and **verse 23**, we see a **fruitful heart**. This is the person who hears and obeys and lives and blesses others by the kingdom message. One thing and one thing only distinguishes the good ground, the good soil, from the rest: **fruitfulness**.

John Walvoord: As this parable makes plain, there is no anticipating in the present age that there will be universal reception of the truth, as postmillenarians teach. Most of those who hear the message of the kingdom will reject it. Some, however, will receive the message, cherish it in their heart, and believe in the truth of the kingdom. This first parable establishes the basic character of the present age, awaiting the return of the rejected King. The age will include some who believe, many who will not believe.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can Jesus justify hiding the truth from certain types of individuals or groups by couching His teaching in parables when He could have presented the same concepts in a more straightforward format?
- 2) How actively are you involved in sowing the seed of God's Word after the pattern of Jesus?
- 3) What should our expectation be in terms of what type of response we should encounter?
- 4) What types of things are distracting me from fully embracing and applying God's truth?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: The **seven parables** describe for us the spiritual course of “the kingdom of heaven” in this present age. In them we see three stages of spiritual development.

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE KINGDOM (13:1–9, 18–23)

The parable of the sower does not begin with “*The kingdom of heaven is like*” because it describes how the kingdom begins. It begins with the preaching of the Word, the planting of the seed in the hearts of people. When we say, “Let me plant this thought in your mind,” we express the idea of this parable. The seed is **God's Word**; the various soils represent **different kinds of hearts**; and the varied results show the **different responses** to the Word of God. Jesus explained this parable so there is no doubt of its meaning.

Why compare God's Word to seed? Because the Word is “*living and powerful*” (**Heb. 4:12** SCO). Unlike the words of men, the Word of God has life in it, and that life can be imparted to those who will believe. The truth of God must take root in the heart, be cultivated, and be permitted to bear fruit. It is shocking to realize that three-fourths of the seed did not bear fruit. Jesus did not describe an age of great harvest, but one in which the Word would be rejected. He was not impressed with the “*great multitudes*” that followed Him, for He knew that most of the people would not receive His Word within and bear fruit.

Fruit is the test of true salvation (**Matt. 7:16**). This would include holiness (**Rom. 6:22**), Christian character (**Gal. 5:22–23**), good works (**Col. 1:10**), winning others to Christ (**Rom. 1:13**), sharing what we have (**Rom. 15:25–28**), and praising God (**Heb. 13:15**). If a plant is to bear fruit, it must be rooted in soil and exposed to sunshine.

In the parable, the sun represents **persecution** that comes because of the Word. Persecution helps believers grow. But the sunshine will kill a plant with no roots. This explains why some “believers” do not last: Their faith was weak, their understanding was meager, and their decision was not sincere. It is possible to “believe” and yet not be saved (**John 2:23–25**). Unless there is fruit in the life, there is not saving faith in the heart.

Nineteen times in **Matthew 13** we find the word *hear*. The parable of the sower is found in the first three gospels, and in each one, the closing admonition is different. It is important that we hear God's Word, because "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (**Rom. 10:17**). Jesus said, "*Who hath ears to hear*" (**Matt. 13:9**), "*Take heed what ye hear*" (**Mark 4:24** my emphasis), and "*Take heed ... how ye hear*" (**Luke 8:18**, my emphasis).

2. OPPOSITION TO THE KINGDOM (Matt. 13:24–43)

Satan opposes the kingdom by trying to snatch the Word from hearts (**Matt. 13:4, 19**). But when that fails, he has other ways of attacking God's work. These three parables reveal that Satan is primarily an imitator: He plants false Christians, he encourages a false growth, and he introduces false doctrine.

The tares—false Christians (vv. 24–30, 36–43). Satan cannot uproot the plants (true Christians), so he plants counterfeit Christians in their midst. In this parable, the good seed is not the Word of God. It represents people converted through trusting the Word. The field is not human hearts; the field is the world. Christ is sowing true believers in various places that they might bear fruit (**John 12:23–26**). But, wherever Christ sows a true Christian, Satan comes and sows a counterfeit.

We must beware of Satan's counterfeits. He has counterfeit Christians (**2 Cor. 11:15**) who believe a counterfeit gospel (**Gal. 1:6–9**). He encourages a counterfeit righteousness (**Rom. 10:1–3**), and even has a counterfeit church (**Rev. 2:9**). At the end of the age, he will produce a counterfeit Christ (**2 Thess. 2:1–12**).

We must also stay awake to make sure that Satan's ministers do not get into the true fellowship and do damage (**2 Peter 2; 1 John 4:1–6**). It is when God's people go to sleep that Satan works. Our task is not to pull up the false, but to plant the true. (This does not refer to discipline within the local church.) We are not detectives but evangelists! We must oppose Satan and expose his lies. But we must also sow the Word of God and bear fruit in the place where He has planted us.

What will happen to the tares? God will gather them together and burn them. It is interesting to see that some of this "bundling" is already going on as various religious groups merge and strive for union. Spiritual unity among true Christians is one thing, but religious uniformity among mere professing Christians is quite another. It is difficult to tell the false from the true today, but at the end of the age, the angels will separate them.

The mustard seed—false growth (vv. 31–32). In the East, the mustard seed symbolizes something small and insignificant. It produces a large plant, but not a "tree" in the strictest sense. However, the plant is large enough for birds to sit in the branches.

Since Jesus did not explain this parable, we must use what He did explain in the other parables to find its meaning. The birds in the parable of the sower represented Satan (**Matt. 13:19**). Passages like **Daniel 4:12** and **Ezekiel 17:23** indicate that a tree is a symbol of a world power. These facts suggest that the parable teaches an **abnormal growth** of the kingdom of heaven, one that makes it possible for Satan to work in it. Certainly "Christendom" has become a worldwide power with a complex organization of many branches. What started in a humble manner today boasts of material possessions and political influences.

Some make this parable teach the worldwide success of the gospel. But that would contradict what Jesus taught in the first parable. If anything, the New Testament teaches a growing **decline** in the ministry of the gospel as the end of the age draws near.

The leaven—false doctrine (v. 33). The mustard seed illustrates the false outward expansion of the kingdom, while the leaven illustrates the inward development of false doctrine and false living. Throughout the Bible, leaven is a **symbol of evil**. It had to be removed from the Jewish homes during Passover (**Ex. 12:15–19; 13:7**). It was excluded from the sacrifices (**Ex. 34:25**), with the exception of the loaves used at the Feast of Pentecost (**Lev. 23:15–21**). But there the loaves symbolized Jews and Gentiles in the church, and there is sin in the church.

Jesus used leaven to picture hypocrisy (**Luke 12:1**), false teaching (**Matt. 16:6–12**), and worldly compromise (**Matt. 22:16–21**). Paul used leaven to picture carnality in the church (1 Cor. 5:6–8) as well as false doctrine (Gal. 5:9). Sin is like leaven (yeast): It quietly grows, it corrupts, and it “*puffs up*” (**1 Cor. 4:18–19; 5:2; 8:1**). It would seem that making the growth of the leaven a picture of the spread of the gospel throughout the world would violate the meaning of this important symbol. It would also contradict the other parables.

Satan has worked hard to introduce false doctrine and false living into the ministry of the Word of God. From the very early days of the church, true believers have battled false doctrine and hypocrisy. How sad it is that some churches and schools that were once true to the Word have turned from the truth to fables. “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” is sound counsel (**1 Thess. 5:21**).

The kingdom of heaven began with the sowing of the Word of God in the hearts of men. Much of the seed did not bear fruit, but some was fruitful. Satan opposed the work of God by sowing counterfeit Christians, by encouraging a false growth, and by introducing false doctrine. It would seem that Satan is winning! But the test is at the end of the age, not during the age.

3. THE OUTCOME OF THE KINGDOM (13:44–50)

At the close of this age, God will have three peoples: the **Jews** (the hidden treasure), the **church** (the pearl), and the **saved Gentile nations** who will enter into the kingdom (the dragnet).

John MacArthur: Kingdom Parables

In **chapters 8 to 10** you find the **credentials** of the King. And there are His miracles, three chapters full of miracles. They are the prophesied credentials, as again and again He proves Himself to be the King in His supernatural power. And running parallel with His credentials in **chapters 8, 9 and 10** is a mounting, ascending **rejection**. It’s a very strange situation. The greater the evidence that He is the King, the greater the rejection, which shows the profound blindness of the people.

Finally, you come to **chapter 11** and Jesus denounces the sinful nation of Israel for rejecting Him. And He promises them **severe judgment**, then closes **chapter 11** with an **invitation**. “*Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” So, out of the message of judgment comes again the message of grace, an invitation. And then, when you come to **chapter 12**, **rejection reaches its climax** and the pronouncement of judgment reaches its climax as well. Their final rejection is summed up in the fact that they accuse Jesus of being Satanic. And Jesus then pronounces a final judgment on the leaders and says, “*You’re beyond the point of being forgiven.*”

But even **chapter 12** closes with another **invitation**. **Verse 50**, “*For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.*” And what was the will of the Father in heaven? Very clearly the Father had said, “*This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him.*” And whoever recognized Jesus as the Son of God and whoever heard His message would come into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. So, Christ has been proven to be the King. The people have rejected Him as the King. He has pronounced judgment on them and yet offers an invitation to whoever will believe.

So as you approach **chapter 13**, the die is cast. Israel has rejected the King. **Israel, therefore, has rejected the kingdom** because you cannot separate the kingdom from the King. For centuries they had awaited the Messiah. For centuries they had awaited the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. They had awaited the times of refreshing, the restoration, the granting back of the glory and the blessing that was man’s before the fall. And when it was offered to them, they refused it and they lost it in that generation. And so, as you approach **chapter 13**, you enter a new dimension, **a new perspective in the ministry of Christ**. . .

And so as you come to **chapter 13**, you can see the shadow of the cross looming in the background. Already in **chapter 12 verse 14**, they had sought to destroy Him. They had reached the point of wanting only to kill Him. They have rejected the King. They have rejected His kingdom. Now, the question that immediately comes into my mind and in the mind of any intelligent reader or any thoughtful reader is this.

If Jesus came to offer the kingdom, if Jesus came to bring His kingdom to earth, to reign and to rule and to establish that which was promised, and they refused Him and refused His kingdom, what then happened to the kingdom? **What happens now?** And that is exactly the question answered by **chapter 13**. It tells us what is going to happen. . .

That’s why Christ is coming a second time, to bring the kingdom that was refused the first time. He came and His message was this, “*Repent for the kingdom is at hand.*” And the message of John the Baptist, His forerunner, was the same. “*Repent for the kingdom is at hand.*” And the message of the apostles, **chapter 10, verse 7**, was the same. The kingdom of God. They were preaching the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. And the people said no to the King and no to the kingdom and the kingdom therefore was **postponed**.

You say, “Well, why didn’t God just eliminate it altogether?” Because God made a promise to Israel and **God keeps His promises**. God is a God of His Word. . .

But what happens in the middle? What happens between now and then? This is the period that some theologians have called “The Parenthesis.” Some have called it “The Interim.” Some have called it the “Interregnum.” But it is a period that is not seen in the Old Testament. And so, Jesus calls it **the mystery**. That is that which was hidden from time past.

They didn’t see this period of time. That’s why you have to have **chapter 13** because they had no teaching on what it would be like. And so, in **chapter 13**, you have a series of eight parables from **verse 1** on to **verse 52**, and in those parables...listen now...**Jesus describes the interim period**. He describes that parenthesis in which we live. We’re in that period. And that is what makes this so profound for us, because if we can understand what Jesus says about this

period, then we can understand how to be about doing what He wants done in this period, you see? . . .

There are two basic aspects of God's kingdom, and you need to understand these at the very beginning. First, is **God's universal kingdom**, and that's very simple to understand. That means God rules everything and everyone forever. He rules everything and everyone forever. He is the sovereign, He is the creator, He is the sustainer, He is the beginning and the end of all things. He dominates all things, He rules over everything and everyone forever. . .

But then there's a second aspect of God's kingdom. And I suppose that Alva McClain has given it a title that's as good as any. I've searched my own mind for a better one and haven't found one. Let me use his term. He calls it the "**mediatorial**" kingdom. That is it is mediated. It is not the direct rule of God; it is mediated through some other agency, through some other individual or individuals. And it refers to **God's rule on earth**. It is directly referring to God's rule on earth. . .

And this is the principle that you have to keep in mind as you get into **Matthew 13**. That the kingdom of God, mediated today, as we're living in this interim period, this time of the mystery kingdom, as at other times in the kingdom **will encompass the true and the false**. And some of the sons of the kingdom and some of the branches that attach themselves are going to go to hell, see. Because, there was no real life there. There was no real subjection there to the King. Now then, you understand some very basic things about the kingdom. And this is what is in Matthew's mind as we come to **chapter 13**. He will show us the character of the kingdom as it will exist in this interim period in which we live. . .

The period in which we live is also called the **church age**; it is synonymous with the church age. We are the unique mystery of this period, and that is defined for us rather explicitly by the apostle Paul in **Ephesians 3**. He says, "*This is the mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, is now revealed to the holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of the promises in Christ by the gospel.*"

In other words, the mystery of this age is that Jew and Gentile would constitute a new body, a new identity unknown. And that is the church. The church is the body of Christ, isn't it? Made up of Jew and Gentile. That was not seen in the Old Testament. That was hidden from them. So there's a sense in which this is the mystery age. This is the kingdom but it is also the church age.

Now, having said that, we must say that **the kingdom is not the same as the church**, and the church is not the same as the kingdom in this sense. The kingdom was before the church and the kingdom concept goes beyond the church, but for this period of time they are one and the same. .

1) The **plan (:3)** of our Lord was to speak in parables.

Reasons parables are effective:

- they make truth concrete
- they make truth portable = allow truth to be carried away in your mind
- they make truth interesting
- they make truth personally discoverable

2) The **purpose (:10)** -- They are to **reveal** and they are to what? **Conceal**. To some they make truth clear; to others they make it even more unclear. . .

Jesus says, "I'm going to show you mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, the secrets never revealed to anybody. But they're given to you to know. But not to them because they don't accept the King." And so, the Lord then unfolds and hides at the same time. Look at **verse 12**, "*For whosoever hath, -*" and here's the principle that He uses – "*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance.*" . . .

You see, if you live up to that light which Christ gives, then more light comes. If you refuse that light, then deeper darkness ensues. And the parables of the servants and the talents reiterate this again and again. Take away what he has and give it to one who has rightly responded to Me. And so, He says even what they have they will lose.

3) The **promise (:35)** – God is sovereign and His program is on schedule.

Van Parunak: It has been plausibly suggested that the three bad soils correspond to violations of the three components of human psychology specified in the **Shema**, the **heart**, the **soul**, and the **might**. . .

These three components of human psychology correspond to the three human instincts over which Adam and Eve lost control, and in which our Lord triumphed in his temptation. **1 John 2:16** summarizes them as "*all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*" --

- The heart in **Deut 6:5** is the locus of pride, and the third of the three instincts is the "*pride of life*," the sense of self that puts us in conflict with others.
- The soul, or life, is what we coddle when we succumb to the "*lust of the flesh*."
- Abundance and wealth is the focus of the "*lust of the eyes*."

We have already recognized the importance of John's three categories throughout the Bible, and now we see that **Deut 6:5** reinforces this framework. John warns against these three instincts; Moses exhorts us to devote them entirely to the service of the Lord.

So it's not surprising, after the repeated emphasis on "*hearing*" in **vv. 9-17**, that the three categories of unproductive soil recall these three instincts, which our hearing should warn us to devote entirely to the Lord (**Deut 6:4-5**).

- The explanation of the first soil, by the wayside, explicitly says that the seed was "*sown in his heart*," and because the hearer does not love the Lord with all his heart, the wicked one can remove the seed.
- The second soil fails because of "*tribulation or persecution*." The soul is the **life-force**, and one who does not love God with all his soul will be fearful of death, and led to reject his faith when he faces persecution.
- The third soil fails because of "*the deceitfulness of riches*." Riches are a form of **power**, and one who does not love God with all his power, all the resources available to him, will be misled by the love of money.

In sum, the parable of the sower instructs the evangelist of the realities of the field in which he labors. Different people will respond to the seed of the word in different ways. Not everybody will receive the truth, but those who do will bring forth **great fruit**.

David Thompson: There are several applications we want to make from this first parable:

- 1) Our job is to sow the seed of the Word of God. Our job is not to generate response.
- 2) The person who hears the Word is one responsible to respond to the Word. There is a personal will and accountability for use of that will right here.
- 3) This world is not going to be converted; in fact, the **vast majority of people** will not respond to God's Word.
- 4) Our ability to bear fruit increases as we grow deep in our understanding of God's Word.
- 5) It will not be the majority of people in any setting who will really respond right to God's Word.

TEXT: Matthew 13:24-43

TITLE: PARABLES DESCRIBING KINGDOM GROWTH – BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

BIG IDEA:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD WILL EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT GENUINE AND COUNTERFEIT GROWTH UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS AT THE END OF THE AGE TO EXERCISE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: The problem of the ever-present wicked among the righteous is such a nagging issue that it dominates the landscape of these lessons. This is an obstacle that can't be overcome except by divine power.

Daniel Doriani: The parables of **Matthew 13** both give **hope** and **explain disappointment**. They say the kingdom is here, in part, without its full might or glory. This creates **dissonance** for believers. If we know Jesus is Savior and Lord, why doesn't everyone believe in him? If the kingdom is here, why is there so much evil in the world? Why does Christ's cause struggle as much as it does? Why do churches, missions, and schools flounder? Jesus urges **patience**; we must "expect continued hostility" from those who reject him. But can we tolerate the dissonance—the kingdom is already here, but not yet in its fullness?

Stanley Saunders: The **ambiguity** and **multivalence** of these three parables admit diverse readings. Are they about the surprising nature and power of God's reign, or about invasion and contamination? Is the contamination a good or a bad thing? Does the growth each story depicts represent promise or threat? . . .

Together the three parables in this portion of the discourse raise more questions than they answer. Each carries associations that may be taken either negatively or positively by Jesus' audience. Do they announce judgment (**13:30, 32**) or divine presence (**13:32, 33**)—or both? Does the empire of heaven set the world right, or is it, for some at least, invasive and corrupting? Any decision to limit the meaning of these parables to but one of these valences robs them of their power to evoke and compel choice. The decisions the audience makes about the meaning of these parables serve in turn to locate the listener in reference to the empire of heaven. . .

All three of these parables point toward the **mixed results** that Jesus' sowing of the kingdom has produced. Each invites the audience to consider where they stand and how they read the signs as the harvest approaches. Each leaves the audience to grapple with **ambivalent signs**. And while Jesus' discourse has created a sharp sense of division between the disciples and the crowd, the multivalent metaphors at work in these parables also serve to inhibit the development of a clear sense of "insiders" (people who get the right meaning) and "outsiders." No one, not even the disciples, has a clear inside track that leads to the right interpretation. It is not right interpretation that distinguishes disciples, but **enduring obedience**, that is, steady, active, resilient witness in a world that does not clearly perceive the signs of God's power, that misidentifies the signs, and that refuses to admit or conform to the rule of God evident in Christ.

Grant Osborne: Many listening to Jesus' teaching would be wondering why God allows evil to flourish right alongside the good; when will he finally end the presence of evil in this world? Christ is saying that this is not the time for the final victory over evil, but **this is the time for sowing the kingdom seed.** As the kingdom message is sown in the hearts of humankind, Satan will cause many to reject and oppose it; yet the kingdom will flourish in the hearts of others, and God will exercise judgment at the end of the age.

John MacArthur: Every phase of human history, then, marks some facet of the **rulership of Jesus Christ**, the rulership of God in the world. There is no period of time when the kingdom of God is not in effect on the earth. **God mediates His rule on the earth** through men. . .

And the Bible delineates very clearly all of these elements of God's rule in the earth. And there's one more that we left out in our little recounting there, and that is the **period of time from the rejection of Christ to the return of Christ**, the age in which we live. That, too, is ruled by Jesus Christ. This, too, is a **form of His kingdom.**

The Bible designates it in the New Testament as the **mystery form**, that which was not seen in the Old Testament. That which was not revealed in the Old Testament. That period of time not really delineated, but now, through the New Testament teaching of our Lord and, particularly, the expanded teaching of the apostle Paul, clearly defined for us. **We are living in that era.**

Jesus in **Matthew 13** tells us what it will be like. He defines for us in seven parables, the character, the extent, the value, and the consummation of this period known as the mystery form of the kingdom. God is mediating His rule on the earth through His church, through believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Now, the disciples didn't see this period of time as the prophets of old didn't see it either.

So, when the Messiah arrived, they thought immediately He would establish His kingdom. And when He established His kingdom, immediately all the rebels and unbelievers would be destroyed and holiness would fill the earth and righteousness would fill the earth, and the kingdom would be as it was predicted to be by the prophets of old. And so they were always concerned about the kingdom and its character and its power and its consummation. . .

They saw a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom of holy glory where unbelievers were devastatingly judged, punished, put out, destroyed. They saw what **Barclay** calls, "a new and stainless humanity being brought to existence in the kingdom. And the enemies being destroyed." So, having heard the first parable, they probably would have thought to themselves, "Well, there's going to be then three kinds of rejecters and one kind of true and genuine fruit-bearing soil. **What's going to happen to the rejecters?**

Jeffrey Crabtree: The kingdom has arrived. It will not totally crush the enemy at this time. Considerable time will pass before the enemy will be finally judged in that final judgment (**Wilkins** 482). In the meantime, the righteous and unrighteous will exist alongside each other in this world. Because of that, to some extent, the professed, visible church will also contain both.

I. (:24-30) PARABLE OF THE TARES AMONG THE WHEAT – FALSE BELIEVERS WITH THE TRUE

"He presented another parable to them, saying,"

Charles Swindoll: As far as we know, Jesus was still sitting in the boat in the “Bay of Parables” when He presented the story commonly called the **Parable of the Wheat and Tares**. He seemed to pick up on the same image as in the previous story, the Parable of the Sower, the Soil, and the Seed (**13:3-23**). We might even consider this a kind of sequel to that parable. This time, instead of focusing on the different kinds of soil upon which seeds can fall, Jesus’ attention shifted to the plants that grow up in the field.

Daniel Doriani: The parable of the wheat and the weeds leads us again to consider disappointment, the evils of this world. For a moment, the parable sounds like bad news because it asks us to wait, to tolerate evil. Later, we learn that the bad news will not last. Still, it helps us to know that we must anticipate seasons of trouble before we see a happy resolution. . .

The parable of the wheat and the weeds adds a new thought. While the righteous and the wicked grow together, they can be **indistinguishable** for a time. It may be impossible to tell believers from unbelievers, but God knows his people. Eventually, he will separate the righteous and the wicked. He will judge and remove the wicked, but will reward the righteous and bring them into his presence.

A. (:24b-26) Counterfeit Growth Hidden Until the Harvest

1. (:24b) Purposeful Sowing of Good Seed

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Good seed was seed that was pure. It had only the seed of the desired crop in it. The farmer was careful to protect his field from unwanted growth. Corrupted crops were harder to harvest, so if the value of the crop was to be protected the seed had to be kept pure. The first parable was about different soil types but assumed good seed. This parable is about different seeds but assumes a single type of soil. The seed in the first parable represents the word of God. The seed in this parable represents people.

2. (:25) Secretive Sowing of Tares

“But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away.”

Michael Wilkins: **Satan** operates in this world both as a swooping bird (**13:19**) and as the enemy farmer attempting to disrupt the growth of good wheat (disciples) by sowing among it *zizanon* (*Lolium temulentum*), a kind of weed referred to also as “darnel” or “tares.” It is a weedy rye grass with poisonous seeds, which in early stages of growth looks like wheat, but can be distinguished easily in its mature state at the time of harvesting.

D. A. Carson: “*Sleeping*” does not imply that the servants were neglectful but that the enemy was stealthy and malicious.

Van Parunak: Wheat is a nourishing food, but tares carry a symbiotic fungus infection that causes a drunken nausea and even death. In fact, the Latin name *temulentum* comes from the word *temulentus* meaning “drunk.” Wheat contaminated with tares would be worthless. The enemy in this story is conducting a particularly vicious form of industrial sabotage, particularly in a subsistence economy, where most people depend on their annual harvest to feed their

families for the coming year. And his attack is cruel. If he had done what Samson did in **Judges 15:4-5**, sending three hundred foxes with torches tied to their tails running through the fields, at least the farmer would know that he has been attacked, but here there is no warning until the plant begins to produce seeds.

3. (:26) Harvest of Both Wheat and Tares Exposes the Counterfeit

*“But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain,
then the tares became evident also.”*

D. A. Carson: An astonishing number of scholars treat this parable as if there were behind it a Matthean church riddled with problem people, perhaps even apostates. So Jesus’ answer in Matthew becomes, in effect, **advice not to try to have a pure church**, because the Lord will make the right distinctions at the end (cf. **G. Barth**, “Auseinandersetzungen um die Kirchengrowth im Umkreis des Matthäusevangelium,” ZNW 69 [1978]: 158–77). But this is a major error in category. Nowhere in Matthew does “*kingdom*” (or “*reign*”—see comments at **3:2**) become “*church*” (see comments at **vv.37–39; 16:18**). The parable does not address the church situation at all but explains how the kingdom can be present in the world while not yet wiping out all opposition. That must await the harvest. The parable deals with **eschatological expectation**, not **ecclesiological deterioration**.

B. (:27-28a) Counterfeit Growth the Work of Satan

1. (:27) Good Seed Attributed to God

*“And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him,
'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’”*

Leon Morris: Their *then* really means “*therefore*”: in view of the fact that you had only good seed sown, **what is the origin of the weeds?**

2. (:28a) Counterfeit Seed Attributed to Satan

“And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!’”

C. (:28b-30) Counterfeit Growth Not Uprooted Until the Final Judgment

1. (:28b-29) Prohibition of Premature Uprooting of Tares

a. (:28b) Question

“And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’”

John MacArthur: Because later on when the servants say, “*Can we pull out the darnels?*” and the Lord says, “*Don’t pull them out, let them grow together,*” if that’s the church then we have no right to church discipline, we have no right to expose a heretic, we have no right to deal with the sin. And that’s not what the epistles tell us. If you make this field the church, you’ve really got problems. Leave it the way Jesus interpreted it. It’s the world.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The parable is not about how the church is to fight evil. Instead, it teaches us that the church exists alongside evil and God perfectly judges all people in the last day.

b. (:29) Response and Reason

*“But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares,
you may root up the wheat with them.’”*

Richard Gardner: For a detailed explanation, we must wait till **verses 36-43**. What the parable itself clearly tells us, however, is that the kingdom must **contend with evil** all around it, and that God permits evil and good to coexist until the end.

2. (:30) Plan for Eventual Judgment of Counterfeit Tares

a. Tares and Wheat Grow Together in This Age

“Allow both to grow together until the harvest;”

b. Tares and Wheat Designated for Contrasting Destinies at Harvest Time

“and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Charles Swindoll: In this parable we see three periods of time.

- During the time of planting, the farmer plants good seed, but his enemy deviously infiltrates the field and plants dangerous, poisonous, look-alike seed.
- During the time of waiting, the farmer advises the workers to allow the bad grain to grow side by side with the good grain, patiently waiting and refraining from taking action. Throughout this in-between time, the workers are responsible for tending and protecting the wheat field.
- Then, at the time of harvesting, the farmer’s harvesters – not the workers who tended the wheat – will carry out the task of separating the harmful and deceptive weeds from the healthy wheat.

II. (:31-32) PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED – IMPRESSIVE POSITIVE GROWTH FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS – INCORPORATING THE GENTILES

“He presented another parable to them, saying,”

John MacArthur: And what He is saying is it’s not your job to be the executioners. That’s for the angels in the judgment. Your job is to keep on being the wheat in the midst of the world so that you’ll influence the tares or the darnels that are all around you. You’re not to be the executioners, you’re not to pull off the judgment, you’re not to pull them out of the ground because you don’t know what you’re doing. You’re liable to kill some Christians in the process and let some non-Christians go because you can’t see the heart. So your job is not judgment. Your job is **evangelism**. They’ll grow together until the end.

Now, what do you think the next question is that they’re going to ask? They’re going to think...I know it’s what I thought. “Well, now this is the kingdom? And we’ve got all these people who reject? And they’re all over the place because the parable of the tares said that the tares were sown throughout the field. And evil is so powerful and evil is so strong and evil is so dominating in its influence, if these two things are going along together, **isn’t that going to choke out the life of the kingdom?** Isn’t that going to strangle the power of Christ in the world?”

A. (:31b) Introduction of the Parable

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;”

Van Parunak: -For the third time, we are invited to consider a man sowing seed in his field. But each time the seed is different.

- In the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of the kingdom (v. 19), and the different soils represent different kinds of people.
- In the parable of the tares, the seed consists of people, “*the children of the kingdom*” or “*the children of the wicked one*” (v. 38).
- In this parable, the seed stands for the kingdom of God, which we must always keep in mind is a process, not a place: it is **the rule of God over his creation**.

B. (:32) Relevant Characteristics of the Mustard Seed

1. Germinates as a Small and Insignificant Seed

“and this is smaller than all other seeds;”

D. A. Carson: No pious Jew doubted that the kingdom would come and that it would be vast and glorious. What Jesus is teaching goes beyond that. He is saying there is a basic connection between the **small beginnings** taking place under his ministry and the kingdom in its **future glory**. Though the initial appearance of the kingdom may seem inconsequential, the tiny seed leads to the mature plant.

John Phillips: Imagine the **astonishment** of the disciples when they heard that! The Lord was about to describe the kingdom of God. They had visions of a global empire. They doubtless pictured an ivory palace, a majestic throne, a glittering court, ambassadors from earth's remotest bounds waiting in long lines for an audience, and an invincible army at the command of a powerful, magnificent king. They waited eagerly for the Lord's description of such a kingdom, one in which they would be high ministers of state. Then came the shock. “*The kingdom of God,*” He said, “*is like a grain of mustard seed.*” They must have stared blankly at Him in astonishment. A grain of mustard seed? Why, that was nothing! You could hardly see it; it was so small and insignificant. Ah! **But it had life! It would grow!** The point of the parable lies in the contrast between the size of the seed when it is sown and the size of the plant when it is grown. In each case, the Lord used hyperbole for emphasis. The kingdom of God seems small and insignificant in men's eyes. In the Lord's day, such was the people's contempt for it that they murdered its King. But when it is fully grown, when it reaches its full potential, they will be awed by it then!

2. Grows Into Impressive Plant

“but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants;”

Leon Morris: That mustard is the smallest of all the seeds does not mean that nowhere is there any smaller seed. It is a way of saying that among all the seeds mustard is a very little seed indeed. It was popularly held to be the smallest of the seeds (**Lightfoot** cites evidence that the size of the mustard seed “passed into a common proverb,” 2, p. 215; indeed, Jesus himself used it that way when he spoke of faith like a grain of mustard seed, **17:20**). We should understand Jesus as appealing to this well-known view rather than to his having surveyed all the seeds and come up with the conclusion that there is none smaller than this (in fact, some seeds are smaller). The point of the parable is that this very little seed grows into a sizeable plant, one larger than all the plants of the garden, and indeed in its mature state becomes a tree (it can grow to a height of 8 to 12 feet). Jesus passes over the various stages of its growth; for this parable they are irrelevant. He is concerned with the **contrast between the tiny seed and the mature majestic**

plant. *So that* introduces the thought of result; the consequence of the great growth of the plant from the tiny seed is that *birds* come and *roost in its branches* (cf. **Dan. 4:12, 20-21; Ezek. 31:6**). The little detail about the birds roosting fills out the picture of the seed growing into a tree; in the end the mustard plant fulfils all the functions of a tree. This points up the strong contrast between the tiny seed and the tree that is the end result of the seed. The kingdom may be considered **insignificant** in its beginnings and was doubtless despised by many in Jesus' day because of this. But in the end its growth would be **extensive**; it would be a very great kingdom indeed. There is also the thought of the continuity between the seed and the grown plant; it is from the mustard seed and that seed only that the mustard plant grew. So it is from Jesus and his little band that the mighty kingdom of heaven would emerge. And if we can reason from the connection with all the nations in the Ezekiel passage, there will be **representatives of all peoples** in the kingdom.

Donald Hagner: The kingdom of God has humble beginnings; it is like a mustard seed, small and unimpressive. It can be overlooked or dismissed as a trifle. Its coming did not overwhelm the world, as had been expected. Yet it is destined to become an impressive entity in radical contrast to its beginnings.

John MacArthur: Now basically, let me just give you a little **botany** so we know where we're going. This particular mustard seed causes to grow a bush, a shrub we would call it, like a garden plant. Normally it grows to about seven to eight feet in height. And that's a good size garden plant. That's a good size herb, and you'll notice it's put in the herb family, lachanon in the Greek, and we'll discuss that in a moment.

But very frequently it will grow to 12 to 15 feet in height. And there are many testimonies that have been written by eyewitnesses in the east who have seen these fields, both now and in past generations, who have testified to the fact that they get to be 15 feet high. One writer talks about them being higher than a horse and rider. Another writer says that the horse and the rider can ride under the branches of the mustard bush. **Now, that's a big bush.**

3. Growth Will Accommodate Inclusion of the Gentiles in the Kingdom

"and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

Do birds represent:

- Just a general reference to the great size of the plant
- Evil forces; false professors of faith and false teachers under the cloak of Christianity
- **Gentiles** who are included in the kingdom [my preference]

Daniel Doriani: When the parable says birds "*perch*" or "*make nests*" (ESV) in the branches, we have an allusion to **Ezekiel 17:23-24** (the image was widespread in the ancient Near East), where God promises to plant a tree in Israel that will provide safety for all who dwell there. Occasionally, "*birds nesting*" signifies Gentile nations finding safety (**Ezek. 31:6; Dan. 4:12, 20-21**). The image suggests that God will replant Israel, so that not only Israel, but even the Gentiles will find **safety in God's family**.

John MacArthur: And what the parable is trying to tell us is that in spite of the opposition, in spite of the three bad soils, in spite of the presence of the darnels, we're going to win. The

kingdom is going to grow and grow and grow and grow and grow. That's the promise of the Lord to encourage us.

S. Lewis Johnson: [Alternative View] Christianity has grown. It's had an **abnormal growth** from that small beginning in the manger in Bethlehem, and the twelve apostles, and the few scattered Christian believers – it's become a worldwide phenomenon. A great religion. But all of this shall ultimately reach its climax in the man of sin, the anti-Christ, who shall arise and proclaim the lie, shall set up the image to himself in the Temple, and call upon the whole of the earth to worship him. The birds of the air [referring to the work of Satan] shall come and nest in the branches of the mustard tree.

III. (:33) PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN – PERVASIVENESS OF NEGATIVE GROWTH OF FALSE DOCTRINE

“He spoke another parable to them,”

Is the Lord using two parables here as a couplet to emphasize the same theme = the powerful and pervasive spread of the kingdom? Or is the Lord using these 2 parables to contrast both the positive and negative types of growth we see in the kingdom in this present age?

A. Introduction of the Parable

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven,”

B. Permeating Influence of the Leaven

“which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened.”

Michael Wilkins: [Alternative View] Scripture uses leaven almost exclusively as a negative metaphor, probably because fermentation implied disintegration and corruption (**Ex. 12:8, 15–20**), as in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which reminded the Israelites of their hurried departure from Egypt (**Ex. 12:31–39; Deut. 16:3**). But Jesus seems to reverse the connotation here to symbolize the **hidden permeation** of the kingdom of heaven in this world. The mustard seed emphasizes growth, while the yeast suggests permeation and **transformation**. In spite of its small, inauspicious beginnings, the kingdom of heaven will permeate the world.

John MacArthur: [Alternative View] All I'm saying is that the way leaven is used in the Bible is very broad. And it is a very excellent analogy of **permeating influence**. And so, we see that our Lord uses it, I believe, in that very same manner here. Sure it's used in the New Testament to speak of evil and its permeating influence but are we saying that God can't use it, also, to speak of the influence of good? Especially when He says, *“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven,”* and especially when it's in a **couplet of parables** which obviously are geared to show how the **kingdom's power is extended as over against the influence of evil given in the first two parables**.

Albert Mohler: The metaphor of yeast usually has a negative meaning in Scripture, but Jesus uses it to symbolize the positive, hidden permeation of the kingdom of heaven in this world. Though the kingdom is active, it is not yet fully observable to the world because it begins with an inner transformation of the heart.

S. Lewis Johnson: The difficulties with taking this as an optimistic picture are these. In the first place, the meal suggests the wheat. We all agree on that. The three measures of meal suggest wheat, and the wheat suggests the true seed are the **doctrines of the Lord Jesus and his work of redemption.**

But the leaven. If you look in the Old Testament and look up all the references to leaven, and then look up in the New Testament all the references to leaven, you discover that instead of being something that is positive, it almost always has a **negative meaning.** For example, in the meal offering, designed to represent the Lord Jesus in his person and in his work, it is specifically stated that if a child of the Nation Israel offers a meal offering, there should be no leaven in it, because leaven suggests sin, and there is no sin in the Lord Jesus.

When the Passover is observed, it is an especially important regulation that the leaven should be removed from the home in which the Passover lamb was to be eaten. And for seven days, they were to eat unleavened bread as they observe the feast.

Then if you come into the New Testament, and if you turn here in the gospel of Matthew to the 16th chapter – why don't you turn over there and read verse 6 through verse 12 – you will see that the New Testament conforms to this teaching. Then Jesus said unto them, *“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”* And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *“It is because we have taken no bread,”* verse 8 which when Jesus perceived, *“O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the 5,000, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the 4,000 and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye not understand that I spoke not you concerning bread, but that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”* Then understood they that he bade them not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Leaven in the New Testament is used of the evil of hypocrisy. It is used of the evil of impurity. It is used of the evil of rationalism, characteristic of the Sadducees. It is used of the evil of formalism in religion, characteristic of the Pharisees. And it is used of the evil of materialism and naturalism characteristic of the Herodians. And Mark tells us that the doctrine of the Herodians could be characterized as leaven as well.

So leaven, then, in the Old and New Testaments **suggests that which is evil.** Furthermore, the other parables, as we have been seeing, suggests that alongside the sowing of the good seed there is the sowing of the tares. And finally, history itself has told us that we're not getting better and better and better. That apostasy is rather the condition than the opposite.

So what, then does this parable teach us, then, why this parable teaches us that in the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus and the truth concerning him, we shall expect – incidentally, the woman – I don't want to be dogmatic about what is meant by the woman. But we do know that in the Bible, in Revelation chapter 17, the figure of the woman suggests **ecclesiastical impurity** and ecclesiastical action. And it's just possible that the woman – evidently perhaps related symbolically to Eve in the Garden of Eden – it is perhaps possible that the woman here is designed to represent ecclesiastical introduction of the leaven into the truth concerning the Lord Jesus.

And if that's what is meant, of course, that we know is what has happened, that the **introduction of false doctrine** into the proclamation of the message of the Christian church has been done by the leaders in the Christian church. The men who stand in the pulpit and teach us, they are the ones who mislead us.

So then, we are to understand by this that throughout this age, it is to be characterized by the tendency on the part of the leadership – perhaps the leadership of the Christian church; the fact is still true – characterized by the introduction, secretly into the truth concerning Christ that which is erroneous. Until finally we shall have the whole leavened, **this age shall end in general apostasy** [both moral and doctrinal].

IV. (:34-35) PURPOSE OF PARABLES – FULFILLING OT PROPHECY

A. (:34) Transition in Mode of Teaching

“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable,”

R. T. France: The second statement on teaching in parables is much shorter than vv. 10–17, and is presented entirely as an **editorial comment**, not as the words of Jesus. It is essentially a formula-quotation preceded only by a brief descriptive sentence to justify it. Here, unlike in 13:14 where Jesus was the speaker, the normal **quotation formula** returns, and we are invited to reflect on how Jesus' teaching method as it is set out in this chapter conforms to a pattern of revelation already established in Scripture. These two verses repeat some of the key themes of the chapter so far, that parables serve to reveal hidden truths, but that to the crowds (unlike the disciples) only the parables are given, not the explanations which enable those secrets to be grasped.

Grant Osborne: On the basis of 13:10–17 this means that Jesus considered the crowds to be outsiders (cf. 13:11–12). This is a turning point in Jesus' ministry as he turns from the crowds and in the rest of ch. 13 addresses only the disciples. Jesus is rejecting those who are not willing to open their ears to “hear” (cf. 11:15, 13:9) and is implicitly applying 13:10–17, where the parables are meant to confirm the rejection of those who are not open to Jesus' kingdom message. In other words, Jesus considers the crowds to be outsiders (cf. 13:11–12).

B. (:35) Testimony of the OT Anticipating Jesus Speaking in Parables

“so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.’”

Jeffrey Crabtree: In addition to parables concealing truth from non-responsive hearts (people who rejected Jesus' gospel, vv. 10-17), parables also required hearers to focus their attention in order to understand. Accurate discernment belonged only to those who were willing to devote the mental energy to understand them (v. 9; Mk. 4:24-25). Mark 4:33-34 adds that once they were in private, Jesus explained each of His parables to His disciples. This prevented misunderstanding and doctrinal disagreements as the disciples passed Jesus' teachings on to others.

Stu Weber: Matthew portrayed Jesus as the Messiah who, for the first time, opened the doors of understanding to eternal realities long kept secret. But he provided understanding only for those

who had ears to hear. This is only one of many changes the king implemented in his inauguration of his kingdom on earth (9:14-17). . .

The major point here is Jesus' explanation of the change, not only in his teaching style to the crowds, but the change in the direction the kingdom is taking in light of Israel's unbelief and Messiah's rejection of the nation. The nation would be set on the shelf while he worked through a new vessel.

V. (:36-43) PARABLE OF THE WEEDS EXPLAINED

(:36-37a) Interpretation Setting

*“Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house.
And His disciples came to Him, saying,
‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’
37 And He answered and said,”*

A. (:37b-39) Identification of the Major Symbols

1. (:37b) The Sower

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,”

2. (:38a) The Field

“and the field is the world;”

R. T. France: But it is unlikely that the theme of a **mixed church**, however important to Matthew elsewhere, was in fact the main point of this parable, at least as Matthew understood it. The field is identified in v. 38 not as the church but as *“the world,”* which suggests that the parable has a **wider perspective** than simply the professing disciple community. Within *“the world”* believers and unbelievers continue to exist side by side even after the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven and Jesus’ assault on the kingdom of Satan, and some disciples may have found this apparently unchanged situation **perplexing**. Where was the new world order they had been promised? What sort of *“kingdom”* was this that allowed opposition to continue unchecked? Why did God not straightaway destroy the *“sons of darkness”* and so make his world a place fit for the *“sons of light”* (to use the language of Qumran)? The parable answers that question by a **call to patience**, directing attention away from the current situation to the **coming judgment**, when it will be made plain who are the true people of God and who are the *“children of the Evil One.”* God is not in a hurry, and they must be prepared to wait for his time.

3. (:38b) The Seed

a. Good Seed

“and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom;”

b. Bad Seed

“and the tares are the sons of the evil one;”

Leon Morris: It is interesting that the *good seed* is not the words that tell of the kingdom, but the *sons of the kingdom*, the people who receive and respond to the word. They are characterized by their relationship to the kingdom; they belong to the kingdom. The weeds also belong — to the evil one! Jesus makes a sharp distinction: in the end people belong either to the kingdom or to Satan.

4. (:39a) Enemy Sower

“and the enemy who sowed them is the devil,”

5. (:39b) Harvest

“and the harvest is the end of the age;”

6. (:39c) Reapers

“and the reapers are angels.”

B. (:40-42) Imagery of the Reaping Process

1. (:40) Summary Imagery

“Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.”

Donald Hagner: The parable is not merely about judgment but about the **delay of judgment**. . . The central point of the parable is now explained. The gathering of the weeds and their burning refer to the **eschatological judgment** (see the same image in **3:10**) that will take place ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος, “*at the end of the age*” (cf. **vv 39 and 49**). The present era of fulfillment announced by Jesus, despite its eschatological character, does not bring with it the **final judgment** of the end time. That time of future eschatological judgment is described in the verses that follow. **Jeremias** (Parables) refers to **vv 40–43** as a “**little apocalypse**.”

John Schultz: The Lord concludes the explanation of this parable with a brief but very vivid picture of the **eternal destiny** of the lost and of the redeemed.

2. (:41-42) More Specific Imagery

“The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Leon Morris: The reaping process will include gathering the things that cause sin as well as the people who do lawless things. In the final state of affairs those traps will be taken away completely.

Craig Blomberg: From the actions of the farmer and the fate of the wheat and weeds, one learns that God will permit the righteous and wicked to coexist in this age but that he will eventually separate the wicked, judge them, and destroy them, while gathering the righteous together to be rewarded by enjoying his presence forever.

Van Parunak: This image, which is repeated in **v. 50** at the end of this group of parables, inevitably calls to mind Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace in **Daniel 3**. There, one like a son of God (in the LXX, an angel of God) delivered the three lads, but here the angels themselves are casting the wicked into the furnace, and there is no recourse.

The image of the final punishment as burning fire draws on OT prophecies:

Isa 66:24 *for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.*

It is common in our Lord's teaching:

Mat 25:41 *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:*

It continues throughout the NT to the final description in the Revelation:

Rev 20:15 *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

It is fashionable in modern churches to downplay or even deny the teaching of a fiery hell, but the consistent testimony of Scripture uses this image to warn of the consequences of persisting in our sin and not receiving the Father's gracious offer of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus.

C. (:43a) Vindication of the Righteous

"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Charles Swindoll: God is just. He knows that evil is on the rise, that charlatans are working behind the scenes to damage our churches, and that Satan has his minions making their debilitating marks on the body of Christ. Evil workers tend to gain a following, and the number of weeds thus multiplies. This is inevitable during the present evil age. However, this age isn't the last. The King is coming, and with Him the judgment. He will sort out the wheat from the weeds – perfectly, precisely, and swiftly. We need to trust Him to provide for and protect his people until the day of Christ's appearing.

Leon Morris: Here the *righteous* are those accepted as righteous on the last great day; the term points to their **acceptability**, not to their **meritorious achievement**. *Shine* represents a verb found here only in the New Testament; the comparison to the sun brings out the radiance of the life to which they have come (cf. **Dan. 12:3**).

(:43b) Exhortation to Responsiveness

"He who has ears, let him hear."

Van Parunak: The Lord repeats the exhortation from v. 9. There (as usually) it concludes a parable, challenging the hearer to figure out the meaning. Here it follows the interpretation of a parable, but the Lord apparently realizes the offensiveness of what he is teaching, and reminds his disciples not to allow the natural attachment to this world to draw them away from it.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How difficult must it have been for the disciples of Jesus to put aside their expectation of immediate kingdom consummation and prepare to patiently engage in long term evangelism and discipleship in a world where evil grows alongside of righteousness?

- 2) What makes the growth of a mustard seed an appropriate analogy for the growth of the kingdom of God?
- 3) Why shouldn't this passage be used as an argument against proactive church discipline?
- 4) Is the reality and severity of eternal punishment of the wicked given short shrift in evangelical circles today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: The parable of the weeds (or tares) answers two questions from the context of Matthew. First, why must the faithful kingdom servants live in the midst of evil on earth? Second, is there any hope of justice and freedom from the surrounding evil of the world? The concept that the weeds, in their early stages, were indistinguishable from the young wheat also points to the likelihood of counterfeits within the kingdom community (**7:15-23**). This parable offered assurance that even these convincing imposters would be "weeded out" in the end.

David Thompson: The Messianic kingdom that could have been established and ultimately will be established one day will not contain any evil. However, since Israel had rejected her King, the whole program of God would move in a different direction. Gentiles would be brought in and even though God would do many great things in the lives of people, an evil one would do his diabolical work until he is finally destroyed.

We may understand kingdom in these parables as the whole time period from the time Jesus Christ ascends until He comes back to reign as King.

UNTIL JESUS CHRIST SENDS HIS ANGELS TO CAST ALL EVIL ANGELS AND PEOPLE INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE TO BURN FOREVER, SATAN WILL PRODUCE A COUNTERFEIT TO THE TRUE, PURE WORK AND WORD OF GOD.

Dr. Stanley Toussaint said there are three new things we learn in this parable:

- 1) The program of God would now take place in the world, not just Israel (**13:38**).
- 2) Good and evil will continue to coexist in the program of God in the world (**13:30**).
- 3) Evil will coexist with good until the kingdom is established and Christ destroys evil (13:39-43).

J. Ligon Duncan: In the Parable of the Sower, the disciples learned that Israel, and many of the Gentiles, would reject Jesus' claims for Himself to be the Messiah, and the good news that He brought, thus correcting His expectations about the kingdom, because they thought that when the Messiah set up his kingdom, all of Israel and all the Gentiles would come to Him. In the parable of the tares, the disciples learn that the kingdom itself will be mixed in character, thus correcting their expectation that the kingdom would be perfectly pure, and would involve a righteous rule over all the unrighteous of the world. They had apparently taken Jeremiah 31, verses 31 through 34, very seriously. They expected the law of God to be written on the hearts of all of those who were involved in the kingdom of heaven. They expected all of those involved in the kingdom to know the Lord from the greatest to the least, and they believed, with John the Baptist, that when

the Lord came He was going to lay the axe to the root of the tree. He was going to bring judgment to the unrighteous in the land, and set up a righteous kingdom. And, consequently, they needed to be corrected in what the kingdom of heaven would be like in this experience between two ages: the coming of Christ the first time and the coming of Christ the second time. And so, the parable of the tares is designed to show them that in Christ's kingdom, the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one are going to exist side by side for a long time. And so, they must wait patiently and give themselves to building up the wheat (that is the sons of the kingdom) and be careful in their judgment not to harm those who are believers. This parable is designed to remind the disciples that there will be judgment and condemnation for those who appear to be in the kingdom, but who are, in fact, not.... This parable also indicates that there will be many who are identified with the kingdom of heaven who are not part of it. It is interesting to see the similarities between the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares. The parable of the sower talks about a sower, so does the parable of the tares. Both parables talk about a field. They both talk about a seed. They both talk about a crop yield and in both parables the evil one is mentioned. But there are also differences between the two parables. For one thing, in the parable of the sower all the seed is good. In the parable of the tares, of course, some of the seed is wheat and some of the seed is weed. In the parable of the sower, the focus is on the response to the different kinds of soils of the seed which has been planted by the sower. In the parable of the tares, the focus is on the command which the landowner gives to his servant. He tells his servant before the final judgment that they are to be patient, and then He gives the command to his servants - the angels at the final judgment are to reap and to separate the tares and the wheat. Notice also that the evil one is at work in both of these parables.

John Piper: A **wartime mindset** must include shrewd knowledge of **enemy tactics**. **Ephesians 5:11**, "*Take no part in unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*" Christianity stands or falls with the reality of Satan and demons. Why? Because Jesus spent his whole ministry fighting them. If they are not real he is reduced to a comic figure.

What is Satan's aim and his strategies?

1. He is the father of lies. (**John 8:44**) His nature is falsehood! He only speaks the truth in order to deceive.
 2. Therefore, his chief enemy is truth—he opposes God's word. (**Genesis 3:1–5**)
 3. He casts doubt on God's goodness. (**Genesis 3:1–5**) He destroys the obedience of faith. He opposes the truth reaching and converting people.
 4. He hinders missions strategy. (**1 Thessalonians 2:18**)
 5. He distorts and prevents effective gospel message. (**Acts 13:8–9**)
 6. He avoids inner need by removing external trouble. (**1 John 3:12**)
 7. He uses the fear of death to hold men in bondage. (**Hebrews 2:15**) It doesn't lead them to God because it leads them to get as many kicks here as possible.
 8. He causes people to stumble over bad Christian attitudes. (**2 Timothy 2:24–26**)
 9. He blinds the minds of unbelievers. (**2 Corinthians 4:4**)
 10. He exploits a lack of understanding. (**Matthew 13:19**)
 11. He suggests ways that don't involve suffering. (**Matthew 16:23; Matthew 4:1–11**)
 12. He imitates religious roles. (**2 Corinthians 11:14–15; Matthew 13:28, 30; Revelation 2:9**)
 13. He misuses Scripture. (**Matthew 4:6**)
 14. He imitates signs and wonders. (**2 Thessalonians 2:9; Mark 13:22**)
 15. He offers exotic occult alternatives. (**Revelation 2:19–24**)
- He attacks faith to destroy believers:

16. attacks faith. (**1 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 11:3**)
17. brings persecution. (**Revelation 2:9; 1 Peter 5:8; Luke 22:31**)
18. brings sickness. (**Job 1:11; 2:5; Luke 13:16**)
19. dissension over doctrine and causes rifts. (**Romans 16:17–20**)
20. sexual allurements. (**1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Timothy 5:15**)
21. unresolved anger. (**2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 4:27**)
22. pride. (**1 Timothy 3:6**)

We began with liar and end with pride. Connection: the truth is that God is God and we are not. It is humbling. The only way to rebel against the lowliness of creaturehood is to be a liar. Humility under God is the great devil resistance (**James 4:6–7**). (*A Wartime Strategy*)

TEXT: Matthew 13:44-46

TITLE: GREATNESS OF THE KINGDOM – ITS VALUE AND APPROPRIATION

BIG IDEA:

THE SUPREME VALUE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD MOTIVATES AN APPROPRIATION OF TOTAL COMMITMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Stu Weber: These parables (:44-46) answer two closely related questions from the surrounding context.

- First, why should we give our lives for a kingdom we cannot see?
- Second, can the kingdom truly be the answer to our search for ultimate fulfillment?

Grant Osborne: Several ideas are intertwined in this collection of parables.

- (1) The kingdom has overwhelming value, worth everything a person has (vv. 44–46).
- (2) Certain judgment is reserved for those who reject the kingdom (vv. 47–50).
- (3) Finally, the disciples have attained an understanding that makes them responsible to teach others the new truths of the kingdom as well as the old truths of the Torah (vv. 51–52).

R. T. France: They are about enthusiastic and whole-hearted commitment to the kingdom of heaven, with the secondary theme of costly renunciation for the sake of the greater good. It is only those who make the kingdom of heaven their top priority who will enjoy its blessings. These parables also continue the theme of the “*secrets of the kingdom of heaven*” in that the treasure is “*hidden*” from others and the pearl has to be “*found*” (it is not thrown before any old pigs, 7:6!).

The relevance of these parables to the disciples is obvious, especially in view of their having “*left*” their previous lifestyle and its material possessions in the call-stories of 4:20, 22 (and cf. 9:9), a theme which will be taken up again in 19:27–29, where it is provoked by the example of the rich man who was unwilling to sell his possessions in order to gain “*treasure in heaven*” (19:16–22). The same contrast between earthly and heavenly possessions and security has been explored in 6:19–34, where it is specifically commitment to God’s kingship (6:33) which must take priority over other concerns. In the treasure-finder and the pearl-dealer, then, we find the opposite attitude to the “*worries of this world and the false lure of wealth*” which stood in the way of true discipleship in v. 22. To find the kingdom of heaven is to find the one treasure which outweighs all other valuation. It is **worth any cost** to seize this unique and unrepeatable opportunity.

Walter Wilson: However the opportunity presents itself, the only appropriate response to the kingdom is one of complete and unqualified commitment.

D. A. Carson: The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl are a **pair**; and pairing is not uncommon in Matthew (e.g., 5:14b–16; 6:26–30; 7:6; 9:16–17; 10:24–25; 12:25; 13:31–33; 24:43–51), an excellent way of reinforcing a point. Like the paired parables with which these two are **chiastically coordinated** (mustard seed and yeast, vv.31–33), **these two make the same general point but have significant individual emphases.**

Donald Hagner: The brief fifth and sixth parables have as their focus the **glorious character** of the kingdom brought by Jesus, which **justifies the cost of absolute discipleship**. They are linked with the preceding parables, however, by the continuing motif of hiddenness and smallness. Thus the hidden treasure corresponds to the hidden leaven and the smallness of the pearl with that of the mustard seed. These parables, again like those of the mustard seed and the leaven, receive no explanation in the text; this may be because they are spoken to the disciples, who will know their meaning.

I. (:44) PARABLE OF HIDDEN TREASURE – JOY OF DISCOVERY

A. Hidden Nature of the Kingdom

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field,”

Grant Osborne: In a society that had no banks or safety-deposit boxes, all one could do with valuables was hide them underground. Archaeologists have often found jars of gold coins or even precious jewels and pearls buried in a field. This parable would be such a case, as the original owners were either killed on a journey or died suddenly and the treasure remained hidden. It is a story that captures the imagination in every culture and time, for buried treasure is a universal symbol of personal fortune.

Daniel Doriani: The ancients had nothing like banks or safe deposit boxes. When brigands threatened or war forced sudden flight, people buried their treasures, often in clay jars. If those who fled did not return, the treasure was lost until someone stumbled upon it.

Ray Fowler: At the start of the story the treasure is not in plain sight but is hidden. That tells you something about the kingdom. **The value of the kingdom is not always obvious to people at first.** They hear about God or Jesus or the church, but they don't realize how important, how essential, how necessary God is to their lives. And so, they go day after day, week after week, year after year, without submitting themselves to God's rule in their life.

B. Joy of Discovery of the Kingdom

“which a man found and hid; and from joy over it”

William Barclay: In this parable, the great point is the **joy of the discovery** that made the man willing to give up everything to make sure beyond question that the treasure became his own. Nothing else in the parable really matters.

Ray Fowler: The second part of the story has to do with the joy of discovery. Jesus says when the man found the treasure, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought the field.

Joy is an important part of this story. The man does not go dutifully off to sell his possessions but does so at the sheer joy of discovering the treasure. He is not upset that he has to go and sell everything. In fact, he doesn't have to go and sell anything at all. He does it because he wants to. He does it because he is glad to. He is so full of joy at the discovery of the treasure that he is glad to sell everything he has in order to obtain the treasure.

John MacArthur: that which was hidden in the field did not belong to the man who owned the field. If it was his, he wouldn't be selling his field without digging it up. He didn't know it was there. He had not gone to the effort to uncover it and dig it out. No doubt it belonged to a previous owner of that same field who had buried it there, died in battle, or died by accident, unable to recover it and so it was no more the number one's owner than it was the number two's owner. So he had no prior right to it. And the man who had uncover it...uncovered it by Jewish law did have the claim on it. The other man had not done that. . .

The point of the parable is here is a man who found something so valuable that he sold everything that he had to get it. That's the point of the parable. He was so overjoyed, he was so ecstatic that he was willing to do anything to get that treasure.

David Turner: The ethics of the man who finds the treasure and then buys the field are irrelevant to the parable (**W. Davies** and **Allison** 1991: 436).

Charles Swindoll: It's an interesting side note that whoever owned the field and sold it to the man didn't realize the vast treasure he had been sitting on, something that suggests neglect of the field by this deed holder and/or heir. At this point, the disciples may have wondered if the indifference of the original owner of the field in the story was meant to symbolize the kind of negligence increasingly shown by the scribes, Pharisees, and other leaders of Israel. These religious leaders had been "*entrusted with the oracles of God*" (see **Rom. 3:2**) but did not recognize the hidden treasure of the gospel of the person and work of Christ and relinquished it to those who did.

C. Supreme Value of the Kingdom – Motivating Total Commitment

"he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

Grant Osborne: The point is obviously the **absolute value of the kingdom**, worth surrendering everything to attain.⁸ No other aspect is highlighted in this short parable, so clearly this is a call for radical discipleship (and especially of financial sacrifices needed) in light of the **overwhelming value of the kingdom**. Only a few know its worth, and they should surrender everything to obtain it.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now, there are differing interpretations, and I want to mention two or three of these interpretations, not to degrade them, but to let you know there are different interpretations, and it is possible that my interpretation is wrong. So I want to suggest some of the others and then give you what I think is the interpretation of the parable. . .

It is the opinion of some that the church of the Lord Jesus is the treasure, and that the man who found the treasure is the Lord Jesus himself, and that when the man of the parable sells all that he has and buys that field, that is a picture of the Lord Jesus giving all that he possessed in the sacrifice on the cross for the church of the Lord Jesus.

Now, there are some biblical sentiments expressed by this, of course. It is true that the church is a kind of treasure so far as God is concerned. It's obvious that he would not have redeemed the church if he did not have in mind for the church great purposes. But of course, the church is no great treasure in herself. And she is only valuable by virtue of that which God does for her. She is totally worthless otherwise. But nevertheless, it is true that the church has a great place in the purpose of God and might be called a treasure in that sense. And of course, it is true that the Lord

Jesus gave his life for the redemption of the church.

But how could the church be “*found*” by the Lord Jesus when she was chosen before the foundation of the world? How could the church be represented as something the Lord stumbled over while he was wandering through a field? In the light of the fact that Paul says we are chosen in him before the foundation of the world, what is the second hiding that is referred to also, here? So while that interpretation has some things that commend it, I really do not think that it satisfies everything that is found in this context.

Still others say, no, the church is not the treasure, Israel the Nation is the treasure, because does not the Old Testament say that in the beginning of Israel’s history “*A peculiar treasure will I make of Thee unto me?*”—the passage in Exodus chapter 19 and verse 5 would seem to suggest that Israel is a treasure to God, and could not Israel be the treasure over which the Lord Jesus stumbles? Again, remember the primary feature of these parables is **the kingdom of heaven**. The period of time between the first coming and the second coming in mystery form, but ultimately, the kingdom of the heavens in its manifested form begins at the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus and continues for a thousand years thereafter.

What he is doing is giving us things that have to do with the gathering of the sons of the kingdom during this present age, in order that they may enter that glorious Messianic kingdom of the future. And **the kingdom is the thing that is stressed, and not the entities within the kingdom**. The church is not found in Matthew **chapter 13**, so far as I can tell, nor is the Nation Israel, specifically found. He’s thinking about the kingdom. He’s thinking about this age, and the movements, and the works of God and of Satan that will characterize this inter-advent period.

Others have said the kingdom is the treasure and Jesus is the man finding it and giving himself for it. So, the kingdom is the treasure. With that, I certainly can agree. But is the kingdom that which the Lord Jesus finds and gives himself for? Again, that’s an appealing interpretation. It has some things about it that are attractive. The kingdom is a treasure and he is speaking about the kingdom, but is the man who stumbles over the hidden treasure a fit picture of the Lord Jesus? I think not. The discovery is a surprise to the man. I don’t think that this is a fit picture of the Lord Jesus. And yet again, I say, that there are some things that are appealing about that interpretation.

Let me suggest to you, with a little bit of diffidence, what I think is the correct interpretation of it. **The kingdom is the treasure. The Lord Jesus is speaking about the kingdom. But the finder of the treasure is the one who becomes the believer and therefore, we are to look at this as a picture of how a man comes to the understanding and the possession of the kingdom as a treasure.**

Now if that is true, if the kingdom is the treasure and the man who stumbles over it is the man who comes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and appropriates the blessings of the kingdom himself, then these points are made. **First of all, the kingdom is something of great value, but men may fail to see it by virtue of blindness.** Now we know that that is true. The kingdom is something of great value. To possess the life of the kingdom is great. To possess the life of the kingdom and live in that future Messianic kingdom is something that is surely great, and it is held out as future for the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want you to know that I am looking forward to the day when I, by virtue of the grace of God, shall be able to live in that marvelous, glorious, Messianic kingdom, in which the world recognizes and must recognize the glory of our Savior God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a second thing that we may argue from this, and that is that the kingdom may be found unexpectedly. The Bible stresses this as one aspect of the truth. For example, we read in Isaiah chapter 65 and verse 1, “*I was found by them that sought me not.*” Isn’t that an interesting statement? I was found by them that sought me not. That is, those who weren’t paying any attention to me, were not seeking after me, have found me.

Now, every believer – well, I wouldn’t say every believer – but if we looked at our lives, we probably, every one of us, would come to the conviction that there was a time in our lives when we did not have any desire whatsoever for the relationship to the Lord Jesus, and that when we did come into that period of time in which there was a desire, it was something we recognized was not natural to us.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The parable stresses the supreme worth of the kingdom and its hiddenness from the eyes of most. It also teaches urgency, sacrifice (**Newman** and **Stine** 448), and wise choices. The parable shows the good fortune of those who discover the message of the kingdom (the hidden message of the parables, **v. 35**) and the kingdom itself. Mostly this parable teaches the sheer joy of finding something so valuable (**Fee** and **Stuart** 160; **Bruner** 2:47). The supreme value of the treasure justifies the total sacrifice of everything to possess a place in the kingdom (**Wilkins** 488; **Phil. 3:8**).

Daniel Doriani: Jesus makes a simple point: **the kingdom is worth all we possess.** Of course, the kingdom is not for sale. Indeed, we can do nothing to acquire it. But if it were for sale, if we had to sell all that we had to gain it, we should count it a bargain. It took all he had, but the worker bought the field. This represents the **surpassing value** of the kingdom. Despite its small beginning and great cost, it is worth all we have.

Warren Wiersbe: [Alternative View] The common interpretation of this parable is that the sinner finds Christ and gives up all that he possesses to gain Him and be saved. But this interpretation presents several problems. To begin with, Jesus Christ is not a hidden treasure. He is perhaps the best-known Person of history. In the second place, the sinner cannot “find Christ” for he is blind and stubborn (**Rom. 3:10ff.**). It is the Savior who finds the lost sinner (**Luke 19:10**). And no sinner could ever purchase salvation! Please note that the man in the parable did not purchase the treasure; he purchased the whole field. “The field is the world” (**Matt. 13:38**). Must the lost sinner purchase the world to gain Christ? Does he hide Him again?

Once again, Old Testament symbolism assists us in our interpretation. The treasure is the **nation of Israel (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4)**. That nation was placed in the world to bring glory to God, but it failed. It became a nation hidden, a treasure not being invested to produce dividends for God. Jesus Christ gave His all to purchase the whole world in order to save the nation (**John 11:51**). On the cross, Jesus died for the whole world, but in a special way, He died for Israel (**Isa. 53:8**). The nation suffered judgment and seeming destruction, but in God’s sight it is “*hidden*” and will be revealed again in glory.

There is, then, a **future for Israel**. Politically, the nation was reborn on May 14, 1948. But the nation is far from what it ought to be spiritually. God sees Israel as His treasure, and one day He

will establish her in her glorious kingdom.

II. (:45-46) PARABLE OF VALUABLE PEARL – PRECIOUS VALUE

A. (:45) Search for Ultimate Value

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,”

Donald Hagner: The kingdom is like a small, inconspicuous pearl but one of incalculable value that, once discovered, calls for unrestrained response in the form of absolute discipleship. The kingdom of God is the **greatest of treasures**. Though its worth is immeasurable by any standard (cf. concerning wisdom, **Wis 7:7–9, 14**), it is now present only in **veiled form** and can be possessed by some without the knowledge of those near them. Like a hidden treasure or a pearl that can be held in one’s hand, the kingdom is **known only to its joyful possessors**. Yet those who find the kingdom, i.e., who receive the message and who respond in discipleship, have begun to experience the **wonder of the kingdom’s presence**. They know that the kingdom is a **reality that is worth everything**. And thus they joyfully make it their one priority in life (cf. **4:18–22; 10:39**). They seek first the kingdom, sacrificing all to it, but at the same time paradoxically finding with the kingdom all they need (**6:33**).

S. Lewis Johnson: The kingdom is the pearl. And the man is the believer who is awakened and is looking for the answer to that which the Holy Spirit has awakened in his heart. So if the kingdom is the pearl, and after all, he does say the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking fine pearls, then we can make these points.

The kingdom is the **loveliest of all possessions**. This man, incidentally, was a professional. He was a professional pearl hunter. He was a merchant man. He was a jeweler. He knew pearls. And he went around, according to this parable, looking for the finest of pearls. And with all of his professional knowledge, he finally set upon one pearl of great price, the Lord Jesus trying by that to stress the greatness and the loveliness of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. And notice it is one pearl of great price – one pearl, not many – one pearl of great price. . .

I think another thing that this parable teaches us is that **entrance may come after a search**. The Bible says there is *none that seeketh after God, no not one*, but the word of God also says, *seek him while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*. And we know that we harmonize these two apparently contradictory things by pointing out that when men seek God, it’s because he has worked first in their lives. . .

This parable also illustrates the fact that the appropriation of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the relationship to him involves **great personal self-renunciation** – selling all that we have.

B. (:46a) Pearl of Supreme Value

“and upon finding one pearl of great value,”

John Nolland: Since pearls come in a great range of qualities and sizes, by far the **highest value** will attach to the best of the pearls. The merchant finds a pearl which is so outstanding that the wealthiest of buyers will vie for its ownership. For him this will be the business deal of a lifetime! But to buy such a pearl will stretch his resources to the limit: only by liquidating all his assets can he raise the capital to close the deal. The opportunity is too good to lose: he acts

decisively and secures the pearl. . . The role of the liquidation of assets is very similar in the two parables.

D. A. Carson: Jesus is not interested in religious efforts or in affirming that one can “buy” the kingdom; on the contrary, he is saying that the person whose whole life has been bound up with “pearls”—the entire religious heritage of the Jews?—will, on comprehending the true value of the kingdom as Jesus presents it, gladly exchange all else to follow him.

C. (:46b) Worthy of Total Commitment

“he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

Grant Osborne: The treasure parable has the person accidentally “*finding*,” while this one has a merchant deliberately “*seeking*.” In other words, they build on each other, and the key is not so much the mode of discovery as it is the total surrender that accompanies it.

John MacArthur: Six Principles (from these 2 parallel parables):

- 1) The kingdom is priceless in value.
- 2) The kingdom is not superficially visible.
- 3) The kingdom is **personally appropriated**, and this is the crux of the parables.
- 4) The kingdom is the source of joy.
- 5) The kingdom may be entered from different circumstances.

In case number one, the man just comes across the treasure. In case number two, the man knows exactly what he’s looking for. Now even if number one was a treasure hunter, he didn’t know what he was looking for. Number two did. . . Now there are people who search, there are people who stumble into it. And then there are combinations of both, right?

- 6) The kingdom is made personal by a transaction.

Is. 55:1 – You buy it. You just don’t buy it with money. You give up all you have for all He has. . . Salvation is an act where I exchange me for Him as ruler of my life.

David Turner: This pair of parables fits into the pattern of positive response to the kingdom (**Garland** 1993: 151–52; **Keener** 1999: 391–92; **Overman** 1996:202–3). The kingdom is portrayed as a hidden treasure and a valuable pearl, pursued by men who sacrifice everything to gain it. This is the picture of discipleship found throughout Matthew. Jesus’s first disciples leave their families and fishing gear to follow Jesus (**4:20, 22**; cf. **9:9**). Following Jesus entails the sacrifice of one’s life for Jesus (**16:25–26**). The rich young ruler will not sell all he has to follow Jesus (**19:21–22**), but all who do make such a sacrifice will be richly rewarded (**19:27–29**). These parables present both the sacrifice and the resulting joy of those who follow Jesus (**13:44**; cf. **2:10; 28:8**; for temporary joy see **13:20**). Despite the lure of wealth and worldly distractions (**13:22**), millions continue to follow Jesus at great cost in the present life but with greater prospects for the future. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (**5:3**).

Warren Wiersbe: [Alternative View] A well-known gospel song perpetuates the interpretation that this pearl is Jesus Christ and His salvation. But the same objections apply to this interpretation as applied to the previous parable. The sinner does not find Christ; Christ finds the sinner. No sinner is able to pay for salvation, even though he sells all that he has.

The pearl represents the **church**. The Bible makes a distinction between Jews, Gentiles, and the church (**1 Cor. 10:32**). Today, the church, the body of Christ, is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles (**Eph. 2:11ff.**). Unlike most other gems, the pearl is a **unity**—it cannot be carved like a diamond or emerald. The church is a unity (**Eph. 4:4–6**), even though the professing church on earth is divided. Like a pearl, the church is the product of suffering. Christ died for the church (**Eph. 5:25**) and His suffering on the cross made possible her birth.

A pearl grows gradually, and the church grows gradually as the Spirit convicts and converts sinners. No one can see the making of the pearl, for it is hidden in the shell of the oyster under the waters. No one can see the growth of His church in the world. The church is among the nations today (waters in the Bible represent nations; **Dan. 7:1–3; Rev. 13:1; 17:15**) and one day will be revealed in its beauty.

So, in spite of Satan’s subtle working in this world, Christ is forming His church. He sold all that He had to purchase His church, and nothing Satan can do will cause Him to fail. There is but one church, a pearl of great price, though there are many local churches. Not everyone who is a member of a local church belongs to the one church, the body of Christ. It is only through repentance and faith in Christ that we become a part of His church. Of course, all true believers ought to identify with a local assembly where they can worship and serve.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can you remember the surpassing joy of your initial entrance into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
- 2) How did God seek you out and draw you to Himself? Was there a stage in that process where you were seeking after God by His sovereign grace?
- 3) How can you deny the Lord Jesus your total commitment in light of His surpassing value?
- 4) Do you treasure your secure inclusion in the family of God over everything else?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Both of these parables would have been great encouragements to Jesus’ disciples. They saw the religious rulers rejecting Jesus and the heat of persecution increasing against Him and His followers. These two parables would have reminded them of the thrill they had experienced when they had recognized Jesus for who He really is. And the stories would have underscored Jesus’ assertion that whatever the disciples gave up for the kingdom of heaven was worth it. The benefits of the gospel of the kingdom are of inestimable worth.

Daniel Doriani: When we treasure the kingdom, it makes a difference in our course of life. We seek out and meditate on God’s truth. We make time to pray and to give thanks to the King. We will live by gospel standards by seeking to become more patient, gentle, forgiving, and merciful.

We are willing to make sacrifices to practice our conviction that the kingdom is our supreme treasure. We find ways to advance the kingdom. We use our God-given talents to extend the kingdom wherever we can—at home, at work, in our neighborhood, in our church. Again, the parables of the treasure and the pearl do not mean we do something in order to gain God’s pleasure. But we do give faithfully to his work, with our time and our talent.

Stanley Saunders: The **common points** in both the treasure and the pearl stories include the discovery of an object of surpassing value, going away to sell everything the finder possesses, and the purchase of the field (treasure)/pearl. Both discoveries—one apparently accidental, the other part of an intentional search—yield knowledge that remains hidden or undisclosed to others. The two finders have been possessed, as it were, by the perception of something that the rest of the world does not see. The two finders are thus like those to whom “*it has been given to know the secrets of the empire of the heavens*” (13:11). Jesus’ disciples have discovered “*what has been hidden*” (13:35) and what “*many prophets and righteous ones have longed to see ... and hear*” but did not see or hear (13:17).

Justin Imel, Sr.: As a general principle, I don’t think we’ve helped people understand the cost of the kingdom before they come to Jesus. We’ll talk about their sins and how Jesus offers forgiveness; we’ll talk about their struggles and how the church can help bear burdens; we’ll talk about the temporary nature of this life and the eternal heavenly home.

However, how often do we say, “Life as a Christian is not an easy life. You’ll need to give up much and it can be a very high price?” The Lord Himself told us how high the cost of discipleship really is: **Luke 14:25-33**. Notice that the Lord turns to the large crowds who are following Him and says this. The Lord doesn’t simply want followers; **the Lord wants people who give up everything and become His true disciples. . .**

Application:

“The kingdom of heaven costs us greatly.” Specifically, what things does the kingdom cost us?

- The kingdom of heaven costs us our finances. How do you bring every last cent into submission to the will of God?
- The kingdom of heaven costs us our priorities.
 - o Worship will have a place of priority
 - o The Work of the kingdom will have a place of priority.

<https://drjustinimel.com/sermon-on-matthew-1344-46-the-costly-kingdom/>

John Piper: The Kingdom of Heaven is a Treasure

Review:

1. We said that the kingdom of God is not mainly realm or place but rule or reign.
2. We said this reign is specifically his saving or redeeming reign. The kingdom is being manifested in power when demons and unbelief and unrighteousness are being defeated and salvation, righteousness, peace, and joy are happening.
3. We said that this reign is present in part but will be consummated at the second coming of Christ. So the blessings we have now in Christ are great (forgiveness, imputed righteousness, acceptance with the Father, no condemnation, the fellowship of Jesus by his Spirit in our lives, progressive transformation into his likeness, gifts of the Spirit, usefulness in ministry, all things working together for our good, etc.), but the fullness of our inheritance awaits the coming of

Christ—no more sinning, no more sickness, nor more injury or calamity, no more depression or spiritual warfare, no more ethnic strife or racism, no more war, no more death. All that will come with the final consummation of the kingdom.

4. And we said that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are the same. God reigns where Christ reigns. And Christ reigns where God reigns. When the book of Revelation talks about the throne of God it says things like:

“*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*” (7:10). And:
“*The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd*” (7:17). And:
“*The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the New Jerusalem]*” (22:3).

Main Lesson from Verse 44:

The question today is: What do we learn about the kingdom of God here in **Matthew 13:44**? We learn one main thing: *The kingdom of God is so valuable that losing everything on earth, but getting the kingdom, is a happy trade-off.* Having the omnipotent, saving reign of Christ in our lives is so valuable that, if we lose everything, in order to have it, it is a joyful sacrifice.

David Mathis: He Sold All His Pearls for One

Treasure and Pearl

In the first parable (**Matthew 13:44**), the hidden treasure is found “by chance,” it seems, without the man looking intentionally for it. In the surprise of it all, the accent falls on his shocking and happy response: *from his joy* he goes and sells all he has to buy the field. Joy flooded his heart as he stumbled on such value.

In the second parable (**Matthew 13:45–46**), we have a merchant. He is looking. He is searching high and low, near and far. Well does he know the value of pearls. In the ancient world, pearls “were regarded as very precious,” says **George Knight**, “in more demand even than gold” (*Pastoral Epistles*, 135). And this merchant is not just seeking pearls but “*fine pearls*” — beautiful pearls, precious pearls. His palate is refined. He has a keen eye.

The merchant’s life has been bound up with pursuing the most precious of earthly objects. Now, he comes across one singular pearl of such beauty, of such great value, one pearl so precious, he goes and sells all he has to have it. The emphasis is not on his accidental find but on the over-the-top fulfillment of an intentional search. Now the accent is not on the subjective response of joy but on the **exceedingly precious value of the object**.

Worth Every Sacrifice

Together the short parables contribute to one picture, seen in the obvious repetition: the man sells all he has to obtain the newfound treasure. However accidental or intentional the search, the man has come upon something of such value that he is eager (“*from his joy*”) to count all else loss in view of the surpassing value of the treasure — of the exceeding preciousness of the pearl.

Neither parable minimizes the cost. In fact, both draw attention to it: literally, “*all things, as much he has.*” There is a cost — a great cost — to this discipleship. But the Disciple, who is himself the Treasure, so far outstrips the cost that we gladly say, “Gain!” This one great pearl is so surpassingly precious that many even say with the great army of missionaries and martyrs, like **David Livingstone**, “I never made a sacrifice.”

What will it look like for Christ's kingdom to come to us like this? How do we receive Jesus as an infinitely valuable treasure, or a singularly great pearl, that far surpasses all else? The concept of *superlative worth* or *supreme preciousness* in **Matthew 13** points us to at least two pictures elsewhere in the New Testament.

Exceedingly Precious

The first is the anointing at Bethany (**John 12:3–8**; also **Mark 14:3–9**). Martha served. Lazarus, freshly resurrected, reclined at table. Their sister Mary “took a pound of *expensive* ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair” (**John 12:3**). Here, *expensive* is the same word used for the one great pearl in **Matthew 13** (Greek *polutimos*, “*exceedingly precious*”). So manifestly, uncomfortably valuable was the ointment that the disciples, and chiefly Judas, registered their concerns. “*Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?*” (**John 12:5**).

A denarius was a laborer's daily wage. This ointment represented a whole year's earnings for a six-days-a-week worker. Likely this was Mary's nest egg for the future. And yet, as precious as it was, she saw Jesus as more precious. She saw him as surpassingly valuable. She poured her future on his feet, and in doing so, she demonstrated who was supremely precious to her.

Supremely Valuable

Paul takes up the same search, sacrifice, and joy in **Philippians 3**. Did he perhaps see himself in the merchant of Jesus's parable? If so, what were the “*fine pearls*” he amassed before encountering the supreme preciousness of Christ? He provides a list: “*circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless*” (**Philippians 3:5–6**).

As a leader among the strictest sect of his religion, he had an unassailable pedigree (what he couldn't control, by birth) and performance (what he could, by effort). These were fine pearls indeed. Until he stumbled upon a Treasure who confronted him, knocked him off his horse, and opened his eyes. This was a Treasure that had been hidden from Paul, and yet one he had long been seeking. Now Paul saw Jesus as the one great Pearl of all-surpassing preciousness, and he counted all to be loss — both pedigree and performance — in view of “*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*” (**Philippians 3:8**). Jesus became to him both an infinitely priceless Treasure to *gain* and a supremely precious Pearl to *know*.

God, in all his divine goodness, took on flesh in this one man Jesus. “*In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (**Colossians 2:9**). Finding him as your one Precious will not poison and shrink your soul. He is the antidote to what ails us, the catalyst to expand our small hearts, the surprising remedy we've long been seeking.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/he-sold-all-his-pearls-for-one>

TEXT: Matthew 13:47-50

TITLE: GATHERING THE HARVEST OF THE KINGDOM (GOOD AND EVIL) –
PARABLE OF FISHERMAN'S DRAGNET

BIG IDEA:

THE FINAL JUDGMENT WILL SEPARATE OUT THE WICKED AND CONDEMN THEM TO ETERNAL SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION:

Stu Weber: Here, as in the parable of the weeds, we find the coexistence of evil alongside the righteous, the discarding and burning of the evil, and the treasuring and protection of the righteous. Again, the angels are the agents of judgment whom Jesus will use. The description of hell (**13:50**) is identical to that in **13:42**.

Charles Swindoll: The preachers of the gospel are not responsible for determining the genuineness of a person's faith in response to the gospel; they simply cast the net.

Ray Fowler: This is a **warning parable**. It is a clarion call to all who hear not to ignore or reject the call of Christ but to make every effort to enter God's kingdom while you still may. Yes, God allows evil and sin to continue in the world for now, but the **final judgment is coming** when God will judge all evil and sin, and those outside of God's kingdom will be punished for their sins. . .

So, there are quite a few similarities between the parable of the weeds and the parable of the net. The **main difference** between the two is a difference of emphasis. The parable of the weeds focuses more on the **co-existing** of good and evil in this present world, whereas the parable of the net focuses more on the **separation** of good and evil at the end of the age.

Donald Hagner: The final parable focuses again on the reality of an **eschatological separation** of the evil from the righteous and the judgment of the former at the end of the age. In the present era, the evil persons are allowed to live together with the righteous—in their midst—even within that manifestation of the kingdom known as the Church. The dragnet of the kingdom thus includes a **mixture of both good and evil**. That such circumstances could exist in the era of the kingdom itself was nothing less than **astonishing**—something indeed worth calling one of "*the mysteries of the kingdom*." That good and evil could be located within the net of the kingdom seemed equally strange, no doubt. Yet at the time of eschatological judgment an unavoidable separation would take place. At that time only the righteous—those who have received the kingdom with appropriate response in the form of discipleship—would survive; the evil would go to their punishment. Focus on judgment within the Church, of course, presupposes the wider context of the judgment of the world. Matthew never tires in warning his readers of the **reality of judgment** and hence the importance of genuine discipleship. It is a warning that both the world and the Church need.

Stanley Saunders: "*things new and things old*" mixes the categories, suggesting that Jesus is referring both to what is continuous with what came before (things old) and what is discontinuous (things new). Jesus himself embodies in his ministry both the fulfillment of

Israel's story and its turn toward a new reality, the kingdom of heaven. Discerning and preserving the relationship between these two is especially important given the ruptures, dislocations, and separations that Jesus' ministry is generating, including the division his parables produce.

Jacob Whitaker: The parable before us this morning, in many ways, **parallels the parable of the weeds** found just a few verses earlier. Some commentators believe that Matthew is using what's known as a **chiastic** literary style. What they mean is that Matthew is writing in a way that intends to help the reader better remember and grasp Jesus' teachings. This chiastic literary style simply means that Matthew recounts Jesus' parables using a certain pattern, **repeating** parables and teachings that coincide with one another.

And my point is that Matthew has a purpose in repeating himself, and Matthew has a purpose in his arrangement of the certain stories and teachings he includes, so when you see patterns of repetition within the Scriptures, the intent is typically to emphasize a point or to help the reader remember the point. Which may be the reason we see the Parable of the Net and the Parable of the Weeds repeating the same point twice within this chapter. . .

So on one hand we see Jesus' insistence that final judgement will come, but not now, instead it will come at the end of the age. Therefore, we also see that this means his kingdom, here on earth, throughout this age, will remain mixed with both believers and unbelievers . This is what his disciples are to expect, this is what they're to be prepared for going forward.

J. Ligon Duncan: The disciples, though they had expected the kingdom of Christ to clearly divide the righteous and the wicked, learned now that that division will not happen at the beginning of the kingdom, but at the end of the kingdom as the judgment day comes in. Jesus' order of priority for them, then, is proclamation now, perfect purity only then. They were to focus their attention on the proclamation and not expect the kingdom to be perfectly made up of only those who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur: Now some people have asked, "Why this parable is included if the basic idea of separation is even also included in the parable of the wheat and the tares?" And the answer to that is several things.

- Number one, it is repeated because the wheat and the tares emphasize particularly the co-existence. This emphasizes only the **separation**.
- It is repeated also because the Lord has a compassionate heart and He wants to add one more **warning**.

I. (:47) PREPARATION FOR FINAL JUDGMENT

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;"

S. Lewis Johnson: The last parable, I mention simply because it is very similar to the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat. But the stress is on the **consummation of the age**. Just as the first parable in the sowing of the seed, in the Lord Jesus as the sower suggests the beginning of the age, so the dragnet in which all of the contents of the nets are dragged to the shore suggests the last of the age, and this series of parables moves from the advent of the age to the conclusion. And the stress rests upon the large net cast only once and hauled to shore only once, and the

result is that the worldwide sweep of the present age, in the gathering out of the sons of the kingdom and sons of Satan is stressed.

Ray Fowler: The net was a common **image of judgment** in those days. For example, we read in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk: “*You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. 15 The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.*” (**Habakkuk 1:14-15**) Cf. **Ezek. 32:1-3**

John MacArthur: Now, what our Lord wants us to understand in this net is basically two things.

- One is the **immense size of the net**.
- And two, is the fact that **it brings in everything**, a conglomerate inclusive catch.

Now, once this has happened and the boat has moved through the sea, and this great vertical wall has swept up everything, living and dead. . .

And men live in this world imagining themselves to be free, moving about, fulfilling their own desires, going here and going there as they will, with little knowledge that the net comes closer and closer and closer. People float about in the liberty of the wide deep sea of life, not knowing the invisible lines of judgment move closer and closer and closer. And each time they are touched by it, they move a little further away. And they're touched again and they move a little further away.

II. (:48) PRESERVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS

“and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: The net (Greek *sagēnē*) was a large seine net (**Louw** and **Nida** I:55). This type of net hung on floats and was weighted at the bottom. The disciples, especially the fishermen of the group, were familiar with these nets and readily understood the imagery. This net **caught all varieties of fish**. Once the net was full, men working in boats or on shore dragged the net in and sorted the fish. God's net, here God's call to judgment, will gather every person and the angels will divide them into two groups (**Wilkins** 489), those who followed Jesus and those did not.

Jerry Shirley: Well in Bible days, there were 2 different kinds of nets used by fishermen. A **casting net** is small, bell shaped, and an individual could use it by himself. The other kind of net is a **drag-net**, and is much larger. In Bible days a drag-net could cover as much as 1 square mile of water surface area. A group of fishermen would spread out the drag-net between 2 boats and would drag it toward the shoreline. By the time they got the net to shore it would be filled with all sorts of sea creatures, and maybe a tire or license plate!

Men on the shore had the task of going thru the catch and separating the good from the bad. There were no game wardens and PETA was nowhere to be found...it was simply man having dominion over the earth and making a living. They would separate the useful from the useless, the edible from the bluegill! It was discrimination which led to separation.

This parable reveals to us tonight what God is doing among lost people today. The gospel of the kingdom involves two things: **invitation** and then **separation**.

The sea in the parable is representative of lost humanity. It's a sea of despair and hopelessness. It's a deep, dark abyss of iniquity.

John Schultz: The main stress in this story is on the future, when the net is pulled up on shore. This brings this parable in line with the parable of the weeds, in which everything is left until the time of the harvest. The pulling up of the net, when the world comes to its last day, is identical to the harvest. That makes this parable a worthy conclusion of the series, because it draws our gaze to the future to the goal to be reached. We still live in the days when the net is in the water, but the time will come when it is pulled ashore.

III. (:49-50) PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED

“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Ray Fowler: Notice the role of the angels in separating the wicked from the righteous at the end of the age. This agrees with Jesus' other teachings in the gospel of Matthew. For example Jesus says in **Matthew 24:31**: *“And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”* (Matthew 24:31)

Angels also appear in Jesus' teaching about the sheep and the goats in **Matthew 25**. We read in **Matthew 25:31-32**: *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”* (Matthew 25:31-32)

John Schultz: The Lord emphasizes again the **fate of the lost**. There is in this story not even any mention of the bliss of the saved, which we find in the parable of the weeds. We may conclude from this omission that the Lord intended this story to be a warning to those who did not want to repent. In our day, such an approach to evangelism would be highly unusual. This is probably due to the fact that we do not take seriously enough the being thrown into the fiery furnace and the gnashing of teeth; so we don't use those arguments. The fact that Jesus did it should give us food for thought.

Warren Wiersbe: The preaching of the gospel in the world does not convert the world. It is like a huge dragnet that gathers all kinds of fish, some good and some bad. The **professing church** today has in it both true and false believers (the parable of the tares) and good and bad. At the end of the age, God will separate the true believers from the false and the good from the bad. When Jesus Christ returns to earth to fight the battle of Armageddon (**Rev. 19:11ff.**), He will separate believers and unbelievers already on the earth. These are living people who are not a part of the church (which was already in heaven) or Israel. These Gentiles will be dealt with in righteousness: The saved will enter into the kingdom, but the unsaved will be cast into the furnace of fire. The same idea is found in the “sheep and goats” parable (**Matt. 25:32ff.**).

Twice in this series of parables Jesus used the phrase “*the end of the world*” (**Matt. 13:39, 49**). He was not referring to the end of this “church age,” because the truth about the church was not shared with the disciples until later (**Matt. 16:18**). The “age” He referred to is the **Jewish age** at the **close of the great tribulation** described in **Matthew 24:1–31** and **Revelation 6–19**. We

must be careful not to “read into” these passages in Matthew the truths later given through Paul and the other apostles.

John MacArthur: Fire is God’s way of describing [Hell] because it is a tortuous, unrelieved kind of fire, more terrible than any fire that we would ever know. But fire describes the torment of the damned; blackness describes the torment of the damned, no light, no light ever, ever. No relief from the suffering, the agony and the pain, forever. . .

Some people think it’s just bad memories. No, it isn’t just bad memories. It isn’t just the inner thinking processes; it is that body as well. Transcendent, eternal bodies, greater than anything we have on this earth, are going to be given to the damned so that they can suffer in those bodies forever. And that’s the only reason that they’ll have those bodies.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why don’t the wicked have any perception that they are being caught up in the dragnet of God’s imminent judgment?
- 2) Why does Jesus repeat this same type of warning as He had just delivered with the parable of the wheat and the tares?
- 3) Where else in the scriptures are angels involved in the process of the final judgment?
- 4) Are evangelical preachers today delivering sufficient warnings about the certainty and severity of eternal punishment in hell?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: Now in the parables of Matthew **chapter 13**, he has been demonstrating that he is the **lord of prophecy**. He is showing himself to be the one who **illuminates our age**, and these parables are certainly marvelously illuminating, giving us pictures of our age that enable us to understand the things that have been transpiring since the Lord Jesus was here. He has said, for example, that the **inter-advent period** – that is, the period between the first coming of our Lord and the second coming of our Lord – is a period in which seed sowing shall take place. Now, he means by that the **sowing of the seed of the word of God**. I have in my notes at that point, may it be expository! . . .

The second thing the Lord Jesus has been saying will characterize this age is that the god of this age, or Satan, will craftily intermingle his sons among the sons of the kingdom by a seed sowing of his own. Now, that means that means that while the word of God is being propounded and expounded, and men are the recipients of its message, **Satan will be sowing his seed** and there will be the sons of his seed manifest among the sons of the kingdom. . .

The Lord Jesus has also been telling us, by the Parable of the Mustard Seed, that **the outward form of the kingdom will develop from a lowly organism to a giant organization**, and surely we have seen that in this age. He has also said, in connection with that, that it would become a comfortable sphere for the operation of wicked spirits, and the very fact that men who proclaim these unbiblical have a hearing in our largest and most respected denominations is evidence of the fulfillment of the words our Lord has spoken.

He has also stated that **this mixed state within the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form, will continue to the end of the age**. And then, there will be a **final, separating judgment**, in which the Lord Jesus will eliminate from his kingdom the things that offend. He will send forth the angels, and they shall gather them out and all of those who do iniquity in order that as we enter into the visibly manifested kingdom of God upon the earth, the Messianic kingdom, all who enter it will be believing men.

Now this is a disturbing picture. But it is **true to history and experience**. And if it is a **disturbing picture**, it is also a **comforting picture**. And it is an **encouraging picture**. Do you know why? Because if our Lord Jesus has so beautifully expounded the trends that have manifested themselves in this age, it is a comforting and encouraging thing, therefore, to look into the future and know that the remainder of the things that he prophesies will also come to pass just as certainly.

Therefore, we look into the future not with pessimism, but we look into the future with **optimism**. We know the things that are going to transpire upon the earth, but we know the Lord Jesus controls the affairs of history, and he shall bring them to their glorious consummation. So everything is optimistic for the Christian as he looks toward the future.

R. T. France: At least 20 species of fish are found in the Lake of Galilee, most of which could be eaten, though some were more favored than others. The Levitical rule that only fish “*with fins and scales*” could be eaten (**Lev 11:9–12**) would have ruled out eels and possibly cat-fish (common in Galilee) because of their resemblance to snakes (cf. **7:10**). And of course some fish caught would be too small or diseased for human consumption. Hence the need to sort out the catch once landed. For “*of every kind*” cf. the weeds growing in with the wheat (**vv. 24–30**), and the inclusion of “*bad as well as good*” in the wedding feast (**22:10**). That the net is not pulled out of the lake until it is full is perhaps intended to emphasize, as in the parable of the weeds, that there will be no premature separation; it will wait until everything is ready in God’s good time.

D. A. Carson: Both the parable and its interpretation point to the **last judgment**. On the angels and the image of the fiery furnace, see comments at **vv.41–42**. But this does not mean that the parable and its interpretation are about the last judgment in the same way **25:1–13** (the ten virgins) and **25:31–46** (the sheep and the goats) are, the one warning of the need for readiness and the other establishing a basis for judgment. The focus here is on **the state of the kingdom when the judgment occurs**. Though it includes both the righteous and the wicked, a thorough sorting out will certainly take place.

Ray Stedman: The Case of the Great Dragnet

It is very important that we understand what Jesus means when he uses the term “*the close of the age*.” He is talking about a time which the prophets had specified would come at the close of the age of the Gentiles. Daniel said it would be seven years long and that during that time strange events would occur in human affairs. Jesus himself describes it in the twenty-fourth chapter of

the book of Matthew. He tells us that the close of the age will be recognizable because it will be a time of "*great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no and never will be,*" (**Matthew 24:21** KJV). You students of history know that there have been some terrible times in the past, but nothing like this. And it is during that last seven years of this present age, before our Lord returns in power and glory and with all his angels with him, as he himself describes, that this judgment takes place and **the angels separate the good from the bad. . .**

Weeping speaks of remorse and sorrow. *Gnashing of teeth* speaks of frustration and hostility and anger. It is all gathered up in the burning phrase "*the furnace of fire.*" I do not know fully what that means. And I do not like judgment any more than you do. I have always been uneasy whenever I have had to deal with these passages which speak of hell and judgment, of death and of the wrath of God. I do not like them because I don't like to think that God will have to do this one of these days. But I have been helped greatly by recognizing that, in the New Testament, the one who speaks most often and most solemnly about judgment and wrath and flames, etc., is Jesus himself. The One with the outstretched arms, with the compassionate heart, who longs to heal sick and wounded humanity, is the One who speaks also about the ultimate end of those who turn their backs and refuse the healing grace of God.

So we must live with this passage the way it is. Our Lord is simply indicating that the issue sharpens as we draw to the close of the age and that at the end it will no longer be possible to hide. As he himself said in another connection, "*That which is hidden shall be revealed. That which is spoken in closets shall be shouted from the housetops.*" That which has been hidden in obscurity and which we think we have gotten away with shall be exposed before the gaze of all. Nothing shall be hidden. Everything shall be uncovered. That is what this parable moves toward. <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/matthew/the-case-of-the-great-dragnet>

Keith Throop: Parable of the Dragnet

Notice a couple key differences between this earlier parable and the parable under consideration today:

- 1) Whereas the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares focuses upon the intervening time between Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom and the end of the age, during which both He and the devil are at work in the world, leading up to a final judgment, the focus of the Parable of the Dragnet is on the future judgment itself.
- 2) Whereas the Parable of the Wheat and the tares includes the destruction of the wicked, but lays stress in the end upon the way in which "*the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,*" thus emphasizing the promise of a glorious future for believers, the Parable of the Dragnet places the emphasis upon the destruction of the wicked.

So, the primary focus of this parable is the future and final judgment of the wicked.

<https://reformedbaptistblog.com/2014/01/03/parable-of-the-dragnet-matthew-1347-50-teaching-outline/>

TEXT: Matthew 13:51-52

TITLE: *SCHOOLING THE SCRIBES – COMPREHENSION AND COMMUNICATION*

BIG IDEA:

GOLD NUGGETS OF KINGDOM TRUTH INCLUDE BOTH NEW AND OLD REVELATION

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: The key here—indeed the key to the parables themselves—is the **combination of new and old**. The parables, like Jesus’ other teaching about the kingdom, involve old and familiar things but newly juxtaposed with new elements. In view are not merely new hermeneutical applications of the Torah in new situations, with which scribes have always concerned themselves, nor new applications of old sayings of Jesus (pace Schlatter; cf. **Schnackenburg**, “Jeder Schriftgelehrte”), but the relation of the Torah to the genuinely new reality of the kingdom of God (cf. **Mark 1:27**), the “*mysteries*” concerning the purposes of God, hidden from the beginning but now being made known (cf. **v 35**). The Christian scribe, trained in the kingdom and prepared to teach others, must be able to use old and new together to bring clarity and understanding to the message of the kingdom in its application to the present. The old things and the new things of the Christian scribe are both indispensable to the gospel. . .

If the Church carries on the work of the disciples, there is a sense in which not only Scripture scholars but every Christian must bring out of his or her storeroom both old things and new things, i.e., must represent a Christianity encompassing **both Testaments**.

Richard Gardner: Jesus concludes his parable discourse by raising again the issue of understanding (**v. 51**) and by telling a parable about the task of those who understand (**v. 52**). Like the parable of the sower, this parable talks about **communication**—and in fact forms an **inclusion** with **13:3-9**. The specific topic here is the **role of the scribe**, one who interprets God’s word for others (cf. the portrait of a scribe in Sirach 39:1-11, a portrait with which Matthew appears to be familiar). According to Matthew, there are scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven (the word for trained is related to the word for disciple), just as there were scribes in the Jewish community.

But who exactly does Matthew have in mind? In the broadest sense, every believer who studies and interprets the word is a scribe. In a narrower sense, scribe may refer to teachers who function like rabbis in Jesus’ community (cf. **23:34**). In this latter sense, Matthew may be alluding to himself as well, giving us a glimpse of the way he viewed his role as the writer of a Gospel.

William Hendriksen: By means of his question Jesus gives the disciples the opportunity to ask for more information about the kingdom, in case there should still be matters that are not clear to them. Their answer implies that, as they themselves see it, their insight has been immeasurably deepened.

Now to acknowledge gratefully that one’s mind has been enriched is wonderful. It is, however, not enough. What has been received must also be **imparted to others**. That is the duty and responsibility of the true scribe, as the Master now indicates.

John Schultz: It rather seems that the Lord's intention was to emphasize the **continuity** between the Old Testament and the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. But those who only hold on to the Old Covenant and go no farther, those who are teachers of the law but not disciples, will not be able to understand the **essence of the Kingdom**.

John Walvoord: It is rather obvious that they did not understand the parable, except in their general teachings. It would have required much more perspective, the clear revelation of the present age, and, to some extent, perspective of history, for them to have really understood these parables. At this time, they did not understand that there would be an age between the two advents. Christ did not challenge their assurance, however, but rather told them that if they were truly instructed in these truths, they would be able to bring out of their treasure house of truth things both new and old.

I. (:51) COMPREHENSION OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

“Have you understood all these things?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes.’ ”

D. A. Carson: This is the only place in this chapter where the disciples themselves are explicitly said to understand, and they say it by themselves. It is as wrong to say that Matthew has portrayed them as understanding everything as it is to say that they understood nothing. The truth lies between the extremes. The disciples certainly understood more than the crowds; on the other hand, they are shortly to be rebuked for their dullness (**15:16**). Like another positive response in this gospel, this one cannot be simply dismissed as presumptuous enthusiasm (as if they think they know everything when in fact they know nothing), nor taken at face value (as if their understanding were in fact mature).

J C Ryle: Personal application has been called the “soul” of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without a direction. It may be well-written, rightly dated, and duly signed. But it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application, “**Have ye understood?**” The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means. He might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed. Ideas must be received into his mind. He must carry off the seeds of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain. It is of great importance to see this point clearly. There is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship, and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them, when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year, as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen. Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to Church, not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, “What have I got from this sermon? what have I learned? what truths have been impressed on my mind?” Intellect, no doubt, is not everything in religion. But it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all.—The heart is unquestionably the main point. But we must never forget that the Holy Ghost generally reaches the heart through the mind.—Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers, are never likely to be converted.

II. (:52) COMMUNICATION OF BOTH OLD AND NEW

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.’”

Grant Osborne: The items that come out of the storehouse, which God has placed in the disciples, relate to the **kingdom truths** that are central throughout **ch. 13**. This is why the “*new*” is first. The new “mysteries” must first be understood by the disciples (and the later church) and then transmitted to the believing community. In other words, the disciples will understand and teach both the truths of the old covenant (cf. **5:17–20**) and the new covenant teachings of Jesus.

Stu Weber: It is important for Christians today to become familiar with both the Old and the New Testaments in order to reflect God's full revelation. The kingdom servant (and Christian disciple) is to be like the scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom—continually opening the treasures of both old and new.

R. T. France: the specific combination of “*things new and old*” may have a further nuance as a warning against neglecting the old in the excitement of having discovered the new—as indeed the imagery of the parables of the treasure and the pearl might suggest. The message of the kingdom of heaven does not wipe the slate clean, but rather brings **fulfillment** to what has gone before, as Jesus has been at pains to demonstrate in **5:17–48**. The “*old*” is not to be “*abolished*” (**5:17**), but to be judiciously integrated into the new perspective of the kingdom of heaven.

John Nolland: Here the disciples are allowed to occupy the role of scribes. As noted at **2:4**, scribes functioned as scholars of the law and as teachers, and also had a role in the administration of justice. In Matthew's story the disciples are being established as repositories of Jesus' teaching in order to prepare them for the teaching role of **28:19**. A judicial role will also become theirs (**16:19; 18:18; 19:28**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: The kingdom scribe possessed some truths of the kingdom of heaven from the O.T. and after hearing and believing the message of Jesus, he possessed more. All knowledge from his pre-kingdom past was not discarded. Rather, it remained useful and necessary information. See 5:17-48. With this, Jesus taught there is linkage between the Old and New Testaments. The trained kingdom scribe is able to understand the mysteries of the kingdom (**v. 11**) and “is able to maintain a balance between the **continuity** and the **discontinuity** existing between the era inaugurated by Jesus and that of the past” (**Hagner 33A:402**).

David Turner: When the disciples affirm their understanding, Jesus responds with what should be viewed as the eighth and final parable of **Matt. 13**, introduced with the characteristic formula “*is like*” (ὁμοίός ἐστιν, *homoios estin*; cf. **13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47**; **Carson 1985**). This parable is also about disciples of the kingdom, who are described as legal experts and likened to a homeowner (cf. **20:1; 21:33**) who brings both new and old things from his storeroom (cf. **12:35**). Jesus calls the disciples he has trained legal experts or scribes of the kingdom because their ministries will entail teaching the kingdom message as they draw upon what Jesus has taught them and teach their own disciples new truths tied to old truths (cf. **23:34; 5:17–48; 9:16–17; 11:11–13**).

Warren Wiersbe: When Jesus had completed this series of parables, He asked His disciples if they understood them, and they confidently replied, “*Yes, Lord.*” Understanding involves

responsibility. To explain this, the Lord added a final parable (**Matt. 13:51–52**) to remind them of their responsibilities.

They must be scribes who discover the truth. The scribes began as a noble group under the leadership of Ezra. Their purpose was to preserve the law, study it, and apply its truths to daily life. Over the years, their noble cause degenerated into a routine task of preserving traditions and man-made interpretations, and adding burdens to the lives of the people (**Luke 11:46–52**). They were so wrapped up in the past that they ignored the present! Instead of sharing living truth from God’s Word, they merchandised dead doctrines and “embalmed” traditions that could not help the people.

As believers, we do not search after truth, because we have truth in God’s Son (**John 14:6**) and God’s Word (**John 17:17**). We are taught by the Spirit of Truth (**John 16:13**) who is truth (**1 John 5:6**). We search into truth that we might discover more truth. We are scribes—students—who sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His words. One joy of the Christian life is the privilege of learning God’s truth from God’s Word. But we must not stop there.

They must be disciples who do the truth. “*Therefore every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven*” is a more accurate translation of **Matthew 13:52**. The scribe emphasizes learning, but the disciple emphasizes living. Disciples are doers of the Word (**James 1:22ff.**), and they learn by doing.

It is difficult to keep our lives balanced. We often emphasize learning at the expense of living. Or, we may get so busy serving God that we do not take time to listen to His Word. Every scribe must be a disciple, and every disciple must be a scribe.

They must be stewards who dispense the truth. The scribes preserved the law but did not invest it in the lives of the people. The treasure of the law was encrusted by man’s traditions. The seed was not planted so it could bear fruit. The “spiritual gold and silver” was not put to work so it could produce dividends. As Christians we should be conservative but not preservative.

The steward guards the treasure, but he also dispenses it as it is needed. He dispenses both the old and the new. New principles and insights are based on old truths. The new cannot contradict the old because the old comes out of the new (**Lev. 26:10**). The new without the old is mere novelty and will not last. But the old does no good unless it is given new applications in life today. We need both.

When Jesus finished these parables, He went across the sea in a storm and delivered the demoniacs in the country of the Gadarenes. Matthew recorded this in **8:28–34**. It was then that Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth, and this event Matthew recorded in **13:53–58**.

Two things amazed the people of Nazareth: the Lord’s words and His works. However, they did not trust in Him, and this limited His ministry. What caused the people to doubt Him? They were too familiar with Him in a human way, for He had grown up in their midst. It was a case of knowing Him after the flesh (see **2 Cor. 5:16**) and not having the spiritual discernment that God gives to those who will yield to Him (**Matt. 11:25–30**). These people walked by sight and not by faith.

But, if His own friends and family did not trust Him, what hope was there that the nation would

believe on Him? Early in His ministry, Jesus had preached at Nazareth (**Luke 4:16–31**) and had been rejected, and now He was rejected again. This was His final visit to Nazareth; those villagers had no more opportunities. Jesus would be known as “Jesus of Nazareth,” and His followers would be called “*Nazarenes*,” but Nazareth would not receive Him. Matthew chose this event as a fitting close to the section “**Rebellion against the King**.”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we overconfident regarding our understanding of God’s revelation?
- 2) How do we maintain the balance between continuity and discontinuity when it comes to God’s plan for the ages?
- 3) Are we actively engaged in learning divine truth just to build up our own knowledge or so we can apply the truth and impart that truth to others?
- 4) Can we afford to neglect the understanding of Old Testament revelation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Wilson: As we have seen, the tension between the old and the new, between continuity and separation, is one that has pervaded the entire discourse. This tension now comes to expression in the agency assigned by Jesus to the disciples in **13:52**, which can be interpreted as an extension of the commission he gave them in **chapter 10**, where the theme of separation (as well as the motif of the house/householder) also figured prominently. In contrast to the crowds, then, for the disciples, the parables represent instruction, specifically instruction in the realities of the kingdom. Moreover, the ability to understand Jesus’s teaching enables them to become teachers themselves, a role that Jesus authorizes here. This aspect of the disciples’ role will be critical when he gives them their final commission, in **28:18–20** (also with *μαθητεύω*). The reference to the disciples’ teaching as something that each of them brings out of his “*treasure*” brings to mind **13:44** (cf. **12:35**), which not only creates a thematic frame for **13:44–52** (binding the second triad of parables to the conclusion) but also suggests that, like the teaching of Jesus himself (**13:34–35**), the teaching of the disciples communicates “*hidden*” realities (cf. **10:26–27**).

Charles Swindoll: At the conclusion of this string of parables, Jesus didn’t just drop the mic and walk off the stage, as it were. He cared that His disciples understood what He had been teaching them. In fact, **Matthew 13:51-52** could be paraphrased, “Get it?” “Got it!” “Good.” Remember, Jesus was still in the house with His disciples. They were the ones who had heard the parables about the treasure in the field, the priceless pearl, and the dragnet. He wanted to make sure they “*understood all these things*” (**13:51**). A great teacher always gets feedback from His students to make sure they’ve “got it.” They had.

D. A. Carson: The point of comparison becomes clearer when we remember that a *grammateus* (“*scribe*,” GK 1208) in Jesus’ day might refer not only to rabbinic, Pharisaic scribes, who were

theological interpreters of the Scriptures capable of rendering *halakic* decisions (rules for conduct), but to **apocalyptic scribes**. This is central to the thesis of **David E. Orton** (*The Understanding Scribe*). Matthew does not reject all “*scribes*” (NIV, “*teachers of the law*”) but only those from the rabbinic/Pharisaic matrix. **Orton**’s extended discussion (pp. 65–120) shows how “apocalyptic” scribes—scribes in the apocalyptic tradition—were devoted to understanding and interpreting hard sayings, dark sayings, apocalyptic sayings. Indeed, parables were part of their focus (cf. Sir 39:1–3). Since Jesus’ disciples have now understood his parables, they can legitimately be called “*scribes*” themselves, as can all of his disciples with similar understanding. Jesus adds an explanatory expression: the scribe with whom he is concerned *mathēteutheis tē basileia tōn ouranōn* (“*has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven*”). Whether the verbal form is construed as deponent (“*has become a disciple*”) or strictly passive (“*has been made a disciple*”), it is not at all clear that the dative expression means “*about the kingdom of heaven*”; in the one NT passage with similar construction (**27:57**), Joseph of Arimathea had become a disciple of Jesus, not about Jesus. By analogy, the scribes in this verse have become **disciples of the kingdom of heaven**.

If the preceding exegetical observations are correct, the **points of comparison** in the parable are two. The emphasis in the first part of the verse rests, not on the supposition that the scribe has been instructed about the kingdom and therefore understands, but that **he has become a disciple of the kingdom and therefore his allegiance has been transformed**. It is with such a person as with “*the owner of a house*”—a discipled scribe brings out of his storeroom new things and old.

The *thēsauros* (“*storeroom*,” GK 2565) so regularly stands for a man’s “heart,” its wealth and cherished values, that we must understand the discipled scribe to be bringing things out of his heart—out of his understanding, personality, and very being. What he brings out are *kaina kai palaia*, not “*new things as well as old*” (NIV), which suggests the new things have been added to the old, but “*new things and old things*”—a subtle touch that reminds the alert reader that in Matthew the gospel of the kingdom, though new, takes precedence over the old revelation and is its fulfillment (cf. **5:17–20**). The new is not added to the old; there is but one revelation, and its focus is the “*new*” that has fulfilled and thereby renewed the old, which has thereby become new (**Bonnard**). Thus the OT promises of Messiah and kingdom, as well as OT law and piety, have found their **fulfillment** in Jesus’ person, teaching, and kingdom, and the scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom now brings out of himself deep understanding of these things and their transformed perspective affecting all of life.

But the order is of great importance. **The parable shows that a discipled scribe has this understanding, not that understanding generates discipleship**. This conforms perfectly to the chapter’s structure. The disciples are not defined as having understanding but are described as having been given revelation and understanding (**vv.11–12**). When the disciples ask for an explanation, they are given it (**vv.36–43**) and thus claim some measure of understanding (**v.51**). “*Therefore*” (**v.52**) a discipled scribe is like, etc. Discipleship to Jesus, recognition of the revelation he is and brings, and submission to the reign he inaugurates and promises are necessary prerequisites to understanding and bringing out from oneself the rich treasures of the kingdom.

But there is a second point of comparison in the parable. The last one could have been made by stressing discipleship but omitting any reference to scribes. Scribes were “*teachers of the Scriptures*.” If they are likened to the owner of a house who brings treasures out of his storeroom, the further implication is unavoidable: they are not bringing forth things new and old

for purely private or personal reasons but in their capacity as teachers. Jesus' disciples claim they have understood what he has been teaching. "Therefore," he responds, "disciplined teachers of the Scriptures, if they have understood, must themselves bring out of their storeroom the treasures now theirs so as to teach others (cf. Trotter, "Understanding and Stumbling"). Implicitly this serves as "a warning against neglecting the old in the excitement of having discovered the new—as indeed the imagery of the parables of the treasure and the pearl might suggest" (France [NICNT]).

This interpretation admirably fits in with three other Matthean themes.

1. The disciples have a major responsibility in evangelizing and making disciples, both during Jesus' ministry (**ch. 10**) and after his departure (**28:18–20**).
2. In the latter instance, they are told to "*disciple*" the nations and teach them everything Jesus has commanded them: i.e., the focus of their mission is Jesus and the revelation—the new "fulfillment" revelation—he has brought.
3. This interpretation, which places some teaching responsibility on the disciples, also fits the purpose of the parables described in the comments at **vv.12–17, 34–35**. Indeed, part of the reason for private instruction may again be linked to the place of Jesus' earthly ministry in redemptive history, for what he tells his disciples in secret they are to proclaim from the rooftops (**10:27**). Jesus explains the parables to his disciples in private; they are to bring out of their treasure rooms "*new things and old*." Thus they are to understand the antecedent Scriptures correctly and show how they point to Jesus the Messiah and the dawning of the promised kingdom.

If this interpretation of **v.52** is correct, then though "*disciples*" in this chapter most probably refers to the Twelve, they **epitomize the church** to come. In that event, "*disciples*" does not refer to a special group of "*teachers of the law*" within Matthew's community (see comments at **23:34**) but to those who by Matthew's day were called Christians. Just as they have been aligned with prophets and righteous men from past ages (e.g., **5:11–12; 10:41**), so are they aligned with "*teachers of the law*." In fact, only Jesus' "*disciples*" are able to bring forth new things and old; the Jewish teachers of the law could bring forth only the old.

John MacArthur: In fact, you could translate it, "You are now disciplined, biblical scholars and teachers." That's what a scribe was, really. He was a student, an interpreter, a transmitter of Scripture, he was known as a theologian, a lawyer and a teacher and preacher. They were members of the Sanhedrin. They were acknowledged authorities on the Old Testament and tradition. They were called Rabbi. They were influential.

And He's saying, "I've done the same to you, just like the Jews do with their scribes, I've disciplined you, I've made you into disciplined, biblical scholars and teachers. And now, here's what you're like –" **verse 52** – "*You're like a man who is the head of a house who brings out of his storehouse things new and old.*"

What do you mean? They knew the Old Testament and now they had heard the mysteries of the kingdom. They knew the old covenant truth and the dawn of the new covenant was coming upon them. They could not only tell them about the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, but they could dispense the new mysteries of the kingdom, right? They were one up on the scribes. All the scribes had was the old stuff, the old stuff, the old stuff.

But He says, “You’re the householder who has the old and the new and in perfect balance. God called you, and trained you, and prepared you to spread it out.” That’s an interesting verb that’s used there, it says the man who is a head of a house brings forth. It literally means to fling out, or to scatter abroad.

In other words, you’ve got all this treasure now, **fling it out**. It talks about liberality and richness. There’s a lot there. Now that you’ve been discipled and now that you are trained biblical scholars and teachers, fling it out. Give them the Old and the New in perfect balance, that which God said in the past and that which is new in the form of the kingdom.

TEXT: Matthew 13:53-58

TITLE: NO HOME COURT ADVANTAGE FOR PROPHETS – JUST REJECTION

BIG IDEA:

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT IN JESUS' HOME TOWN OF NAZARETH – THOSE CLOSEST TO US RESPOND IN HURTFUL REJECTION AND UNBELIEF

INTRODUCTION:

Jeffrey Crabtree: Verse 53 brings the kingdom parables to an end and marks the end of Matthew's third major block of teaching materials (cf. 7:28; 11:1). This verse also introduces the next section. The following verses document Jesus' continuing ministry in the midst of increasing resistance against Himself and His message.

Richard Gardner: The two stories that comprise 13:53 - 14:12 come from Mark 6:1-6 and Mark 6:14-29. (Matthew has already used the intervening material in Mark 6:7-13 in the mission discourse.) What we have in these accounts is a two-panel unit on the **fate of prophets**. Panel 1 features Jesus' rejection in Nazareth, and panel 2 reports the beheading of John the Baptist in Herod's court. Linking the two stories and the two figures is the fact that both Jesus and John are identified as prophets (13:57; 14:5); the note that Jesus' powers evoke memories of John (14:1-2); and the reader's awareness that Jesus' rejection will lead to a fate similar to John's (cf. 17:9-13).

OUTLINE

- Jesus in His Hometown, 13:53-58
- John in Herod's Court, 14:1-12

Donald Hagner: The passage is thus structured in the following sequence:

- (1) concluding formula and transition (v 53);
- (2) the teaching of Jesus in Nazareth (v 54a);
- (3) the response and questions of the people (v 54b-57a);
- (4) the response of Jesus in a proverbial logion (v 57b); and
- (5) comment on the resultant paucity of miracles (v 58).

The five successive questions in (3) are particularly notable, especially the parallelism of the first and fifth (πόθεν τούτω, lit. "*whence to this one*"); the three center questions have to do with Jesus' family. Just before the questions is the reference to the crowds being "*amazed*" (ἐκπλήσσεσθαι); just after is the reference to their being "*scandalized*" (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο). The references to πατρίς, "*home town*," in vv 54 and 57 unify the passage. These correspondences thus reflect a **chiastic structure**.

R. T. France: This is Jesus' only recorded **return to Nazareth** after his public ministry began down by the lake. Luke 4:16-30 tells the story at length and in a more dramatic form, culminating in an attempt on Jesus' life; he has moved it out of its natural place in the narrative⁴ in order to use it as a "frontispiece" for his account of the Galilean ministry. But in Matthew and Mark it fits more naturally, with reports already having reached Nazareth of the "wisdom and miracles" which Jesus has been displaying down in the lakeside area and beyond. He comes back to them now as the "local boy made good," and they react with the predictable scepticism of a

small village community. Nazareth apparently joins Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (11:20–24) in the inglorious roll of the communities which failed to repent despite the evidence of the miracles.

David Turner: Jesus’s rejection in Nazareth provides a sad yet fitting introduction to the narrative block 13:53 – 17:27. Jesus has made it clear that the message and messengers of his kingdom will often be rejected (cf. 5:10–12; 10:14–39; 11:12; 12:2). This rejection begins with Jesus himself (cf. 5:11; 8:34; 9:3, 11, 34; 11:19–24; 12:10, 14, 24–45) and includes even his hometown, Nazareth (cf. 2:23; 4:13; 21:11; 26:71; John 1:45; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 24:5; 26:9), which he left for Capernaum to begin his ministry (Matt. 4:13). Chiastic analysis of this pericope has merit, since the pericope begins and ends with references to Jesus’s hometown (πατρίς, *patris*, 13:54, 57) and focuses in its center on the cynical questions from the Nazarenes (13:54c–56).

Leon Morris: Although Matthew has not tried to disguise the fact that there was some opposition to Jesus from the first, his book so far has been mostly concerned with the wonderful teaching of Jesus and with the way people flocked around him to hear him teach and to see the miracles he did. But this did not last. Matthew now makes it clear that the opposition grew. There were still faithful and loyal followers, but in these chapters he tells us of people who failed to respond in the right way. We see the opposition growing and becoming increasingly bitter; in time it would lead to the cross. Matthew begins with two stories of rejection: the rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth and the rejection of John the Baptist, slain at the hands of Herod. These two stories make a fitting introduction to the next section of this Evangelist’s narrative.

(:53) TRANSITION

*“And it came about that when Jesus had finished these parables,
He departed from there.”*

John Nolland: ‘*It so happened that when Jesus had finished*’ repeats language that Matthew has already used in 7:28 – 8:1 and 11:1 to mark the conclusion of major blocks of teaching in the Gospel. The language will serve the same role in 19:1; 26:1.

I. (:54-56) REJECTION IS HURTFUL

A. (:54a) Home Town Ministry Creates a Buzz

1. Return to Nazareth to Teach in the Synagogue

“And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue,”

Grant Osborne: Here Jesus leaves the area around Capernaum and returns to his hometown of Nazareth, about fifteen miles west of the southern tip of the lake.

Charles Swindoll: The journey to Nazareth would have taken two full days on foot. And the trek would have taken Jesus southwest about 40 miles uphill!

Richard Gardner: Nazareth is implied (cf. 2:23; 4:12-13), but the vagueness of the language in the Greek text (literally *his native place*) lets the story that follows typify Israel as a whole (cf. v. 57).

Donald Hagner: Jesus had left Nazareth after the arrest of John the Baptist, moving to Capernaum (cf. **4:13**). Although there are indications of a wide ministry (e.g., **9:35; 11:1**), the narratives focus on Capernaum and the area around the Sea of Galilee (**14:13** assumes his return to this area). At this point in the narrative, however, Jesus returns to his πατρίδα, “home town” (the word can mean “home country” or “home territory,” but the context suggests “home town”), and teaches (ἐδίδασκεν, “was teaching,” i.e., for some time, or less probably inceptive, “began to teach”) “in their synagogue” (ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν), probably the very place in which he had worshiped as a young man before embarking on his ministry. Although no attention is given to the emotions of Jesus, this must have been a particularly momentous occasion for him. Here τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν, “their synagogue,” is not, as elsewhere (**4:23**), the synagogue of the Jews, thus reflecting a break with Judaism (contra Luz), but merely **the synagogue of the people of Nazareth**.

R. T. France: This synagogue visit does not evoke a welcoming response, and from this point on we shall hear no more of Jesus teaching in synagogues.

2. Response of Astonishment

“so that they became astonished, and said,”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Their reaction at first was **surprise**. They knew him. He had lived there most of His life. His teaching ability, and probably the subject matter as well (**Evans**, Matthew 284), caught them by surprise (cf. **7:28; Lk. 4:24; Is. 50:4**). They knew Jesus had not formally studied under recognized rabbis. How did He know so much about the kingdom? What right did He have to preach the arrival of the kingdom of heaven or call them to repentance?

His healing miracles also surprised them (**Mk. 6:5**). They wondered how He was able to perform miracles. Compare this with the Pharisees’ doubts and comments in **12:24**. They too questioned the source of His power (**Osborne** 550).

A. T. Robertson: What the people of Nazareth could not comprehend was how one with the origin and environment of Jesus here in Nazareth could possess the wisdom which he appeared to have in his teaching . . . It was unpardonable for Jesus not to be commonplace like themselves.

B. (:54b-56) Hearts of Skepticism Instead of Faith

Walter Wilson: Between the two πόθεν questions (**13:54c, 56b**) are three οὐχ(ί) questions (**13:55a, 55b, 56a**) that bring up the matter of **Jesus’s family ties**.

1. (:54b) Key Issue = Source of Wisdom and Power

“Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers?”

John Nolland: The Pharisees have already raised the question of where it all comes from in **9:34; 12:23**, and answered in terms of power from the evil one.

Donald Hagner: Their amazement, however, did not move them to faith but instead provoked skepticism. Their initial question, to be sure, expresses a degree of wonder and, finding no obvious answer, testifies inadvertently to the unique reality and authority represented by Jesus and his message.

2. (:55-56a) Depracating Questions Due to Familiarity with Jesus' Family

- a. (:55a) Tone of Deprecation Regarding Jesus' Father
"Is not this the carpenter's son?"

David Turner: Joseph is traditionally viewed as a carpenter, but the word τέκτων (*tektōn*; cf. **Mark 6:3**) means simply "builder," and in ancient Galilee this would likely entail **working with stone** (BDAG 995; **K. M. Campbell** 2005).

- b. (:55b) Tone of Deprecation Regarding Jesus' Mother
"Is not His mother called Mary,"
- c. (:55c) Tone of Deprecation Regarding Jesus' Brothers
"and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"

Craig Blomberg: Though they do not yet support him, James and Jude (the abbreviated form of Judas) will later distinguish themselves as Christian leaders (on James, see **Acts 15:1-29**) and as writers of inspired epistles. Only here does Matthew indicate that Jesus had an unspecified number of sisters as well.

- d. (:56a) Tone of Deprecation Regarding Jesus' Sisters
"And His sisters, are they not all with us?"

3. (:56b) Key Issue Repeated

"Where then did this man get all these things?"

Donald Hagner: The point is the same: Jesus and his family are well known. And thus the initial question is repeated: "How did all of these things [ταῦτα πάντα] come to this man?" Although that question remains unanswered, it is clear from the following statement that they found it intolerable that Jesus spoke as he did with the undeniable implication of his own self-importance.

Walter Wilson: Specifically, it appears that the townspeople have interpreted Jesus's words and actions as a claim to a form of honor inconsistent with their estimation of his status, an estimation based on their understanding of his kinship ties. It may also be based on their estimation of Joseph's occupation, insofar as manual laborers were sometimes disparaged for their lack of wisdom, as in Sir 38:24-27 (also with τέκτων).

II. (:57) REJECTION SHOULD BE ANTICIPATED

A. Hardened Opposition

"And they took offense at Him."

D. A. Carson: "They took offense at him" (*eskandalizonto en autō*), i.e., found in him obstacles to faith, even though the biggest obstacles were in their own hearts. It is sad that every time in the NT somebody is "scandalized" by someone, that someone is Jesus (see **TDNT**, 7:349; cf. **11:6; 26:31, 33; Mk 6:3; Lk 7:23**).

Robert Gundry: The townspeople's taking offense at Jesus displays their lack of understanding: they understand neither the source of Jesus' wisdom and miracles nor the identity of his true

family. Since to take offense means to fall into a trap, lack of understanding has trapped the townspeople in unbelief.

B. Honor Not Given

“But Jesus said to them,

‘A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household.’”

Craig Blomberg: Throughout Christian history many of Jesus' followers have experienced the truth of this teaching: those who have known them best from an early age on are often least willing to accept them as spiritually gifted or empowered.

III. (:58) REJECTION RESTRICTS PRIVILEGE

A. Withholding Miracles

“And He did not do many miracles there”

Richard Gardner: The unbelief that denies honor to Jesus denies something to Nazareth as well (v. 58). It leads Jesus to restrict his ministry there, so that the people get only a smattering of all that Jesus has to give.

Charles Swindoll: As a result of their unbelief, Jesus did few miracles in Nazareth. On the one hand, we can look at this as an act of judgment – their rejection of Jesus would mean that their sick and oppressed would not receive the blessings of healing and deliverance. On the other hand, this withholding of miracles can be interpreted as an act of mercy toward the people of his hometown – the greater the revelation of Jesus' power and majesty, the greater the guilt for their rejection of Him as the long-awaited Messiah.

B. Warning against Unbelief

“because of their unbelief.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus responded to their rejection with a proverbial saying that means much the same as “over familiarity breeds contempt” (v. 57). This saying is repeated in **John 4:44**, but there it evidently refers to His rejection by the whole of Galilee (**Carson**, John 236). Even though those who knew Him best as brother, neighbor, friend, or business acquaintance in Nazareth rejected Him, still Jesus claimed to be a prophet. As such, He deserved their honor (**Hendriksen** 582).

Not only did the general population of Nazareth reject Him so did His siblings (“*in his own house*”). They did not believe in Him until after His resurrection. Luke mentioned that His mother and brothers were in the upper room as part of the one hundred and twenty (**Acts 1:14**). Jesus appeared to James (**1 Cor. 15:7**), who eventually became a key leader in the Jerusalem church (**Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12**) and authored the N.T. book that bears his name (**Jas. 1:1**). Jude (Judas), who identified himself as James' brother (**Jude 1**), also later wrote a short letter that bears his name. Nothing specific is known of the other brothers or sisters. One might suspect that given their stage in life as young adults, the sisters might have had family responsibilities that kept them from being in Jerusalem with the others on Pentecost.

Unbelief was the problem (v. 58) in Nazareth and this unbelief was their own choosing (**Mk. 6:6**). According to Mark, Jesus marveled at the unbelief of His family and acquaintances even as

He had marveled at the faith of the centurion (**Mt. 8:10**). The result of such unbelief was few healings and no recorded kingdom conversions. Unbelief kept Him from helping the needy. Unbelief also kept His family and acquaintances from gaining understanding of His message and joining His kingdom (**vv. 13-15**). What sad days! Those who had the greatest light will receive the harshest judgment (**11:20-24**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it difficult for our own family members to recognize and appreciate our spiritual gifts?
- 2) When we have the privilege of being exposed to so much good exegetical teaching, how is it possible for familiarity to lead us to take truth for granted?
- 3) Why didn't Jesus use miracles to try to turn around their unbelief?
- 4) Why is it sometimes the most difficult to evangelize the people who know us the best?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Exegetical Outline

I. Jesus' Return to Nazareth (13:54b)

- A. His purpose: to teach
- B. Their reaction: astonishment

II. The Response of the People (13:54c–57a)

- A. Their questions (**vv. 54c–56**)
 1. Two “where” questions on the source of his wisdom and deeds
 2. Three “is not” questions regarding his family
- B. Result—scandalized (**v. 57a**)

III. The Response of Jesus (13:57b–58)

- A. In word—a prophet without honor (**v. 57b**)
- B. In deed—few miracles (**v. 58**)

Familiarity Breeds Contempt:

The people among whom Jesus grew up expected him to remain the village carpenter. In that society there was virtually zero socioeconomic mobility, and everyone spent their lives in the occupation their fathers and grandfathers handed down to them. While it is true that many prophets came from similar peasant backgrounds, they too were rejected by their former friends. The Jewish people in general also tried to force Jesus into their narrow expectations of what a Messiah should be (i.e., both a faithful practitioner of the written and oral Torah and a political conqueror). When Jesus refused to fit their preconceptions, they also turned on him. In fact, this

prepares for the next section, where John's death at the hands of Herod foreshadows Jesus' death at the hands of the Jewish leaders.

Donald Hagner: The primary mistake of the people of Nazareth was their automatic limitation of Jesus to the familiar framework in which they had previously known him. This made them unable to evaluate Jesus in terms of his message and deeds. It made impossible a fair consideration of who Jesus was and what he had come to offer. **Familiarity with Jesus** became a **liability**, since he was thereby forced into a preconceived framework. In this respect outsiders have a distinct advantage. If we widen the scope of this observation, it can be seen again clearly in one of the major transitions of the Gospel: the transition of the kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles. For it is just this kind of familiarity and set of preconceptions that have been responsible for Jewish unbelief in the gospel, and the lack of the same may have made the Gentiles more objective in their understanding and thus more receptive of the good news of the kingdom. This is a generalization, of course, but it may be true more often than not that familiarity and all that goes with it do not dispose people to see what is really before their eyes. But tragically the central mysteries of the gospel, the Messiah who suffers death on the cross and the centrality of that death to the realization of the kingdom, violated Jewish preconceptions and thus prohibited their reception of the gospel (cf. **Rom 9:32–33**).

David Turner: Unbelief is always sad, but here it is especially pathetic. **Matthew 12:46–50** and **13:54–58** bracket the parabolic discourse by relativizing familial and social relationships (**W. Davies** and **Allison** 1991: 461). Jesus, like most people who return home, arrives with memories and acquaintances. But his fellow residents of Nazareth refuse to accept his kingdom mission because they remember his humble beginnings. Perhaps there is an element of **jealousy** in their unbelief. But they are not merely quibbling over the anomaly of Jesus's humble roots and his powerful ministry; they are **rejecting God's saving rule**.

Warren Wiersbe: Two things amazed the people of Nazareth: the Lord's words and his works. However, they did not trust in Him, and this limited His ministry. What caused the people to doubt Him? They were too familiar with Him in a human way, for He had grown up in their midst. It was a case of knowing Him after the flesh (see **2 Cor. 5:16**) and not having the spiritual discernment that God gives to those who will yield to Him (**Matt. 11:25-30**). These people walked by sight and not by faith.

But if His own friends and family did not trust Him, what hope was there that the nation would believe on Him? Early in His ministry, Jesus had preached at Nazareth (**Luke 4:16-31**) and had been rejected, and now He was rejected again. This was His final visit to Nazareth; those villagers had no more opportunities. Jesus would be known as "*Jesus of Nazareth*," and His followers would be called "*Nazarenes*," but Nazareth would not receive Him.

J. Ligon Duncan: No Honor in Nazareth

When we come to Matthew, verses 53 to 58, we come to a turning point in Matthew's presentation of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is at this point that the indifference which had characterized some who had heard the Lord Jesus turns into open opposition to His gospel preaching. There had always been some who were indifferent and even hostile to what the Lord Jesus was teaching and preaching. Now, however, the crowds in general are befuddled and opposed to what Jesus is saying. . .

- I. Even people who saw Jesus perform miracles reject Him as Messiah and Savior.**
- II. Familiarity breeds contempt.**
- III. Unbelief is a poison.**

Jon Courson: Unbelief: Its Cause and Cure

Unbelief is hazardous to your health. In this passage, we see it affecting people in three ways:

I. Unbelief Blinds Your Eyes

II. Unbelief Poisons Our Hearts

Unbelief not only blinds our eyes, which resulted in skepticism, but poisons our hearts, which resulted in cynicism . . .

III. Unbelief Robs You of Your Joy – leading to bitterness

https://img.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/article_pdf.php?aid=24487

Brother Rory: The Power of Unbelief

For we are about to embark on truth being presented to 8 different groups or individuals.

- 1) His Hometown (**13:53-58**)
- 2) Herod (**14:1-12**)
- 3) The 5,000 (**14:13-21**)
- 4) The disciples (**14:22-33**)
- 5) The Jerusalem Scribes and Pharisees (**15:1-20**)
- 6) The Canaanite Woman (**15:21-28**)
- 7) The 4,000 (**15:29-39**)
- 8) The Pharisees and Sadducees (**16:1-4**)

And of all of those 8 opportunities only two will prove to be successful.
Only the disciples and the Canaanite woman exercise true faith in Christ.
The rest all reject.

Some are certainly hard soil, some rocky, and some weedy,
But all end up rejecting Christ.

And Matthew's point is validated that it is not the fault of the seed
And it is not the fault of the sower, but is **the fault of the soil**.

I. They Saw (13:54a)

*“He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue,
so that they were astonished”*

II. They Speculated (13:54b-56)

III. They Stumbled (13:57)

“And they took offense at Him”

IV. They Suffered (13:58)

“He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.”

TEXT: Matthew 14:1-12

TITLE: *THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST – SPEAKING TRUTH TO DEPRAVED POWER CAN COST YOU DEARLY*

BIG IDEA:

DEPRAVED POWER COWERS IN FEAR, CONCEALS A GUILTY CONSCIENCE AND COMPLIES WITH MANIPULATIVE SCHEMES

INTRODUCTION:

Van Parunak: Now we enter the third subsection of the Proclamation section. Having documented the **opposition** and presented the **choice** that is to be made, Matthew sets off the section with two episodes.

- In the first, King Herod kills John the Baptist, the one who introduced the Lord.
- In the last, Peter confesses our Lord, John's most famous disciple, as the Son of God.

We must remember that "*Son of God*" throughout the OT is the title assigned to the promised royal Son of David. Taken together, these two episodes remind us: **the kings of this world will try to stamp out God's purpose to set up his kingdom, but the true king has arrived and is recognized by his own people**. The material between these bookends reminds us of the preparation in **ch. 4-11** and the rejection in **ch. 12-13**. In particular, we have two sections of miracles and boat rides that remind us of the evidence collected in **ch. 8-9**, evidence that our Lord cited to John the Baptist when he sent early in **ch. 11** to ask whether Jesus were in fact the promised Messiah. These alternate with two sections of Pharisaic rejection that recall **ch. 12**. The first of these includes a reference to the Gentiles, which was the centerpiece of the rejections in **ch. 12**.

Charles Swindoll: The story begins with a birthday party, involves a sexually provocative dance, turns on the strangest of all birthday gifts, and ends with the senseless beheading of a godly prophet by order of a lustful, creepy king. From the prominent figure in this story we can learn some valuable lessons about folly and sin – and their terrible consequences.

Walter Wilson: The question of **Jesus's identity** (a major theme for much of chapters 11–16) is raised yet again, this time through the words of a new character, Herod Antipas, who responds to reports about Jesus and his miraculous powers with speculation that Jesus is in fact John the Baptist raised from the dead. That Herod would have reason to feel anxious about such an eventuality is shown by the following scene, which serves as both a digression and a flashback within the narrative. The audience watches as Herod has John imprisoned (cf. **4:12**), learning that he did so because John had condemned Herod for marrying his brother's wife. Although Herod initially refrained from executing John (on account of his fear of the people), at a banquet for his birthday a pair of women within his own household manipulate him into doing so. The description of the banquet itself, meanwhile, further illustrates the depravity as well as the viciousness of those who oppose the kingdom of God. The scene concludes with an explanation of how John's disciples buried his body and reported to Jesus what had happened. . .

The **characterization of Herod** in **14:1–12** is familiar against this background,

- his behavior being guided by fear (**14:5**),
- recklessness (**14:7**),

- grief (14:9), and
- inappropriate desires, both for Herodias (14:3) and her daughter (14:6),
- his relationship with the former entailing an impious disregard for the law (14:4).

He hosts a depraved and gruesome banquet, during which he has John executed without due process. Worst of all, he yields his agency to a pair of women from his own household. In all these respects, he contrasts both with the fearless, ascetic John and with the true king, Jesus.

Grant Osborne: Herod represents the leaders of Israel both in his false understanding of Jesus and in his persecution and murder of God’s messengers—in this case, John the Baptist. At the same time, John represents Jesus in his bold proclamation and willingness to suffer the consequences and also in his arrest and martyrdom at the hand of God’s enemies. So this intensifies the rejection of **13:54–58** and demonstrates how far that rejection will go, namely, to death. . .

A major theme in this unit is the striking parallels between the death of John and that of Jesus (cf. **17:11–13**). **Davies** and **Allison** calls it a “**christological parable.**” John was the messianic forerunner, and that means that he was also the forerunner of messianic suffering and death.

R. T. France: The careful reader of Matthew might reflect on the contrast between this degenerate scene of Antipas’ lavish feast with its sordid and tragic outcome and the wholesome simplicity of the “*feast*” which will follow in vv. **13–21**.

I. (:1-2) COWERING IN FEAR -- MIRACLES OF JESUS MISAPPLIED TO THE GHOST OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

A. (:1) Herod Hears of the Ministry of Jesus

“At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus,”

David Thompson: Now I carefully want us to observe the opening prepositional phrase of **verse 1** -- “*at that time.*” This has some far-reaching ramifications. At the time when Jesus Christ had taught and had done so many wonderful miracles and His reputation was widely spread and He had been nationally rejected, including being rejected by those from His hometown, we then come to this part of the narrative which deals with the murder of John the Baptist.

Dispensationally, Christ had just given a series of parables which demonstrated that He was going to leave and things on earth were going to become evil. Christ wants to show that God’s true servants will not be loved at this time; in fact, they will be hated, persecuted, and at times even killed. The evil will escalate.

ONE WHO STANDS FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD AND PROCLAIMS THE TRUTH OF GOD WILL BE HATED AND THERE WILL BE THOSE WHO WANT HIM DESTROYED.

When real righteousness is preached, it is not embraced by the majority of people. It offends most people and they want to destroy the one who is proclaiming that which is true and righteous.

Jeffrey Crabtree: This Herod was **Herod Antipas**, a son of King Herod the Great (**2:1**). Among his siblings were a full brother Archelaus and three half-brothers, Aristobulus and two named Philip (**2:22**; ISBE II:693-694). Herodias, the daughter of Aristobulus, married one Philip (**Mt. 14:3**) and their daughter, Salome, married the other Philip, Philip the Tetrarch (**Lk. 3:1**). Herod

Antipas divorced his first wife and Herodias divorced Philip in order to marry each other (A.D. 27). Thus, both husbands of Herodias were her uncles. John the Baptist publicly denounced this marriage and made these two his enemies. . .

Jesus had very little respect for Herod Antipas and no fear. He would not run from Herod because He still had ministry to complete (**Lk. 13:31-32**). Jesus called Herod a “fox” and refused to be intimidated by his sly, nocturnal ways. At His own trial Jesus refused even to speak to Herod when Herod questioned Him. Herod and his soldiers shamefully treated Jesus (**Lk. 23:11**). Antipas and Herodias were the N.T. counterparts of the O.T. **Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kg. 18:17 - 19:1)**.

D. A. Carson: Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, was **tetrarch (v.1)**, not king—though doubtless “king” was used popularly (**Mk 6:14**). His tetrarchy included Galilee (**4:12**) and Perea (**19:1**). Because John the Baptist’s ministry had been exercised in Perea (**Jn 1:28**), he had come under Herod’s power. Herod had been ruling more than **thirty years**, and at this time he lived primarily at Tiberias on the southwest shore of Galilee. Thus Jesus’ ministry was taking place largely within Herod’s jurisdiction.

How the reports of Jesus’ ministry reached Herod is unknown; it may have been through Cuza (**Lk 8:3**). So extensive a ministry could not have been kept from Herod for long. His conclusion, that this was John the Baptist risen from the dead (**v.2**), is of great interest. It reflects an eclectic set of beliefs, one of them the Pharisaic understanding of resurrection. During his ministry John had performed no miracles (**Jn 10:41**); therefore Herod ascribes the miracles in Jesus’ ministry not to John but to John “*risen from the dead.*” Herod’s **guilty conscience** apparently combined with a **superstitious view of miracles** to generate this theory.

B. (:2) Herod Loses His Mind Due to Superstition and a Bad Conscience

“and said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead; and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’”

R. T. France: The idea of a ghostly or even physical return of someone who has had a special influence, especially if that influence has been prematurely cut off by violent death, is found in various cultures (think Elijah, Nero, King Arthur, Elvis). This is popular superstition rather than a worked out theology of resurrection such as that of the Pharisees. Matthew does not say explicitly that Antipas felt personally threatened (“haunted”) by the returning John, but that is probably implied, and Jesus’ “*withdrawal*” in **v. 13** suggests that he regarded Antipas as a potential threat to himself (cf. **Luke 13:31**).

Bruce Hurt: These were “*Works of power.*” Herod clearly associates the supernatural acts of this person (he thinks is John) with the fact that he has returned from the supernatural. He knows that John did not manifest miraculous powers during his life, so his distorted theology determines this has to be a result of his resurrection so that now he possesses powers he did not possess in his natural state.

Leon Morris: In any case **superstition** and a **bad conscience** make a strong couple, and they led Herod into this curious affirmation.

II. (:3-5) CONCEALING A GUILTY CONCIENCE -- MEMORY OF HEROD FLASHES BACK TO REBUKE DELIVERED BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

Robert Gundry: Herod's lack of understanding triggers a **flashback** to John's death.

A. (:3) **Instigation of Herodias**

“For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.”

Tom Stevenson: [The tyrant] was in general paranoid, cruel, and unstable, both psychologically and emotionally ... unlike the good king, he killed citizens; he was dominated by evil advisers and women ... he was a creature of lust ... he disregarded the state laws and institutions, ruling in an arbitrary, repressive fashion according to his moods.

John MacArthur: The palace [at Machaerus] was located on a mountain higher even than the city of Jerusalem and offered a beautiful and dramatic view. But the **dungeon** was dug deep into the earth beneath, and archaeologists have discovered the many places where prisoners were chained to the walls. There was no natural light and only dank, foul air to breathe. Here John the Baptist was incarcerated for about a year until his execution.

B. (:4) **Indictment Delivered by John the Baptist**

“For John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’”

Donald Hagner: John opposed Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, not simply on the grounds of the impropriety of divorce and remarriage (cf. **19:9**) but on the basis of the OT prohibition reflected in **Lev 18:16** and 20:21 (in the case of a childless widow, such a “levirate” marriage was obligatory; see **Deut 25:5**; cf. **Matt 22:24**). This lies behind John's strong statement: οὐκ ἔξεστίν σοι ἔχειν αὐτήν, “it is not lawful for you to have her.” The imperfect tense of ἔλεγεν implies repetition: “he kept saying.” Herod would not tolerate John's condemnation and so had him arrested.

William Barclay: It is always dangerous to **rebuke a despot**, and by his rebuke John signed his own death warrant. He was a man who fearlessly rebuked evil wherever he saw it. When the Scottish reformer John Knox was standing for his principles against Queen Mary, she demanded whether he thought it right that the authority of rulers should be resisted. His answer was: ‘If princes exceed their bounds, madam, they may be resisted and even deposed.’ The world owes much to the great men and women who took their lives in their hands and had the courage to tell even kings and queens that there is a moral law which they break at their peril.

C. (:5) **Impediment to Execution**

“And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew records that Herod was afraid to kill John because of the people. They had great respect for John (**3:5-6**). The general population considered John a prophet, even as they did Jesus (**16:14**). Herod had enough political savvy to know that killing John could have enormous **political fallout** if the people turned against him. Josephus reports that Herod was motivated by political fears when he arrested John, afraid John had such influence that he could turn the people against him (**Maier**, 271-272). With John preaching to large crowds and

publically denouncing Herod's sins, Herod may have been losing favor with the people. This could have been another reason Antipas decided to stop John. He also feared John because he knew John was "a righteous and holy man" (Mk. 6:19-20). Because of this fear and knowledge of John's holiness, not only would Herod not kill John, he would not permit Herodias to kill him either. John apparently languished in prison for some time, perhaps as much as a year or more (4:12; 9:14; 11:2; Wilkins 510).

III. (:6-11) COMPLYING WITH MANIPULATIVE SCHEMES -- MARTYRDOM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST SCHEMED BY HERODIAS

Walter Wilson: With its trappings of royal intrigue and corruption, the episode that follows (14:6–11) is redolent of ancient court tales, including the tale of Esther, to which our story probably alludes. Of particular interest for its verbal similarities is **Esth 2:9**, which tells of how the "girl" (κοράσιον, cf. **Matt 14:11**) "pleased" (ἡρέσεν, cf. **Matt 14:6**) the king, ἀρέσκω being a verb that in the LXX often has sexual connotations. According to **Mark 6:22**, she pleased Herod and his guests, while in **Matt 14:6** she pleases Herod alone. Once again, focus is maintained on Herod. While Matthew drops the reference in **Mark 6:21** to a banquet (δεῖπνον), the references to Herod's birthday (14:6a), to dancing (14:6b), to reclining guests (14:9), and to a platter (14:11) are consistent with a **banquet scene**. The impropriety of a princess dancing before guests in such a setting, engaging in the sort of performance usually reserved for courtesans, is taken for granted, as is the idea that such an act would take place in a Herodian household.

A. (:6) Scheme of Herodias Exploited Her Own Daughter

*"But when Herod's birthday came,
the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod."*

Grant Osborne: This dance is unusual, for such an undoubtedly **lascivious dance** was normally done by courtesans. The fact that it was the princess (named Salome in Josephus, Ant. 18.136–3711 and probably between twelve and fourteen years old [so **Hoehner**]) who performed it would at first have shocked everyone and then been regarded as a high honor to Herod. The **low morals** of Herod's court were well known, and he is greatly pleased with the girl and her dance.

Michael Wilkins: Herod the Great built a **royal palace** at the fortress **Machaerus**, in part because he prized the hot springs at Calirrhoe not far away. The remains of a majestic peristyle court that rose to an ornate triclinium (banquet room) have been excavated, an indication of the lavish entertaining that was held at the palatial fortress. After the death of Herod the Great the fortress was assigned to the tetrarch of his son Herod Antipas. Here, according to **Josephus**, Herod Antipas imprisoned John the Baptist and later had him put to death.

Homer Kent: The celebration of Herod's birthday provided Herodias opportunity for revenge. Debasing her own daughter by sending her to perform a suggestive dance before Herod and his courtiers, she extracted from this puppet ruler a grandiose promise more fitting for a Persian monarch (**Mk. 6:23**; cf. **Est 5:3**).

B. (:7-9) Scheme of Herodias Extracted Foolish Oath from Herod

1. (:7) Blank Check Foolishly Promised

"Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked."

2. (:8) Beheading of John the Baptist Demanded

*“And having been prompted by her mother, she said,
‘Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.’”*

Grant Osborne: Herodias obviously did not want to give Herod any time to think about it. It was common for victorious conquerors to have the heads of their enemies put on public display (it was a Roman rather than Jewish practice), but at a banquet to have John’s head served up as if it were a delectable dish on a “platter” is hideous beyond belief. No better proof of the absolute **depravity of Herod’s court** could be given.

William Barclay: **Herodias** -- she was the ruination of Herod in every possible sense, although she was a woman not without a sense of greatness. At the moment, we simply note that she was stained by a triple guilt. She was a woman of loose morals and of infidelity. She was a vindictive woman who nursed her wrath to keep it warm, and who was out for revenge, even when she was justly condemned. And – perhaps worst of all – she was a woman who did not hesitate to use even her own daughter to achieve her own vindictive ends. It would have been bad enough if she herself had sought ways of taking vengeance on the man of God who confronted her with her shame. It was infinitely worse that she used her daughter for her evil purposes and made her as great a sinner as herself. There is little to be said for a parent who stains a child with guilt in order to achieve some evil personal purpose.

3. (:9) Bondage to Foolishness and Peer Pressure

*“And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given
because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests.”*

William Barclay: Herod’s action was typical of a **weak man**. He kept a foolish oath and broke a great law. He had promised Salome to give her anything she might ask, little thinking what she would request. He knew well that to grant her request, in order to keep his oath, was to break a far greater law; and yet he chose to do it because he was too weak to admit his error. He was more frightened of a woman’s tantrums than of the moral law. He was more frightened of the criticism, and perhaps the amusement, of his guests than of the voice of conscience. Herod was a man who could take a firm stand on the wrong things, even when he knew what was right; and such a stand is the sign not of strength but of weakness.

C. (:10-11) Scheme of Herodias Ensured the Execution of John the Baptist

1. (:10) Severing the Head of John the Baptist

“And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.”

Warren Wiersbe: Herod is remembered as a weak ruler whose only concern was his own pleasure and position. He did not serve the people, he served himself. He has the dubious honor of being the man who killed the greatest prophet ever sent to proclaim God’s Word.

2. (:11) Serving It Up on a Platter

*“And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl;
and she brought it to her mother.”*

(:12) EPILOGUE --

A. Respectful Burial

“And his disciples came and took away the body and buried it;”

Robert Gundry: The taking of John’s corpse by his disciples anticipates the taking of Jesus’ corpse by one of his disciples (27:57–60) and thus contributes again to the parallel between John and Jesus that runs throughout Matthew.

B. Reporting Back to Jesus

“and they went and reported to Jesus.”

R. T. France: We have heard of John’s “disciples” already in 9:14; 11:2. They have continued as a group after his imprisonment, and indeed there is evidence that such a group continued for a considerable time after John’s death distinct from the disciples of Jesus; note the mention in Acts 18:25; 19:3 of “disciples” who “knew only the baptism of John.” Their action in burying John’s body after execution (presumably having obtained permission from Antipas’ court to do so) is like that of Joseph of Arimathea later (27:57–60); in each case there was some risk in being associated with an executed leader, but that risk was overridden by the Jewish horror at leaving a body unburied. In view of the close relationship which Matthew has depicted between John and Jesus, it is not surprising that on John’s death some of his followers should look to Jesus as the natural successor to their leader; hence Matthew’s statement that they reported to Jesus.

D. A. Carson: Only Matthew mentions their **report to Jesus**. This report does not become the reason for Jesus’ withdrawal but serves other purposes:

- (1) It draws John and Jesus together against the opposition;
- (2) it suggests, though it does not prove, a positive response to Jesus by John and his disciples following 11:2–6; and
- (3) it supports the view that Matthew often finishes his longer narrative pericopes by returning to the opening theme (see comments at 12:45; 15:20)—Herod hears reports of Jesus (v.1); Jesus hears reports of Herod (v.12). The frequency of this device gains importance in interpreting Matthew’s later chapters.

John Schultz: John’s disciples came to claim his body and give him an honorable burial and they came to tell Jesus what happened. Matthew tells us how Jesus reacted to this news. Evidently, it hit Him hard and He sought a place where He could digest the news and where He could be alone with the Father. According to Mark, the incident coincided with the return of Jesus’ disciples from their evangelistic campaign. Jesus’ effort to withdraw was also prevented by a mass show of a crowd of people, which forced Jesus to keep on moving. There would be no time for solitude and reflection.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we have the courage and conviction of John the Baptist to call out evil even if it costs us dearly?
- 2) What parallels do you see between the treatment of John the Baptist (in his ministry, rejection, death and burial) and that of the Lord Jesus?

3) How could a powerful figure like Herod be consigned to weakness and manipulated to act against his will?

4) Can you see any parallels to powerful political figures in our day where power corrupts and their own family devolves into decadence and depravity?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Turner: Antipas is a pathetic figure, prompted by his vengeful wife's suggestion to her daughter. Instead of humbly acknowledging the error of his rash promise, he saves face by destroying God's prophet. His palace guests are shown a blatant example of despotic power, and Antipas takes his place in the roster of evil rulers who rejected God's messengers.

This unit can be outlined as follows:

- a. Herod's explanation of Jesus's miracles (**14:1-2**)
- b. Herod's previous execution of John (**14:3-12**)
 - i. John's imprisonment (**14:3-5**)
 - ii. John's execution (**14:6-11**)
 - iii. John's burial (**14:12**)

Daniel Doriani: The Herods represent secularism at its nadir, when power and wealth lead to indulgence of the darkest impulses. Still, they give us insight into the secular mind. The Herod clan had a religion much like secular people today. There was some sense of justice, perhaps even some knowledge of God's law, yet they considered themselves above it. They married, divorced, celebrated, promised, and ruled as they pleased. They knew some biblical concepts, yet they mixed them with pagan concepts (in this case, reincarnation).

Richard Gardner: At least three features of the story call for further comment:

(1) The dance by Herodias' daughter, likely at her mother's bidding, is unprecedented. Entertainment of this sort would normally be provided by harlots, not by a member of the royal family.

(2) The story is told in such a way as to recall earlier biblical events. In her scheming to destroy John, Herodias is cast as Jezebel (cf. **1 Kings 19:3**). And Herod's promise to give her daughter anything she wants echoes language from the story of Esther (cf. Esth. 5:2-3; Mark 6:22-23).

(3) Herod appears as one who himself wants to destroy John (**v. 5a**; cf. the somewhat different picture in **Mark 6:20**), and Herodias' request for John's head merely forces the king's hand. Herod's only regret (the king was grieved, **v. 9**) is that executing John will upset the people who revere him (**v. 5b**; cf. **21:46** and **26:4-5**, where fear of the people restrains Jesus' enemies.)

As suggested earlier, John's gruesome end at the hands of Herod points ahead to Jesus' tragic end at the hands of Pilate. This is where rejection and unbelief will finally lead. And when John's disciples report the prophet's death to Jesus (**v. 12**), they are in effect announcing Jesus' own impending fate. . .

Cf. the comments of **Martin Luther**, which focus on the picture of Herod in the text. According to Luther, the mighty rulers of the world “are all Herods,” crafty foxes who want to appear pious and respectable, but all the while bent on pursuing evil (491-492). Luther’s words are rather harsh, and many rulers doubtless deserve a kinder verdict. What is true and has been true in every age, however, is that prophets and kings often find themselves in conflict, and that prophets all too often pay a price for their witness.

Donald Hagner: Although John the Baptist came in the eschatological role of Elijah, “*they did to him whatever they pleased*” (17:12). As John was regarded as a prophet, he suffered the fate of the prophets (cf. this important theme in 23:31–35). Described by Jesus as greater than any other “*born of woman*” (11:11), he was murdered through a bizarre sequence of events, part of the “entertainment” of the evening, by the whim and caprice of the wicked. A horrendous crime of this kind is self-indicting. Yet God no more prevents this outrageous deed than he will the death of Jesus, or later of Stephen and the thousands of martyrs who have followed in his footsteps. John’s murder is a foreshadowing of the murder of Jesus, and Matthew’s narrative is designed to indicate a number of parallels. “*So also the Son of Man will suffer at their hands*” (17:12). Death, the temporary end of physical life, is not the worst enemy of humanity. Alienation from God is. And thus those who murdered John are far more pitiable than is John himself. In this instance, to be “dead” is more blessed than to be “alive”; for the one murdered truly lives, while those who murdered him are in reality the dead. As Jesus was soon to follow in John’s path, so are his disciples also to be prepared for death (cf. 10:21–22, 39; 24:9).

Stanley Saunders: The story of John the Baptizer’s death is one of the few episodes in the Gospel in which Jesus is not the center of attention. Here Matthew’s focus shifts from Jesus to the inner workings of **Herod Antipas’s household**. Why? John’s death foreshadows Jesus’ fate. Matthew has also been exploring the constituency and nature of Jesus’ family (12:46–50; 13:53–58). Now Matthew sets the **disparate character of the two royal families—Jesus’ and Herod’s**—vividly on display. Antipas’s murder of John reminds us of his father’s (Herod the Great’s) murder of the innocent children in 2:16–18. Both Antipas and Jesus are their fathers’ sons.

- One family holds political power by means of violence, while the other rules in gentleness and mercy.
- Both hold lavish banquets—one for the rulers, the other for the hungry masses (cf. 14:13–21).
- One is lord of the realm, the other is Lord of the Sabbath. Matthew thus invites us to consider closely the “fruit” that each family tree produces.

Power corrupts. Every generation learns this painfully, through repeated demonstrations. This story is but one instance in Matthew’s ongoing depiction of the corruption and violence of human rulers (cf. 2:3–18; 26:47, 59–68; 27:24–43; 27:62–66). Matthew holds up not just these particular rulers or this particular incident for critical scrutiny, but all rulers who are unrepentant before God’s power. Nor is the polemic in which Matthew here engages merely the evangelist’s own pet peeve. Biting criticism of human leaders is a rushing river in both Testaments. What symptoms of unrepentance do we see in our own rulers? How does our corruption and violence haunt us? How is Jesus’ power and leadership different from the human political and social power we know so well?

John MacArthur: Analysis of Herod

In his interactions with both John the Baptist and Jesus, Herod Antipas stands like Judas as a monumentally tragic figure in history. He had the greatest man who had ever lived, the most

honored prophet of God in his hands, and he locked him in a dungeon until he had him executed. More importantly, he had an audience with the King of kings, and he mocked Him and turned Him away. Such wasted opportunity was the result of his insidious love for sin, his arrogant unwillingness to believe, and his cowardly fear of the truth. Herod claimed to rule over others, but in reality he was a man controlled by the fear of man. His fear of the people initially kept him from killing John. His fear of his friends finally compelled him to authorize John's execution. His fear of John made him anxious when he heard about Jesus. But his fear turned to scorn when he finally had an audience with the Son of God. Herod feared everyone except the Lord, and he lost his soul as a result.

J. Ligon Duncan: Herod and the Murder of John the Baptist

I. (:1-5) God uses our consciences to call us to repentance, and we ignore this at our own peril.

Herod's conscience is nagging him. But it's not nagging him in a saving way. He's guilty of things and he's bothered by those things in his heart even if he doesn't admit them openly, but he's not bothered enough to seek a Savior. And so in this passage, which recounts Herod's reaction to the news of Jesus' ministry, we are reminded that we need to recognize the importance and the power of conscience.

II. (:6-12) Christians should not expect reward in this life, but our hope is in the life to come.

Here's a man who deserved, if anyone deserved, the reward of a faithful servant and yet, here his life ends in such a way. **J.C. Ryle** says, "Truly there was an event here, if ever there was one in the world, which might make an ignorant man say what profit is it to serve God?" But even in this event we learn that our hope must be placed on the city which has foundations. That's where John's hope was. And though surely this must have been the most disappointing of ways to end the ministry. I can imagine not so much the martyrdom but the imprisonment in the last months of his life when John would have been wanting to be useful in God's service. It must have been terribly frustrating for that man. He would have wanted to be preaching repentance and preaching and preparing the way for Christ and here he is confined and then finally executed. And yet God's plan is perfect. And John had put his hope on those things to come. **Ryle** again says, "Let all true Christians remember that their best things are yet to come. Let us count it not strange if we have sufferings in this present time." It is a season of probation. We are still at school. We are learning patience, long suffering, gentleness, meekness which we could hardly learn if we had all our good things now. But there is an eternal holiday yet to begin. For this, let us wait quietly. It will make amends for all. *Our light affliction which is but for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal way to glory*, Paul says.

Brother Rory: Fear is the Opposite of Faith

- 1) Herod feared the loss of pleasure.
- 2) Herod feared the loss of his position of power and his job.
- 3) Herod feared public opinion.
- 4) Herod feared for his future.

Decisions made in fear only produce more fear.

Fear produces fear, but faith produces faith and freedom.

Bruce Goettsche: The World at Its Worst

Here are some simple guidelines for taking a stand for truth:

- Be clear on the truth you are defending or the wrong you are trying to right. It is easy to lose sight of the issue and start demonizing people and beat them up either physically or verbally. That will not advance the truth, it only leaves bruised people. Focus on the issue not the person.
- Approach the matter prayerfully and with wisdom. Rather than re-acting think about the best way to make your point. Remember the goal is not to “win” (it is not a contest), but to awaken. A 10-count is never a bad idea.
- Come at the issue with humility rather than with arrogance. Humility will lower walls, arrogance erects them.
- Keep focused on the point of conflict and not the fight. Sometimes we are like feuding families (Hatfields and McCoys) we feud because that is what we do! No one knows what started the feud. They only know that they aren’t supposed to like the other people.
- Be prepared for consequences. There is often a price to be paid for standing for the truth. If you stand against an employer you should be prepared to lose your job. If you stand against evil people you should be prepared for attempts at intimidation. You should be prepared for a lawsuit or even a visit from law enforcement. You should not be surprised when this happens and you should be willing to take what comes without giving in to the pressure.
- Most of all, we should seek to honor the Lord in the way we confront a problem. That means we treat people with respect and honor. We must constantly guard ourselves to make sure we are behaving as a Christian and not as a pagan.

John the Baptist went to jail. He likely knew it was a possibility when he spoke up. Paul and the other apostles were imprisoned many times. It comes with the territory. If you tell the truth, there will often be a price to pay. You can do everything right and still face the angry mobs or the vindictive people who want you to be silenced. However, like John the Baptist, when people look back on what happened, they will see that you conducted yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Ray Fowler: Martyred for Christ

- I. You can expect people to be confused about **Jesus (verses 1-2)**
- II. You can expect to be persecuted for confronting sin (**verses 3-5**)
- III. You should be ready to pay the ultimate **price (verses 6-12)**

TEXT: Matthew 14:13-21

TITLE: THE MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF THE 5,000 – MESSIANIC PROVISION

BIG IDEA:

JESUS OFFERS HIMSELF AS THE BREAD OF LIFE FOR THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: The narrative now turns to the recounting of two dramatic “nature” miracles, the multiplying of the loaves and fish and Jesus’ walking on the water. These have the effect of sharpening further the question concerning the power and identity of Jesus. The feeding of the five thousand, furthermore, has unmistakable messianic implications.

Richard Gardner: Jesus is a gracious host who supplies the needs of God’s people as Yahweh (the Lord) did in days of old. He spreads “*a table in the wilderness*,” giving the people “*food in abundance*,” so that “*they ate and were well filled*” (**Ps. 78:19-29**).

Stu Weber: Our gracious God will provide abundantly for those of the household of faith, thus assuring us that we can risk complete obedience.

R. T. France: We move from Antipas’ lavish but degenerate feast to one with a simpler menu but a more wholesome atmosphere. This, the first of two related feeding miracles in Matthew (cf. **15:32–38**), is recorded in all four gospels, with an impressive **similarity in all the essentials**, both in the numbers of people, loaves, fish and baskets and in the sequence of verbs which describe Jesus’ action.

The significance of the verbs used becomes clear when the five Synoptic feeding narratives are compared with the three Synoptic accounts of Jesus’ eucharistic action at the Last Supper. In all eight pericopes we find the same sequence: “*took ... blessed/gave thanks ... broke ... gave*.” The same sequence of verbs occurs also in **Luke 24:30** where Jesus “*presides*” at the meal at Emmaus. This can hardly be accidental, and suggests that the evangelists framed their accounts of the feeding (and of the Emmaus story) to reflect the wording of the eucharistic formula with which they and their readers were by now familiar. The feeding of the crowd is therefore presented as a “**foretaste**” of the central act of worship of the emergent Christian community, even though the menu was not quite the same. And since the Last Supper was itself a foretaste of the messianic banquet (**26:29**), that dimension too can legitimately be discerned in this story.

At the time, of course, this eucharistic nuance could not have been known. The disciples (and the crowd, if they were aware of how the food had been produced) would have been more likely to understand the event in terms of **OT precedent**. An obvious parallel would be with the **miracle of Elisha**, who fed a hundred people from twenty loaves, with some left over (**2 Kgs 4:42–44**); there are verbal echoes of the Elisha story in this pericope, and the nature of Jesus’ miracle is the same, though the scale is vastly higher. But another precedent which might have been felt to be even more significant in view of Matthew’s emphasis on the place being (literally) “*wilderness*” (vv. 13, 15) is that of Moses, under whose leadership a far greater number of people were miraculously fed in the wilderness not just on one occasion but for an extended period (**Exod 16**); the manna was given to supply their need of “*bread*” (**Exod 16:4, 8, 12**). The parallel is

made explicit in **John 6:25–34**. Moses, however, is unlike Jesus in that he is not himself presented as performing a miracle, but simply as spokesman for God; he describes the manna as “*the bread that the Lord has given you to eat*” (**Exod 16:15**; cf. **Ps 78:25; 105:40**). There is evidence that some Jews expected a return of manna in the messianic age (2 Bar. 29:8; Qoh. Rab. 1:28; cf. **Rev 2:17**). . .

But whatever the OT or other nuances which might have been perceived either by the disciples or the crowd at the time or by Matthew and his readers in recalling the event, the incident stands out primarily as a **spectacular miracle** in its own right, yet another staggering display of Jesus’ “*authority*” over nature as well as over human conditions.

Grant Osborne: The two stories of rejection and death that have recapitulated the conflict of **chs. 11–13** are now finished, and we enter a section on **Jesus’ miraculous power** (note “*the powers*” in **13:54**) and discipleship. That carries through **ch. 14** until we arrive at the next conflict narrative of **15:1–20**. This juxtaposition of four themes—Christology, conflict, discipleship, and miracles—will carry through this section.

The primary theological theme is that “**God will provide**,” along with its concomitant motif, **faith**. Jesus’ **compassion** is demonstrated as he feeds the needy crowd, and he involves the disciples at a deeper level in this miracle than at any other time, asking them to realize that he will take care of them. This theme carries over to the walking on the water pericope, where the disciples are tested and fail to show they have learned the lesson. . .

This is one of the richest of Jesus’ miracles theologically, as seen in the fact that it is the only miracle story found in every Jesus tradition. It reaches to the past (the manna, the Elisha miracle of **2 Kgs 4**), the present (God’s provision for his people), and the future (the messianic wedding feast). It is difficult to overstate its importance.

William Barclay: Galilee was a small country, only fifty miles from north to south and twenty-five miles from east to west, and Josephus tells us that in his time within that small area there were 204 towns and villages, none with a population of less than 15,000 people. In such a thickly populated area, it was not easy to get away from people for any length of time. But it was quiet on the other side of the lake, and at its widest the lake was only eight miles wide. Jesus’ friends were fishermen; and it was not difficult to embark on one of their boats and seek rest and quiet on the east side of the lake. That is what Jesus did when he heard of the death of John.

J Ligon Duncan: So Jesus’ response in this time of His own need, to the needs of others, is to have compassion upon them, to heal their sick, and to care for them. We should not underestimate the importance of this picture. It clearly impacted the disciples. This is the only parable in all of the New Testament gospels that is recorded in each of them. There are many parables in the gospels. Many of those parables are recorded in three of the gospels, but this parable is found not only in the synoptics, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it’s found in John as well. The disciples clearly thought that this parable was of great importance. So they recorded it in each of their accounts of Christ’s ministry.

Craig Blomberg: **JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE FOR JEWS AND GENTILES (14:13 - 16:12)**. This section is tied together by two parallel feeding miracles and Jesus’ summary reflections on them (**14:13-21; 15:32-39; 16:5-12**). At first Jesus continues to minister to Jews

(14:13-36); then he turns from them to the Gentiles (15:1-16:12). In each section the **Christological question** continues to be sharply focused. . .

This miracle is sometimes seen as simply an illustration of Jesus' compassion for human need, but the lack of urgency in the setting hardly merited such a wonder. The disciples' suggestion of v. 15 offered a realistic alternative. Rather, feeding the five thousand—**providing bread for Israel in the wilderness**—almost certainly was meant to call to people's minds God's supernatural feeding of the Israelites with manna in their wilderness wanderings in Moses' day. Jewish tradition had come to believe that the Messiah would repeat this miracle of abundant provision of food on an even grander scale. The promise of **Ps 132:15** and the somewhat similar miracles of **1 Kgs 17:9-16** and **2 Kgs 4:42-44** also provide important background. The collection of twelve baskets (one per apostle?) may well have been intended to call to mind the **twelve tribes of Israel**. Again we see evidence that Jesus is **creating a new Israel** out of those who will follow him and **foreshadowing the messianic banquet** (as also in **22:1-13; 26:29**). He must therefore be the Messiah. Applications of this passage must focus on **Christology** and **spiritual sustenance** rather than making vague and sometimes false promises about God meeting all our physical needs. John develops precisely this spiritual import of the miracle by placing Jesus' "Bread of Life" discourse, given in the Capernaum synagogue, shortly after his account of the feeding miracle (**John 6:26-59**).

I. (:13-14) VISION OF THE NEED OF THE PEOPLE PROMPTING THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

A. (:13) Attempt at Finding Solitude in a Lonely Place

"Now when Jesus heard it, He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself; and when the multitudes heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities."

John MacArthur: Why [did Jesus withdraw]? Was He afraid of Herod? Not at all. But He would not expose Himself needlessly to the imminent danger of such a person as Herod, whom He later called a sly fox. But if Herod was intimidated by John the Baptist, and so intimidated not only by John, but by his own wife, and by the people around him, that he murdered John the Baptist, he would stop at nothing to murder the one whom John the Baptist announced as the True King. Jesus knew full well that Herod's father, Herod the Great, had murdered every male child in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in order that he might stamp out one who was supposed to be a king. And this, his son, would perhaps do no less if he were convinced that Jesus was a threat to his reign. And so our Lord withdraws privately by boat across the Sea of Galilee to a wilderness place.

I think it's important to understand that the Lord knew that the people also saw the Messiah as a political ruler, as a king who would overthrow the Herodian dynasty, and overthrow the Roman monarchy, and establish independence and freedom for the land of Israel. And because our Lord knew that that was the people's perception, He knew that's what would come back to Herod, and only complicate and endanger both He and His disciples to a greater extent. **And so He sought privacy.**

D. A. Carson: Luke (9:10) specifies that the "solitary place" was in the region belonging to Bethsaida—i.e., Bethsaida Julias on the northeast shore of Galilee. The crowds ran "on foot" around the top of the lake, presumably crossing the upper Jordan at a ford two miles north of

where the river enters Galilee. They “*followed*” Jesus, seeing where he was going and setting out after him; but arriving first, they were already there when he landed with his tired disciples (v.14).

William Barclay: Jesus had come to find peace and quiet and loneliness; instead, he found a vast crowd eagerly demanding what he could give. He might so easily have resented them. What right had they to invade his privacy with their continual demands? Was he to have no rest and quiet, no time to himself at all?

But Jesus was not like that. So far from finding them a nuisance, he was moved with compassion for them. **Premanand**, the great Christian who was once a wealthy high-caste Indian, says in his autobiography: ‘As in the days of old, so now our message to the non-Christian world has to be the same, that **God cares.**’ If that is so, we must never be too busy for people, and we must never even seem to find them a trouble and a nuisance.

Grant Osborne: Jesus wishes to remove himself from a politically tricky situation, the second time he has done so (cf. 12:15). **Luke 9:10** tells us the “*solitary place*” was at Bethsaida on the northeast part of the lake, an area outside the area Antipas controlled. The addition of “*privately*” (κατ’ ἰδίαν) means Jesus wishes to spend time alone with the disciples and prepare them for the terrible events soon to come.

Stu Weber: Matthew's language gives a fourfold emphasis to Jesus' desire for **solitude**:

- (1) he **withdrew**;
- (2) he went **by boat** so the crowds on foot could not follow him;
- (3) he went to a **solitary place**; and
- (4) he went **privately**, emphasizing separation from the crowds, not from his disciples.

If we assume that Jesus withdrew to mourn John's death, we see that Jesus had a deep emotional side and desired to be alone with his circle of friends.

B. (:14) Addressing the Needs of the Multitude out of Compassion

“And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.”

Leon Morris: He saw large numbers of people, and he had compassion on them; Jesus was deeply moved at the plight of the afflicted and the poor. So on this occasion he *healed their sick*. Matthew does not qualify this in any way, but leaves the impression that Jesus healed all who were unwell in that crowd. Mark tells us that Jesus taught the people “*many things*,” and Luke that he spoke about “*the kingdom of God*,” but **Matthew concentrates on the healing**.

Grant Osborne: We see here Jesus’ **adaptability** and **love**. He wants to be alone with his followers, yet when he disembarks he sees this great horde of people. Most of us would be annoyed, but not Jesus.

R. T. France: What matters is that Jesus immediately shelved his own plans in favor of the needs of the crowd.

Bruce Hurt: Jesus' response to the crowds should teach all of us as His disciples that **flexibility** is an important attribute if we are to walk in His footsteps. Are you able to cope with sudden changes in circumstances? Are you able (willing) to be "bent" or "flexed?" Are you "pliable?" How do you respond when unforeseen circumstances force a change in your ministry plans? How do you react when your plans are unexpectedly interrupted?

II. (:15-18) DIALOGUE WITH THE DISCIPLES TO URGE ACTION

A. (:15-16) First Exchange – We Have a Situation Here

1. (:15) Request of Disciples – Send the Crowds away to Get Food

“And when it was evening, the disciples came to Him, saying, ‘The place is desolate, and the time is already past; so send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’”

2. (:16) Response of Jesus – You Feed Them

“But Jesus said to them, ‘They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!’”

Leon Morris: Jesus does not say what is to be eaten or how the disciples are to obtain it. He simply turns their attention away from the hopelessness of the situation and their easy solution and invites them to think how they could help.

Grant Osborne: This is a key to the miracle, because at every level Jesus will involve the disciples in what is to transpire. He wants the disciples to learn that **God’s agents must care for God’s flock**. This is probably supposed to echo Elisha at the feeding miracle in **2 Kgs 4:43**, *“Give it to the people to eat, For this is what the LORD says, ‘They will eat and have some left over.’”* which is also echoed here in *“they all ate and were full”* (v. 20).

J. Ligon Duncan: **Jesus demonstrates that all the power for ministry comes through Him.** They need to know that they do not have the ability to minister before they are able to minister. Because that ability, that power, that source, that strength is only found in Christ. And so the very command of Christ to the disciples, *“You feed them,”* is going to drive them to their knees. Drive them to their faces in dependence on Christ because they don’t have a clue how they’re going to do this.

B. (:17-18) Second Exchange – You Are Asking the Impossible

1. (:17) Complaint of Disciples – Lack of Resources

“And they said to Him, ‘We have here only five loaves and two fish.’”

Michael Wilkins: Bread and dried or pickled fish were food suitable for taking on a short journey into the hills. John tells us that a young boy had supplied them, indicating that they were small cakes sufficient for one person’s afternoon meal, not full “loaves” found on modern grocery store shelves (**John 6:9**). John further reports that the bread cakes were made of barley, the chief component of the staple food in Israel, especially of the poorer people.

Charles Swindoll: From a purely human point of view, they could see no way around this problem. Jesus was demanding the impossible. John’s account of this miracle fills us in on some insider information. Jesus told them to do what everybody knew was impossible in order to test them, *“for He Himself knew what He was intending to do”* (**John 6:6**).

Clearly, the disciples failed the test. In their objections, the disciples folded under the pressure of the natural, surrendered to the earthly, and capitulated to the rational. And in doing so, they had utterly forgotten that standing in front of them was omnipotence personified. Instead of saying, “We can’t,” they should have responded to Jesus the same way the prophet Jeremiah had toward God: “*Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You*” (Jer. 32:17). But when our minds are riveted to the human perspective, our reason will be limited to human possibilities. All we can focus on is what *can’t* be done. We forget that God is the God of the impossible, the one who said, “*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?*” (Jer. 32:27).

2. (:18) Care Demonstrated by Christ – Bring Them to Me
“*And He said, ‘Bring them here to Me.’*”

Leon Morris: The disciples had put forward their evidence of this meager supply as a way of indicating the impossibility of their doing anything, but Jesus thinks of it as the basis for action.

III. (:19-21) MIRACULOUS PROVISION WITH PLENTY TO SPARE

A. (:19) Performing the Miracle

1. Directing the People to Recline at the Banquet Table
“*And ordering the multitudes to recline on the grass,*”

Grant Osborne: The infinitive “*to sit down*” (ἀνακλιθῆναι) is used for “*reclining*” at banquets and is probably deliberate here. This simple repast will be turned into a sumptuous feast.

2. Depending on the Gracious Gift of the Father
“*He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food,*”

3. Distributing the Food
“*and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes,*”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus did not make a large batch of food to feed the crowd. He just kept distributing pieces of bread and fish until no one wanted any more. The miracle was open and undeniable. The Twelve and the multitude witnessed this miracle as it was happening over the extended time it took to break enough bread and fish to feed and serve these thousands of people. In other words, it was not an instantaneous miracle but one that kept happening, like the oil in 2 Kings 4:5-6. It must have made a deep impression on the Twelve.

B. (:20) Providing More than Enough

1. Ample Portions for All
“*and they all ate, and were satisfied.*”

D. A. Carson: Matthew omits many details—the greenness of the grass, the groups of fifty and one hundred—but points out that all ate and were satisfied (v.20), perhaps an anticipation of the messianic banquet, and at least evidence that there was lots to eat! The twelve baskets (*kophinos*,

GK 3186, a stiff wicker basket) of leftovers and the size of the crowd (which might have been fifteen or twenty thousand total, if there were five thousand “men,” v.21) also support the latter point.

J. Ligon Duncan: This miracle points beyond the specific provision of that bread. It points beyond the gift of the bread to the giver of the bread. Jesus’ point in doing this miracle is to draw the disciples’ eyes from the physical provision of bread to Christ’s spiritual provision for what we need for eternal life. As that bread was necessary or that food was necessary to go on living, so the spiritual provision which He makes for us is necessary if we are going to have eternal fellowship with Him.

2. Abundant Left Overs

“And they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets.”

Leon Morris: It would seem that each of the apostles had a basket and filled it (the baskets were *full*). So there was an abundant meal, but also there was no waste.

Donald Hagner: The symbolism of the twelve baskets suggests the special significance of this miracle **for Israel**. Messianic fulfillment means (and especially for Matthew!) that Jesus will provide for Israel before considering the Gentiles. And the feeding of the five thousand is an indication to the Jews that the Messiah is in their midst, offering to them—as in the miracle of manna in the wilderness—the reality of salvation, the fulfillment of the promises.

C. (:21) Projecting the Scope of the Miracle – Parsing the Numbers

“And there were about five thousand men who ate, aside from women and children.”

Walter Wilson: Nothing is said of the crowd’s reaction to these events: for them the miracle occurs “offstage.” Instead, the story concludes with an authorial comment about the remarkably large number of participants, the five thousand men (cf. **Acts 4:4**) corresponding to the five loaves of bread.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are there times we should seek solitude from ministry activities?
- 2) Are we flexible and compassionate when our schedule is interrupted with pressing needs?
- 3) Do we make ourselves available to serve the needs of others – not in our own power, but trusting in the resources of our Lord?
- 4) Do we present Jesus as the Bread of Life who is sufficient to meet the deepest spiritual and eternal needs?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: This miracle emphasizes the qualifications of the Lord Jesus for the Davidic throne. Jewish tradition had said that when the Messiah should come, “*he would feed the people of God,*” and you will remember that in several of the parables the Lord Jesus tells, he speaks about a **Messianic banquet** in which the Messiah shall feed the people. You will find this referred to in the Old Testament and the New Testament also. So, the idea that emerges first from the feeding of the 15,000 in the minds of those who observed is this man is the promised king, and there was a recognition, then, of the qualifications for the Davidic throne in the Son of God. Now, they from wrong motives recognized it, but nevertheless it was there.

John MacArthur: The Lord was teaching here. All of this was a massive lesson. And there are three groups in this crowd. There are the twelve; and this was for the training of the twelve. And there is the elect remnant, and this was for the confirmation of the faith of the elect. And there is the rejecting, shallow thrill-seeker; and this was the unmasking of the thrill-seeker. All of these were in view.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus and His disciples desperately needed rest (**Mark 6:31**), yet the needs of the multitudes touched His heart. The word translated “*moved with compassion*” literally means “to have one’s inner being (viscera) stirred.” It is stronger than sympathy. The word is used twelve times in the Gospels, and eight of these references are to Jesus Christ.

Jesus was “*moved with compassion*” when He saw the needy multitudes (**Matt. 9:36**). They were like sheep that had been lacerated from brutal fleecing – torn, exhausted, and wandering. Twice he was moved with compassion when He beheld the hungry multitudes without food (**Matt. 14:14; 15:32**). The two blind men (**Matt. 20:34**) and the leper (**Mark 1:41**) also stirred His compassion, as did the sorrow of the widow at Nain (**Luke 7:13**).

Jesus used this word in three of His parables. The king had compassion on his bankrupt servant and forgave him his debt, and we ought to forgive one another (**Matt. 18:21-35**). The Samaritan had compassion on the Jewish victim and cared for him in love (**Luke 10:25-37**). The father had compassion on his wayward son and ran and greeted him when he came home (**Luke 15:20**). If our heavenly Father has such compassion toward us, should we not have compassion toward others?

Note the steps we must take in solving life’s problems.

- 1) Start with what you have.
- 2) Give what you have to Jesus.
- 3) Obey what He commands.
- 4) Conserve the results.

The apostle John recorded a sermon on “*the Bread of Life*” that Jesus gave the next day in the synagogue in Capernaum (**John 6:22ff.**). The people were willing to receive the physical bread, but they would not receive the living Bread – the Son of God come down from heaven. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand was actually a sermon in action. Jesus is the Bread of Life, and only He can satisfy the spiritual hunger in man’s heart. The tragedy is, men waste their time and money on “*that which is not bread*” (**Isa. 55:1-7**). People today are making the same mistake.

Jesus still has compassion on the hungry multitudes, and He still says to His church: “Give them something to eat.” How easy it is for us to send people away, to make excuses, to plead a lack of resources. Jesus asks that we give Him all that we have and let him use it as He sees fit. A hungry world is feeding on empty substitutes while we deprive them of the Bread of Life. When we give Christ what we have, we never lose. We always end up with more blessing than when we started.

Grant Osborne: This was truly a **messianic miracle** pointing forward to the messianic banquet, an eschatological meal often emphasized by Jesus (**Matt 8:11; Luke 14:15; 22:30**) and also a common theme in Judaism, building on **Isa 25:6**, “*On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines*” and developed further during the intertestamental period (1 En. 62:14; 2 Bar. 29:8; 2 Esd 2:38). Thus it can be said that Jesus here is depicted both as the prophet Elisha and the new Moses. Finally, from the meaning of table fellowship in the ancient world, there is a **theology of community** here; Jesus is establishing a new community, with himself as the head of the family (v. 19).

Significance:

1) Jesus Christ is Sovereign

The entire NT attests to the deity of Christ and his oneness with the Father (esp. emphasized in John and Revelation). As a member of the Godhead Jesus created this world (**John 1:3–4; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2**), and he both sustains and controls it. Therefore he asks the disciples here to realize this reality and to depend wholly on him. He is Alpha and Omega (**Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13**), meaning he is Lord over history; and God’s people must entrust themselves to his omnipotent and omnipresent (**Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20**) presence in their lives. The disciples needed to experience not only the power and provision of Jesus in their lives, but also how they can participate in that power and see it flow through them.

2) Mercy and Compassion

Through his mercy and compassion, Jesus will provide for our needs. Most take messianic provision to be the single major theme of the story. It took a long time for the disciples to learn this—indeed, until after Pentecost. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Jesus repeated it again (**15:29–39**). This is the distinguishing mark of true follower; our minds must focus on the things of God rather than merely human concerns (**Mark 8:33b**); we must seek and think heavenly rather than earthly pursuits (**Col 3:1–2**); and we must search after heavenly rather than earthly treasures (**Matt 6:19–21**). One of the most difficult aspects of the Christian walk is to learn contentment whatever the circumstances so that it does not matter whether we are in need or have plenty, for we know the Lord is in charge (cf. Paul’s testimony in **Phil 4:11–12**).

3) Prophet and Messiah

Jesus is the great prophet and Messiah who will bring history to a close. Here three major symbols intertwine: Jesus the new Moses who will give us the hidden manna (**Rev 2:17**), the Elisha prophet who multiplies the bread, and the Messiah who will enable us to participate in the messianic banquet. Jesus has controlled the past, will control the future, and already controls the present. This is the meaning of the title of God in **Rev 1:4**—“*who is, and who was, and who is to come*” (cf. **Rev 4:8; 11:17; 16:5**)—slightly out of order with “*who is*” (i.e., the present) first. The readers of Revelation know God is in control (the entire OT tells that) and will control history. Their discouragement comes because he does not seem to be in control of the present. The message is that God is sovereign over the present even though it doesn’t seem like it.

4) Involvement in Christ's Powerful Work

This is a discipleship story as well as a miracle story. More than in any miracle, the disciples are central in every aspect. Jesus wants them first to realize he will take care of them and to understand that they can mediate his power to the world. This is seen in the miracles of Acts. Luke has chosen miracles that reproduce those of Jesus to show that “*in the name of Jesus*” the church reenacts the life and ministry of Jesus (e.g., **Acts 9:32–34 = Luke 5:18–26; Acts 9:36–42 = Luke 8:49–56**). God’s power is available to the church.

5) Jesus is Establishing a New Community

The meaning of table fellowship is unity and community. Meals symbolized “friendship, intimacy, and unity,” involving reconciliation and making a person part of one’s extended family, i.e., “social, religious, and economic equals.” So in providing this meal for the crowds, Jesus is inviting them to become part of his new family of kingdom people and promising those who respond that he will provide for their needs.

Daniel Doriani: Two Kinds of Kings Govern the People

The Gospels generally spell out their lesson, but here we encounter one of the texts that leave certain points unstated. **Matthew 14** places two stories side by side without telling us how they are connected, but if we assume there is art to his order, we can detect an **intriguing contrast**. Matthew places stories of King Herod (**14:1–12**) and King Jesus (**14:13–21**) side by side, and the contrast lets us know Jesus a little better. Consider:

- Herod throws a drunken party for his friends in the royal palace. Jesus offers a pleasant meal for the crowds in the countryside.
- Herod’s party entertains the rich and famous people of Galilean society. Jesus’ party feeds the common people, the hungry followers of Jesus.
- The first party was an orgy for leaders. It began with a sensual dance and ended with the death of John. It sought the pleasures and honors of this world. The second party began with teaching and healing. It ended with a meal that was a foretaste of the marriage supper of Jesus and his people.
- King Herod cared for nothing but his glory on his birthday. King Jesus served his people when they forgot their food.

In the spring, near the Passover (**John 6:4**), Jesus told the hungry people of Israel to recline on the green grass and prepare for a feast. Passover celebrated Israel’s redemption from Egypt. After the Passover, Moses gave the people manna in the wilderness. Now Jesus gives his people bread in the wilderness.

Let us pause to collect the main lessons.

- First, the feeding of the five thousand teaches us to expect the Lord Jesus to provide what his people need. He is compassionate. If we are needy, he supplies. Even if our need rises from our own errors, he is generous.
- Second, even as Jesus delegated a part of his work to the disciples, so he delegates a portion of his work to us. Even if our resources are small and few, Jesus can multiply them, to this day.

- Third, when Jesus does provide, we should be thankful, not just for the gift, but for the giver. For the gospel turns our attention not to the bread, but to Jesus who provided it long ago. And he provides today, for life, both physical and eternal.

Jabez Burns: The Spiritual Lessons Which the Miracle Affords.

A. In the people we see a striking representation of the moral condition of the human family. In a desert world—starving for want of food—no human means of supply.

B. In the provision we see a true exhibition of the blessings of the gospel. Its source, Jesus; its apparent insufficiency, yet its abundance, yea, inexhaustibleness. Its freeness and cheapness; without money and without price. Its satisfying nature; all ate and were filled.

C. In its distribution we see the nature of the office of the Christian ministry. It is—to receive from Christ’s hands the bread of life, and to give it to a dying world. It is Christ’s provision only they are to distribute.

D. In the abundance remaining we see the boundlessness of gospel supplies. Myriads have eaten, and yet the bread is undiminished. We learn,

E. That personal participation of gospel blessings is necessary to our happiness and satisfaction. We must not only be of the multitude, and hear, and see, and sit down with them; but we must, also, eat, receive Christ into our hearts by faith; and thus only can we enjoy the blessings of God’s great, and full, and abundant salvation. The invitation is: “*Come ye, buy and eat; ... and milk, without money, and without price.*”

TEXT: Matthew 14:22-36

TITLE: WALKING ON WATER – GROWING INSIGHT INTO THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

BIG IDEA:

FAITH FOCUSES ON THE DIVINE IDENTITY OF JESUS WHO HAS POWER OVER CREATION AND RESCUES THOSE WHO CALL OUT TO HIM

INTRODUCTION:

Stanley Saunders: Matthew riddles this account with double entendre, much of which is lost in English translation and most of which focuses on the divine power of the human Jesus. Matthew develops two main claims in this story of divine power and presence: Jesus is again crossing the boundaries between the human and the divine, between earth and heaven; and the same powers Jesus demonstrates are also available to other humans, first of all to Jesus' disciples.

Walter Wilson: Like the picture of Jesus feeding the multitude, the picture of Jesus walking on water illustrates both his authority over the forces of nature and the expectation that his followers will somehow participate in this authority. . . . While the previous story alluded to the feeding of Israel in the wilderness, this story alludes to Israel's salvation at the Red Sea (**Exod 14–15**), thereby extending the narrative's **exodus typology**.

William Barclay: In the hour of the disciples' need, Jesus came to them. When the wind was contrary and life was a struggle, Jesus was there to help. No sooner had a need arisen than Jesus was there to help and to save.

In life, the wind is often contrary. There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our temptations, with our sorrows and with our decisions. At such a time, no one need struggle alone, for Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with hand stretched out to save, and with his calm, clear voice bidding us take heart and have no fear.

Donald Hagner: As in both Mark and John, this miracle occurs immediately after the feeding of the five thousand. The effect of these **successive narratives** is powerful. The question of the **identity of this Jesus**, which has been before the readers previously (cf. **7:28–29; 11:3; 13:54–56; 14:2**), especially in **8:27**, and which was left implicit in the preceding narrative, again cries out for an answer that is now unequivocally given in **v. 33**.

Ray Fowler: This week's passage always reminds me of the joke about the two deacons who took their pastor out fishing on a lake in their boat. They were anchored some distance from shore, and after they had been fishing awhile, the first deacon says, "Oh, I left my sandwich in the car." He steps out of the boat, walks across the water to the shore, gets his sandwich, walks back across the water and gets back into the boat. The pastor is amazed at this, but the other deacon doesn't say anything about it, so neither does he.

Then the second deacon says, "Oh, I forgot my thermos." He steps out of the boat, walks across the water, gets his thermos, walks back across the water and into the boat. The two deacons just keep on fishing, while the pastor is thinking, "Well, if they can do it, I guess so can I!"

So, he casually tells the deacons, “I need to get something, too.” He steps over the side of the boat, promptly sinks like a rock and starts swimming for shore. The first deacon turns to the second deacon and says, “Do you think maybe next time we should tell him where the rocks are?”

Of course, Jesus didn’t need any rocks when he walked on the water, and this is an amazing miracle of God’s power, love and care for his followers.

- 1) You are never out of God’s sight (:22-24).
- 2) You are never out of God’s reach (:25-26).
- 3) You are never out of God’s care (:27-36).

God is all-knowing, which means you are never out of his sight. God is all-present which means you are never out of his reach. God is all-loving and all-powerful, which means you are never out of his care.

You are never out of God’s sight, and so that means **God has not forgotten you**. You are never out of God’s reach, and so that means **God has not abandoned you**. You are never out of God’s care, because **God loves you so much**, he sent his Son to die for you. He is the all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful, all-loving God who knows your troubles and will rescue you in his perfect timing.

<https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/when-the-going-gets-tough/>

I. (:22-23) JESUS MODELS DEPENDENCE AND DEVOTION IN PRIVATE PRAYER

A. (:22) Purpose of Solitude

“And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.”

Robert Gundry: “*Compelled*” implies that he exercised his authority on them against their will. Disciples want to stay with their master. “*Immediately*” stresses Jesus’ exercise of authority.

Warren Wiersbe: John recorded the reason why Jesus was in such a hurry to dismiss the crowd and send the disciples back in the boat: The crowd wanted to make Jesus king (**John 6:14-15**). The Lord knew that their motives were not spiritual and that their purposes were out of God’s will. If the disciples had stayed, they would certainly have fallen in with the plans of the crowd, for as yet, the disciples did not fully understand Christ’s plans. They were guilty of arguing over “*who was the greatest*,” and a popular uprising would have suited them perfectly.

D. A. Carson: Why Jesus “*made*” (the verb is very strong and might be translated “*compelled*”) the disciples go on ahead of him may be deduced from these bits of information:

- (1) he wanted to be alone to pray (**v.23**);
- (2) he wanted to escape the crowd with his disciples to get some rest (**Mk 6:31-32**); and
- (3) he may have dismissed the disciples forcefully to help tame a messianic uproar (**Jn 6:15**).

B. (:23) Priority of Prayer

“And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.”

Charles Swindoll: Jesus was finally getting a long-awaited quiet time alone. With the disciples heading across the northeastern quarter of the lake and the crowds dispersing, Jesus was able to slip away and climb one of the nearby hills in that secluded location. He was going to do what He had originally intended to do before the masses of people had swarmed Him – commune with His heavenly Father (see **14:13**).

David Doriani: People sometimes ask **why Jesus needed to pray**. Jesus prayed because he was a real man, because his humanity was an essential component of his work as the mediator between God and mankind. A mediator approaches two estranged parties in order to reconcile them.

II. (:24-27) DISCIPLES MODEL FEAR AND PANIC IN TIMES OF TESTING

A. (:24) Difficult Circumstances Test Our Faith

“But the boat was already many stadia away from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.”

Charles Swindoll: The boat was literally “*many stadia*” from land. A **stadion** was about 600 feet, which means the boat was precariously distant from the safety of the shore. What’s worse, “*the wind was contrary,*” and the boat was “*battered by the waves*” (**14:24**). Matthew describes the action of the waves with the word *basanizo*, a verb that means “to subject to severe distress, torment, harass.” Thought the disciples had likely intended to hug the shoreline as they headed north, the wind and waves were pushing them farther and farther out to open water, away from their destination and toward certain calamity! It was after three o’clock in the morning, but not yet dawn – “*the fourth watch of the night*” (**14:25**). In short, the disciples were in trouble, and as far as they knew, they were all alone.

Grant Osborne: A severe storm hit, and the boat was under severe distress (*βασανίζω* is a strong verb meaning to “torture” or “cause great distress,” often used of illness or even demonic oppression). Some scholars go so far as to see **cosmic powers** at work. There was a strong headwind (*ἐναντίος*, “*against it*”), and huge waves threatened the lives of the disciples.

Walter Wilkins: The lake’s **low elevation** leads it to be subject to a powerful east wind (“*Sharkiyeh*”) that blows in over the mountains.

R. T. France: The disciples’ predicament this time is the inability to make headway rather than an imminent danger of sinking.

B. (:25) Divine Presence Appears Miraculously

“And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.”

Stu Weber: According to Jewish time reckoning, the day begins at sunset (about 6:00 P.M.). The Jews divided the twelve-hour night into three watches, but the Gospel writers used the Roman custom of **four three-hour watches**—6 to 9 P.M., 9 P.M. to midnight, midnight to 3 A.M., and **3 to 6 A.M.**

C. (:26-27) Dread (Fear and Panic) Met with Reassurance

1. (:26) Fear and Panic

“And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.”

Stu Weber: Fatigue, combined with superstition and lack of faith-filled insight, set them up for a response of pure terror when they saw Jesus.

Donald Hagner: Given the popular belief that the sea was the home of evil spirits (cf. **Rev 13:1**), they undoubtedly thought the “ghost” meant to do them ill. In **Luke 24:37**, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples, who are filled with fear and conclude they are seeing “*a spirit*” (πνεῦμα; but D: φάντασμα; as in our text; for a similar word, see Wis 18:17). OT symbolism concerning the mastery of God over the sea and specifically his walking upon it (e.g., **Ps 77:16, 19; Job 9:8; 38:16**; cf. wisdom in Sir 24:5), while significant in retrospect, could hardly have occurred to the disciples at the time, although for the evangelist and his readers it must have been suggestive.

Richard Gardner: The epiphany in the text before us clearly anticipates the revelation of Jesus’ glory in the resurrection.

2. (:27) Reassurance

*“But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying,
‘Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.’”*

R. T. France: The disciples’ **irrational fear** is met by the **familiar voice** of Jesus; considering the startling manner of his appearance, his words sound almost banal, but their very ordinariness contributes to the **reassurance**.

Robert Gundry: The disciples’ disconcertedness and fear stem from non-recognition of Jesus, not from failure to understand that as deity he could walk on the sea. So between his commands to take courage and stop being afraid, he identifies himself with “*I am*,” where we’d say, “It’s me” (compare **John 9:9**, for example). For Matthew’s Jewish Christian audience, though, “*I am*” also equates with the divine title, “*I AM*,” by which God identified himself to Moses in **Exodus 3:14**. The equation contributes to walking on the sea as a **demonstration of deity**. The immediacy with which Jesus speaks this encouraging self-identification underscores his deity, which makes him greater than Moses.

David Doriani: Once we safeguard the uniqueness of Jesus’ miracle, we can affirm that we are like the disciples in important ways.

- First, Jesus was with the disciples during the storm and **Jesus is with us today**. He said, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (**Matt. 28:20**).
- Second, when Jesus comes, **it spells the end of fear**. The command “*Don’t be afraid*” appears seven times in Matthew (**1:20; 10:26–31** [3 times]; **14:27; 17:7; 28:5, 10**).

III. (:28-33) PETER MODELS INCONSISTENT FAITH BUT GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE TRUE IDENTITY OF JESUS

A. (:28-29a) Imitating Christ = Challenging Goal

1. (:28) Entreaty of Investigation

*“And Peter answered Him and said,
‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’”*

Walter Wilson: Finally, it is noteworthy that in both stories, **a speaking role is assigned to Peter** (**14:28, 30; 17:4**). This last point illustrates one of the principal features of the section in which

our story is situated (**13:53 - 17:27**), namely, the emergence of Peter as the disciples' spokesperson and representative. In this instance, his actions contribute to the gospel's *imitatio Christi* theme, which surfaced previously in the mission discourse (e.g., **10:25**). Peter asks for permission to emulate Jesus's miracle, that is, to participate in his power over the sea and what the sea represents, especially death. Jesus's response implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of such a request, thereby also revealing something important regarding the nature of his messianic authority. Similarly, in the mission discourse, Jesus commands the disciples to perform the same miracles they have just seen him perform, conferring upon them the authority to—among other things—raise the dead (**10:8**). Power over death is thematized by another story of this section in which Peter has a speaking role, namely, his confession of Christ at Caesarea Philippi: “*you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (**16:18**). Comparison with **10:8** and **16:18**, then, suggests that Jesus's response to Peter in **14:29** functions as a **type of commission**, specifically a commission to participate in his power over death. If this line of reasoning is correct, the inclusion of such a commission represents another way in which 14:25–33 generically resembles an account of a post-resurrection appearance. Put differently, the texts in **10:8**, **14:29**, and **16:18** belong to a series of commissioning episodes culminating in the great commission issued by the resurrected Jesus (**28:18–20**), with each episode manifesting a different dimension of the power of the Messiah and his followers over death.

2. (:29a) Enabling Invitation

“*And He said, ‘Come!’*”

Donald Hagner: Peter is here paradoxically a **model both of faith and of lack of faith**. The story is also a demonstration of the **saving power of the Lord**. If we take the narrative as historical, it is difficult to know what lay behind Peter's request. It may be that Peter wanted to participate with Jesus in this miracle as he had in the preceding one. Perhaps it was no more than impulsiveness or the desire to do something excitingly dangerous—to have a once-in-a-lifetime experience—which appealed to him. The impossible would be possible through the power of Jesus. Thus Peter's request is based upon faith in Jesus and not upon an uncertainty about whether the apparition really was Jesus (this reality is assumed in the protasis of the condition). He did **get out of the boat** and did **walk toward Jesus**.

B. (:29b) Intentional Faith Takes Aggressive Action

1. Got Out of the Boat

“*And Peter got out of the boat,*”

2. Walked on the Water

“*and walked on the water*”

3. Came Toward Jesus

“*and came toward Jesus.*”

C. (:30-31) Intervention of Jesus Delivers from Failure to Maintain the Focus of Faith

1. (:30) Failure to Maintain the Focus of Faith

a. Taking Eyes Off Jesus and Focusing on Difficult Circumstances

“*But seeing the wind,*”

Walter Wilkins: Jesus does not criticize him for that request; he only mildly chides him for his ineffective faith once he gets out there. It took much courage to follow Jesus on the water, and Peter does fine until he looks at his circumstances (“*seeing the wind,*” **14:30**) and takes his eyes off of Jesus; then he finds himself afraid and in trouble. We will face many circumstances for which we are completely unprepared, and the circumstances we face from day to day will change. But the one constancy we have in this life is Jesus. As we go through life focused on an intimate walk with Jesus through each and every circumstance, we learn how to apply his consistency to our circumstances.

- b. Replacing Faith with Fear
“he became afraid,”
- c. Experiencing Negative Consequences
“and beginning to sink,”
- d. Calling Out for Salvation
“he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’”

2. (:31) Intervention of Jesus Delivers

- a. Hand of Deliverance
“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him,”
- b. Word of Correction
“and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

Charles Swindoll: The Greek word for “*doubt*” here is a rare one – *distazo*. In the whole New Testament it’s found only here and in **Matthew 28:17**: “*When they saw him they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.*” In both places, the term is used in reference to people who do, in fact, believe in who Jesus is and what he’s capable of but who at the same time harbor lingering doubts. This wasn’t the kind of doubt that an unbeliever has, which is more like stubborn unbelief. It’s the doubt that comes from living in a world filled with situations, circumstances, trials, and tribulations that cause strong believers to wonder about the goodness and mercy of God.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The question pointed to the reason for Peter’s failure. He did not stop believing completely. He stopped believing in the complete adequacy of Jesus (**Osborne** 576). Why did he doubt? He had walked on water, but had he become afraid of the waves? He should know that the one who enabled him to walk on water could keep him safe from the winds or waves.

Leon Morris: Jesus bestows on Peter the epithet “*Man of little faith*” (for this term see on **6:30**; this is the only place where it is used of **one individual**; elsewhere it refers to disciples as a whole). “*Why did you doubt?*” Jesus asked him. The leading apostle might have been expected to trust more wholeheartedly, more especially since he had already taken some steps in his alien environment. He was learning that **problems arise when doubt replaces trust**.

D. (:32-33) Identity of Jesus Confirmed by His Power over Creation

1. (:32) Submission of Creation

“And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped.”

Donald Hagner: A sometimes unnoticed aspect of the story is the miraculous cessation of the powerful wind. This makes the story quite similar to that of the stilling of the storm in **8:23–27**.

2. (:33) Worship of the Disciples

“And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’”

Robert Gundry: Worshipping Jesus—that is, bowing low before him—adds bodily confession to verbal confession so as to highlight even further the disciples’ true understanding.

Stu Weber: Jesus probably intended the feeding of the five thousand to be primarily a **lesson in faith** for his disciples. Here, on the heels of the first lesson of the day comes the second lesson. The disciples had demonstrated no confidence in Jesus’ ability to feed the crowd, but at least Peter began to show the first flicker of true faith. With much yet to learn, the disciples came closer than ever to an **understanding of who Jesus was (14:33)**.

D. A. Carson: The **climax** of the story is not the stilling of the storm (**v.32**) but the **confession and worship of the disciples**: *“Truly you are the Son of God”* (**v.33**). This is the first time Jesus has been addressed by the disciples with this full title (cf. **16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54**). But it already lurks behind **3:17** (*“my Son”*), and the devil has used it of Jesus (**4:3, 6**). It is most likely abbreviated to *“the Son”* in Jesus’ self-references in **11:25–27**. In the earlier passage (cf. **3:17**), we have seen how the title would most likely have been understood by the disciples at the time and how it would have been fleshed out in light of the resurrection.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The word translated *“worship”* (Greek *proskuneō*) means “to prostrate oneself before someone as an act of reverence, fear or supplication” (**Louw** and **Nida** I:218) or to “express by attitude and possibly position one’s allegiance to or regard for deity” (**Louw** and **Nida** I:540). The Magi (**2:11**), a leper coming to be healed (**8:2**), and Jairus (**9:18**) had prostrated themselves before Him. Now **with the fullest understanding so far**, the Twelve—at least in attitude and possibly even in position—bowed before Him in the boat, and worshiped Him as one worships God. This is the first time Matthew records that the Twelve worshiped Jesus. . .

The day had been busy and long. Jesus showed the Twelve more and more of His glory (**Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 1:1, 2**). Many were healed, over five thousand were miraculously fed, Jesus walked on water across a large portion of the lake, Jesus enabled Peter also to walk on water to meet Him, and Jesus calmed the sea. The Twelve had served the miracle food to the five thousand, gathered up the uneaten food, and had rowed against a headwind across a significant portion of the lake. Evidently, no one had slept. Jesus had prayed on the mountainside and the Twelve had wrestled against the waves, perhaps most of the night. So much for a getaway for rest (**Mk. 6:30–31**); yet this was a day etched forever in their memories. This day they recognized that Jesus was no mere human. He was God’s Son. Perhaps this was why Jesus chose to disclose such power at this time.

Grant Osborne: Matthew presents the gradual process by which the disciples come to understanding and overcome their failures as a result of Jesus’ presence with them (see on **13:11–12, 16–17, 23, 51–52; 16:12**). Of course, this hardly means full understanding, for Jesus will castigate their ignorance in **15:16; 16:9**. The disciples have no concept of deity until **John 20:28** and later. They use the title in a vaguely messianic sense, but understanding is dawning, and Matthew expects the reader to see all the title portends.

(:34-36) TRANSITION – SUMMARY OF POWERFUL ONGOING HEALING MINISTRY

Walter Wilson: The picture is completed with a **narrative hinge** in **14:34–36**, which briefly shows the audience what transpires when the boat reaches its destination. Here the power of the gospel is communicated both in the manner in which word of Jesus’s presence goes out to the people and in the manner in which large numbers of people respond by coming to Jesus for healing.

D. A. Carson: This little pericope stresses again the sweeping extent of Jesus’ public ministry (cf. **4:23–25; 8:16; 9:35–36**) and shows that Jesus’ ministry extended to all the people, though his close disciples had special access to him and his more intimate instruction. Also, because the stricter groups, such as the Pharisees and the Essenes, counted it an abomination to rub shoulders in a crowd—one never knew what ceremonial uncleanness one might contract—Jesus’ unconcern about such things neatly sets the stage for the confrontation over clean and unclean (**15:1–20**). As in **8:1–4; 9:20–22**, he himself cannot become unclean; instead, he makes clean.

Donald Hagner: Jesus again engages in a **healing ministry** as part of his proclamation of the dawning of the kingdom of God. The healings and their inclusiveness (“*all*”) point to and foreshadow the **blessings of the eschatological order** in its final realization in the future. Jesus is central to the experience of, and even the possibility of, these healings. His power is so overwhelming that simply to touch his garment is to experience immediate healing. The same presence and power of Jesus are available to the church in ways that transcend temporary, ad hoc healings of this kind. The salvation experienced by the church goes beyond what was experienced at Gennesaret; the healings at Gennesaret are at best only anticipations of the **eschatological wholeness of the church** to be experienced by every believer.

Richard Gardner: As noted earlier, the summary here forms an **inclusion** with the summary at the beginning of the unit in **verses 13-14**. And the content is typical of summary statements found at a number of places in the narrative (cf. **4:23-25; 8:16-17**): All the sick throughout the region are brought to Jesus, and all who are brought are healed. The unit ends then, as it began, by attesting the **divine compassion of Jesus for those in need of wholeness**.

A. (:34) Safe Arrival at Destination of Gennesaret

“And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus and the Twelve went to Gennesaret, a heavily populated, fertile plain located on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. The plain of Gennesaret is about three miles (5 km.) long and one mile (1.6 km.) wide. It extends northward along the coast from Magdala almost to Capernaum (**ISBE** II:443).

Walter Wilkins: The region of Gennesaret did not figure prominently in Jesus’ ministry as recorded in the Gospels, but the response to Jesus on this occasion was remarkable. **Josephus**’s description captures not only the **beauty of the region**, but also indicates the exquisiteness of the lands surrounding the Sea of Galilee.

Skirting the Lake of Gennesar [Galilee], and also bearing that name, lies a region whose natural properties and beauty are very remarkable. There is not a plant which its fertile soil refuses to produce, and its cultivators in fact grow every species; the air is so well-tempered that it suits the most opposite varieties. The walnut, a tree which delights in the most wintry climate, grows luxuriantly, beside palm-trees, which thrive on heat, and figs and olives, which require a milder climate. One might say that nature had taken pride in this assembling, by tour de force, the most discordant species in a single spot, and that, by a happy rivalry, each of the seasons wished to claim this region for her own.

B. (:35-36) Sick Healed by Contact with Jesus

1. (:35) Jesus Functions as a Magnet for Needy People

“And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick;”

David Doriani: There is no hint that they wanted more than healing, no hint that they came to become disciples. They came to take from Jesus, to use him for their ends, much like the crowd that saw Jesus multiply bread and followed him, merely hoping for more food (**14:13–21; John 6:25–34**). Jesus knew they were using him, but he felt compassion and healed them regardless. It was his way to give to the undeserving. Just as he provided for the unbelieving crowds then, so he cares for us even before we believe. Jesus cares for our health, gifts, and friendships because any of these may one day move us toward faith in him.

2. (:36a) Jesus Makes Himself Available and Approachable

“and they began to entreat Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak;”

Charles Swindoll: So powerful were His miracles that if people touched even the fringe of his cloak, they were cured of their diseases (**14:36**). That people entreated Jesus to let them touch His cloak for healing may suggest that they had heard the testimony of healing from the woman who had been cured of the twelve years of bleeding (see **9:20-22**). If so, this gives us a good example of how word of Jesus’ astonishing miracles had made an impact on the crowds.

3. (:36b) Jesus Heals with Impartiality, Power and Finality

“and as many as touched it were cured.”

Stu Weber: The Lord will graciously reward any expression of true faith.

Jeffrey Crabtree: As Jesus traveled to various communities, people would place their sick where they knew He would pass. Though Jesus healed the sick, this was not His primary ministry (**11:4-5; 12:28; Hagner 33B:427**). His primary ministry was providing access into the kingdom. Healings indicated that the kingdom Jesus was preaching had arrived (**Mt. 11:2-6; Lk. 4:18-21; Is. 61:1-2**). Matthew’s point in these verses is not so much the faith of the people as it was the **power of Jesus** (**Hendriksen 604**). He who had fed the five thousand and walked on water now healed every disease brought to Him. **Bruner** (2:79-81) points out that Matthew used “five excited absolutes” in his description: “*all that country, . . . all that were diseased, . . . only touch, . . . as many as touched, . . . [and] perfectly whole.*”

William Barclay: This is just one of Matthew’s almost colourless little connecting passages. It is a sentence or two of the gospel story that the eye might easily pass over as quite unimportant;

and yet it is **very revealing of Jesus**.

(1) There is **beauty** in it. No sooner did Jesus appear anywhere than people were crowding and clamouring for his help; and he never refused it. He healed them all. There is no word here that he preached or taught at any length; there is simply the record that he healed. The most tremendous thing about Jesus was that he taught men and women what God was like by showing them what God was like. He did not tell them that God cared; he showed them that God cared. There is little use in preaching the love of God in words without showing the love of God in action.

(2) But there is also **pathos** here. No one can read this passage without seeing in it the grim fact that there were hundreds and thousands of people who desired Jesus only for what they could get out of him. Once they had received the healing which they sought, they were not really prepared to go any further. It has always been the case that people have wanted the privilege of Christianity without its responsibilities. It has always been the case that so many of us remember God only when we need him. Ingratitude towards God and towards Jesus Christ is the ugliest of all sins; and there is no sin of which we are more often and more consistently guilty.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Jesus need to pray?
- 2) How can we remind ourselves that God is with us during those fearful times when we imagine that we are all alone?
- 3) Why didn't the disciples of Jesus recognize Him when he came towards them walking on the water?
- 4) What kinds of storms has Jesus already rescued you from?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stanley Saunders: The story raises questions about the nature of discipleship, about our perceptions of the world, even the physical world, and about our participation in God's divine power. Can we also traverse the boundaries between divine power and the human world? To what end? What factors cause us to be "little-faiths"? How does the world capture our attention, so that we too become caught between two minds, two ways of perceiving the world, ourselves, and God? Remember, this Gospel begins and ends with the claim that Jesus is "God with us." What difference does this claim make for us? Where do we perceive God's liberating power today, the power even to burst the limits of the physical world?

David Turner: The rescued disciples' confession that Jesus is God's Son should be seen in the light of biblical texts that represent the stormy sea as a place of evil chaos from which only God can deliver (**Exod. 14:10–15:21; Ps. 107:23–32; Jon. 1:4–2:10; cf. Wis. 14:2–4; 1QH 6.22–25;**

Heil 1981: 35). Thus, in walking on the water and delivering the disciples from the storm, Jesus exercises divine attributes and accomplishes feats that are the prerogative of God alone. It is also significant that Jesus can share his capacity to walk on water with Peter. “If a man walks on the sea, he does so only by divine authority” (Heil 1981: 61; cf. **Job 9:8; 38:16**). But authority to walk on water is relatively inconsequential when it is compared with authority to extend God’s kingdom (**Matt. 10:1, 7; 11:27; 28:18–20**). Peter’s faith (and that of the disciples collectively) may be weak, but Jesus’s presence will continue to empower and rescue as inevitable future trials are encountered.

Charles Swindoll: I can think of three connections with our own challenges in life – challenges that bring us to our knees in dependence on Christ.

- 1) First, we sometimes feel all alone when we experience dark nights, but we’re not. We have Jesus, who takes up permanent residence in our lives. His Spirit indwells us to empower us, to remind us of His presence, and to enable us to endure whatever may come.
- 2) Second, the storms of life seem to last forever, but they’ll cease. They’re not too long to endure. No storm strikes us that’s not known, permitted, or directed by the Lord our God.
- 3) Third, we sometimes experience dreadful moments when we think we’ll drown, but we don’t. Though we may initially take noble steps of faith and experience a boost of confidence, we often lose sight of our Lord, falter, and fall. But even when we begin to sink, we sink into His arms. . . Instead of responding in panic and doubt, reach out to Him. Take His hand. Let Him strengthen and encourage you.

Walter Wilson: The epiphany story itself exhibits a **symmetrical structure**, with the notice about the strong wind in **14:24** corresponding to the calming of the wind in **14:32**, and Jesus’s walking on water in **14:25–26** corresponding to Peter’s walking on water in **14:29b**. At the center of the composition are Jesus’s words to the terrified disciples (**14:27**), Peter’s request (**14:28**), and Jesus’s command (**14:29a**). This structure contrasts with Mark’s version of the story, in which the center position is occupied by Jesus’s act of walking on water. As is so often the case, for Matthew special significance is attached to the **element of dialogue**.

Grant Osborne: This pericope is so intimately tied with the preceding feeding of the five thousand that most of the themes there are continued and deepened, especially the sovereignty of Christ and discipleship understanding.

1. Jesus as Son of God

Jesus as God’s Son has the authority of Yahweh over the wind and the waves. **Twelftree** says, “Of all Matthew’s miracle stories, it is this one that portrays the **highest Christology**,” with Jesus the new Moses who does not just act for God, but rather God acts in him to conquer the storm and rescue his people. Still, Jesus is not just the agent of God but himself contains the authority and power of God.

2. The Role of Faith

Faith is especially needed and demonstrated in times of trial and trouble. Jesus taught his disciples to rely on his merciful provision in the feeding scene, but here he leads them into a time of testing that will prove their mettle. As Jesus himself was led by the Spirit into the time of testing by Satan (**4:1–11**), so he leads the disciples into the time of their testing. Unlike Jesus

(and like Israel in the wilderness), however, they ultimately fail the test, though with **partial success** shown in their “*little faith*.” While the boat does not signify the church, the storm does signify the difficulties of life (as was the case in the stilling miracle of **8:23–27**).

3. Victory through Depending Totally on Christ

In the feeding miracle Jesus wanted to involve the disciples in his authoritative act, and this continues here. When Peter asked to walk on the water, that was the response Jesus wished. As long as Peter focused on Jesus, he was able to take step after step on the water. However, when he turned to consider the earthly situation, he failed and began to sink into the depths. The entire NT builds on this, as victory over sin and temptation is completely related to the degree to which we are centered wholly on Christ. Peter is the model disciple even in his failure. He is an all-too-human figure, struggling with his growing awareness of Christ, as do we all.

4. Calming Our Fears and Giving Us Understanding

When overwhelmed by external struggles and at wit’s end, Jesus is the one who soothes our anxious hearts, who can truly remove our worries and turns our fears to joy and our defeats to victory (**Phil 4:6–7; Jas 1:2–4; 1 Pet 1:6–7**). Moreover, out of the struggle comes a deeper understanding of the reality of Christ. Out of the disciples’ initial defeat they were guided by Jesus into a new awareness of him as “*the Son of God*,” and they are beginning to grow in their understanding of that reality.

Donald Hagner: Jesus has power over the sea: he walks upon the deep as God alone does, and the sea respects his wishes. If the Israelites regarded the sea as the domain of evil powers, then the terrifying experience of a storm at sea in the dead of night becomes even more symbolic of the human experience of evil (cf. **Ps 69:15–16**). The fear of the disciples is like the fear of all who are **threatened by insecurity in the face of the unknown**. But when Jesus appears to those in extreme need, it is as one who has sovereign power, not only over the forces of nature but over evil itself. Thus his words, “*Be of good courage. It is I! Do not be afraid*,” are not empty or meaningless. **Fear is unwarranted where Jesus is present**. If in circumstances of personal need one responds in faith and, like Peter, steps out into the unknown but begins to submerge again through doubt under the all-too-real presence of evil, then at the cry, “*Lord, save me*,” Jesus is immediately there to deliver the believer (cf. **Ps 18:16–17**). Then will come the gentle rebuke: “*You of little faith, why did you doubt?*” In the experience of the Christian, Jesus is “*God with us*” (**1:23**), the ever-present source of deliverance (cf. **28:20**). (For a similar meditation upon God’s deliverance employing the symbol of the water and storm, see **Pss 69:1–3, 13–15; 107:23–32**.) In some such way as this, the miracle of this pericope was meant to be understood by and find practical application in Matthew’s church. The Jesus who multiplied the loaves and fish and who appeared to the disciples walking on the water and who saved Peter from sinking, this same Jesus is the Lord of the church who has brought salvation and who stands similarly prepared to save his people, even when they may doubt, from the evils that beset them. This Jesus who rules over nature and even the realm of evil is rightly worshiped as “*truly the Son of God*.”

J. Ligon Duncan: Now there are so many applications of this passage alone, that we could spend the whole morning talking of it. But let me just direct your attention to two things. The first thing I want you to note is, **the Lord Jesus let those disciples go a long time in the storm before He came to them**. I think very often in the midst of our trials, we keep looking for the light at the end of the tunnel. And in some of our trials that light never shows up. We feel like we keep going further and further and further in the tunnel. And we can’t see the Lord’s presence, and we

can't see the Lord's hand, and we can't make sense of it, and we feel as if the Lord has abandoned us. The Lord Jesus let those disciples go a long time before He came to them. And He did it, not out of spite, but He did it to build them up in faith in Him. To see their own weakness, to see their own need, and then to see the sheer power at His disposal to answer that need. The Lord Jesus may put us in a trial for that precise reason. And will not we say with the hymnist, "What e're my God ordains is right"? Surely the disciples learned that lesson on this night.

There is another thing I want you to see. **Peter's response to Jesus provides a beautiful picture of what saving faith is.** Notice that as long as Peter's focus is on the Lord Jesus, he is upheld. The minute Peter's attention is shifted to the circumstances around him, the waves and the wind, he begins to sink. Does that not teach us something about how faith works? It is not the strength of faith that saves us, it is the object of faith that saves us – the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not the strength of our faith in Christ that saves us. It's Christ that saves us. And when our focus is taken off of Him, our faith falters. As Peter becomes more aware of his circumstances and less aware of Christ, he begins to sink into doubt. And the Lord Jesus has to pull His doubting servant up with the words, "*O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?*" You see, if our faith is grounded in our circumstances, it will always be like Peter's faith at that moment. Going up and down depending on how the circumstances are. But if our faith is on the proper object, the Lord Jesus Christ, it will be constant. Why? Because He is constant. He never changes.

TEXT: Matthew 15:1-20

TITLE: *DEFILEMENT IS A HEART ISSUE*

BIG IDEA:

DON'T SUBSTITUTE RELIGIOUS TRADITION EMPHASIZING CEREMONIAL CLEANLINESS FOR DIVINE COMMANDMENTS EMPHASIZING INTERNAL PURITY

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: Matthew follows Mark in alternating passages revealing the power and identity of Jesus with confrontations with those who refuse Jesus and his message.

Grant Osborne: Two ideas are intertwined in this section—**external tradition** and **internal purity**. The first is central to **vv. 1–9**, the second central to **vv. 10–20**. Yet both combine in the theme that the life of the follower of Jesus must be controlled not so much by external codes of conduct forced from without but by the inner person of the heart that proceeds from within.

Richard Gardner: As we move into **chapter 15**, we find Jesus embroiled in another **conflict** or **controversy** (cf. the conflict stories in **chapter 12**). The immediate issue in the conflict is whether the disciples defile themselves when they fail to observe the rabbinic tradition of washing hands before eating. (According to **Luke 11:38**, Jesus himself failed to observe the practice.) In responding to those who pose the question, Jesus raises a more fundamental question about the rabbinic tradition itself: Does this tradition help us understand and obey the will of God expressed in the Torah? Or does it distort and sometimes circumvent the Torah and thereby mislead God's people?

William Barclay: In this passage, there meets us the whole conception of clean and unclean. We must be quite clear that this idea of cleanness and uncleanness has nothing to do with physical cleanness, or, except distantly, with hygiene. It is entirely a **ceremonial matter**. For the people to be clean was for them to be in **a state where they might worship and approach God**; for them to be unclean was for them to be in a state where such a worship and such an approach were impossible. . .

Religion had got itself mixed up with all kinds of external rules and regulations; and, since it is much easier both to observe rules and regulations and to check up on those who do not, these rules and regulations had become religion to the orthodox Jews.

Warren Wiersbe: Tradition is something external, while God's truth is internal, in the heart. People obey tradition to please men and gain status (**Gal. 1:14**), but we obey the Word to please God. Tradition brings empty words to the lips, but truth penetrates the heart and changes the life. Actually, tradition robs a person of the power of the Word of God.

Walter Wilson: Once again we have a portrayal that displays Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees and scribes, though now his adversaries are seen to come from Jerusalem, the implication being that news about the Galilean prophet has reached the center of Judaism. The debate in this instance pits the authority of the Pharisees as interpreters of their "tradition" against the authority

of Jesus as interpreter of “the word of God,” with the ritual of handwashing serving as a case study. To their complaint about the disciples’ failure to observe this practice, Jesus counters with a complaint of his own, the crux of which is that his opponents are more concerned with upholding traditions meant to help people observe the law than with observing the law itself, thereby exposing themselves as **hypocrites** and **blind guides**. As an illustration, he brings into view their tradition regarding the Korban vow, which he argues contradicts the divine commandment to honor father and mother, a sure indication of its “human” origin. After issuing a cryptic pronouncement about ritual purity to the crowds (graphically describing different things going into and out of someone’s mouth), Jesus is shown fielding a question and then a request from the disciples, who want to understand the meaning of this strange statement. Again drawing on the Decalogue for illustrations, Jesus explains that what people eat and drink leaves their moral core untouched, whereas what they say has the power to defile, since it proceeds from the heart.

Stanley Saunders: The **deteriorating relationship** between Jesus and the religious elites now takes a more ominous turn. Scribes and Pharisees last joined forces to ask Jesus for a sign (**12:38**; cf. **16:1–4**). The group that now challenges Jesus is from Jerusalem. Jesus has been ministering around Gennesaret, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee (**14:34–36**), so the scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem must come some distance for this encounter. Perhaps the Jerusalem leaders think that the locals are not up to dealing with Jesus, so they send their own people to put Jesus in his place. Jerusalem now looms on the horizon (cf. **16:21**). In controversies such as this, Jesus’ adversaries are hoping to assert their own status and diminish Jesus’ authority with the crowds. The point of the attack is to **discredit Jesus** by demonstrating that he and his followers do not attain the high standards of purity required by tradition and practiced, presumably, by the Pharisees and scribes.

I. (:1-9) RELIGIOUS TRADITION ESSENTIALLY INVALIDATES DIVINE COMMANDMENTS

A. (:1-2) Charge of the Religious Traditionalists

“Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying,

Grant Osborne: The historic present “*came*” (προσέρχονται) makes the coming more vivid (**Wallace**, 526). This is probably a semi-official delegation from Jerusalem sent to test Jesus’ knowledge and faithfulness to Torah (both written and oral). This is the only time in Matthew the Pharisees are named first (probably following **Mark 7:1**). The mention of **Jerusalem** stresses the hostility of the leaders and moves the action toward the climactic scene at the passion. It was unusual for such a lofty group to visit this backwater area of Galilee. **France** says this provides “a foretaste of the confrontation to come.”

1. (:2a) General Charge = Violating the Tradition of the Elders

“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?”

Michael Wilkins: The term “*tradition*” comes from a noun that refers to something that has been “handed over” or “passed on” (*paradosis*). The “*tradition of the elders*” (**15:1**) became a technical expression among the Pharisees for the interpretation of Scripture made by past esteemed rabbis that was “passed on” to later generations. . .

Traditions developed by humans can be dangerous when they supplant God's revelation. But tradition is not wrong per se. Paul uses the same term (*paradosis*) to refer to the gospel truths and doctrines that he passed to the churches (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6), and a related verb (*paradidōmi*) to refer to the fundamental creedal truths of the cross and resurrection that he had received and passed on to the church (1 Cor. 15:1). The essential difference between these forms of tradition and those developed within Judaism rests on the fact of **Jesus' incarnation**. Jesus is the revelation of God embodied, and Paul declares therefore that the traditions he received and passed on to the church have derived from God himself through the revelation of Jesus the Messiah. That is a crucial dissimilarity for us to reflect upon.

Grant Osborne: In Jesus' time these rules for the conduct of daily lives were transmitted orally but later were written in the Mishnah, with an entire tractate, Yadayim, filled with minute details on the washing of hands. They originally had a good purpose, to enable a people living in a culture far removed from the seminomadic culture that existed at the time of the giving of the law to understand and keep the law. They called it "building a fence around the law," i.e., keeping the common people from inadvertently breaking the law. But the number of details quickly turned it into a burdensome set of pedantic rules.

R. T. France: It was subsequent scribal rulings that attempted to extend this principle to the eating of ordinary food, and to people other than priests (on the principle that Israel as a whole was a "*priestly nation*"), and it is uncertain how far this process had advanced by the time of Jesus. It is likely that ordinary people would have found no problem with the practice of Jesus' disciples, and that this group of Jerusalem teachers are expecting of them a more rigorous standard than was yet recognized in Galilee. As a religious teacher, they perhaps imply, surely Jesus could not afford to allow his disciples more laxity than the Pharisees expected of their followers.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The apparent assumption behind the question was that unclean hands would defile (make unclean) the food, which would then defile the person (Nolland 612, 615), thus breaking fellowship with the Lord.

2. (:2b) Specific Charge = Cleanliness Violation

"For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

Richard Gardner: The particular tradition of washing hands before eating may have been based on a biblical text commanding priests to bathe before eating sacred food (Lev. 22:1-9). That text is part of a longer catalogue of ritual laws urging the people of God to distinguish "*between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean*" (Lev. 10:10), to avoid defilement from touching or partaking what is unclean (cf. Lev. 11), and to wash away defilement when it occurs (cf. Lev. 14:1-9; 15:1-33; Exod. 30:17-21).

B. (:3-6) Countercharge of Jesus

1. (:3) Elevating Man's Traditions over God's Commandments

"And He answered and said to them, 'And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'"

Richard Gardner: The text provides a framework for defining the relationship between Scripture and tradition—and judges those who permit tradition to have priority over Scripture. Needless to say, it has not been difficult for interpreters to point to situations where this has been the case. In

the Reformation era, Jesus' critique of Jewish tradition was often applied to the practices and institutions of Roman Catholicism (cf. **Luther**: 497-498; **Calvin**, 1960:4.10.10 and 4.10.23; **Calvin**, 1972, 2:159-161; **Menno Simons**: 178, 362). The reign of tradition, however, is really a generic problem, not the failing of one particular branch of Christendom. Every church must ask itself: **Does Scripture control our traditions, or do our traditions control Scripture?**

Daniel Doriani: Jesus **turns the tables** on the Pharisees at once. Although he cares about their topic—**true holiness**—he does not answer them on their terms. Instead, he proposes a counterquestion. The Pharisees ask, “*Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?*” Jesus replies, “*And why do you break God’s law for the sake of your tradition?*” (**15:3**).

By refusing to answer, Jesus captures the agenda. This is an important strategy. We must ask the right questions and set aside the wrong ones. When there is confusion, we should try to discover what the essential issue is. When there is a discussion, we need to try to frame the debate correctly. . . . Jesus asks the right question. The Pharisees asked about violations of the elders’ tradition; Jesus asks about violations of God’s law.

Charles Swindoll: Jesus didn’t take the bait. He had been breaking those unscriptural, contrived traditions since he began his ministry. If He wasn’t touching unclean lepers, he was taking corpses by the hand and lifting them back to life. And when he wasn’t fraternizing with scum-of-the-earth tax collectors, He had the audacity to heal people on the Sabbath! Knowing He was entirely in the right and they were in the wrong, Jesus answered their hypocrisy and should have convicted them of their own need for a Savior.

Jesus’ tone in this passage nears **exasperation**. He was fully aware of their man-made rules and regulations and couldn’t have cared less about them. He’d been dealing with this Pharisaic nonsense for months now, and this was just the latest installment of an ongoing conflict with spiritually blind guides who were leading people astray. Enough was enough! Jesus confronted them head-on.

Stu Weber: While the hypocrites claimed to enhance God's Law through their tradition, Jesus claimed that God's Law and their tradition were mutually exclusive. When their man-made regulations took precedence, those regulations took a person astray from the straight path of God's Law (cf. the wide and narrow gates and roads of **7:13-14**).

2. (:4-6a) Explanation of the Countercharge

a. (:4) Clear Commands of God Regarding Honoring Parents

*“For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and,
‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’”*

Grant Osborne: Jesus then adds the commandment against reviling or “*speaking evil*” of a parent, part of a paragraph detailing capital death penalty cases (**Exod 21:12–21**) and was interpreted not only of cursing a parent but also of insubordination against parents. Jesus wants to show how serious the responsibilities to parents were.

Leon Morris: (:4) -- Jesus proceeds to draw attention to one of the ways they broke the commandment and precedes it with, “*For God said.*” Since the divine origin of the commandment is important, he does not allow it to drop out of sight. What God has said is not to be put on a level with what even godly scribes laid down and handed on from one to another.

The commandment he selects for attention is that which commands the Israelites to honor their parents. The Jews commonly respected their parents, but Jesus points out that this attitude was due not to a scribal requirement, but to a divine command. God, no less, has prescribed that proper respect be paid one's parents (**Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16**). With this he links a further prescription that anyone who speaks evil of parents shall be put to death (**Exod. 21:17; Lev. 20:9**). Scripture leaves no doubt that parents are to be honored, and that extends even to the way people speak of their parents.

(:5) -- *But* is **adversative** and *you* is **emphatic**; Jesus is setting the Pharisees in contrast to God, whose words he has just quoted. "*God said ... but you say*" means that the words of God stand in opposition to the words of the Pharisees. Whoever is general, "*anyone at all.*" This "*anyone*" is pictured as addressing either father or mother and announcing that he has made a gift to God of anything that the parent might be expected to get from him. *Gift* comes first in this expression, which gives it emphasis, and while it may be used of gifts in general, in the New Testament it is used mostly for gifts made to God. In his version of the incident Mark at this point has *korban*, a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "*offering*" and always used in the Old Testament of offerings to God. What the child is telling the parent in this saying is that he has decided to give as an offering to God what the parent might have expected would be given to him or her in old age. *Anything of mine* is comprehensive. **The son is vowing away all that he might have used to support his parents.**

Jeffrey Crabtree: *To honor* (Greek *timaō*) means to "show high status to someone by honoring" (**Louw and Nida I:735**). It can also mean to "provide aid or financial assistance, with the implication that this is an appropriate means of showing respect" (**1 Tim. 5:3; Louw and Nida I:571**). These two meanings are closely connected, as Paul demonstrated in his instructions about parental support (**1 Tim. 5:3-8**). Adult children and grandchildren are responsible to honor their parents and grandparents by caring for their material needs. This was Jesus' point as well.

To curse or revile (v. 4) means "to insult in a particularly strong and unjustifiable manner" (Greek *kakologeō*; **Louw and Nida I:434; Grimm's 320**). The Hebrew word (**Ex. 21:17**) means to treat with contempt or dishonor (BDB 886). This Hebrew word and form were used in **Genesis 12:3** ("*that curseth thee*") in God's covenant blessing to Abram. See also **Leviticus 24:14, 23, Proverbs 20:20, and Jeremiah 15:10** for other examples.

b. (:5-6a) Convoluting Circumvention of God's Commands

"But you say, 'Whoever shall say to his father or mother, 'Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,' 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.'"

Richard Gardner: For Jesus, the societal obligation to care for parents that God commands in the Decalogue has priority over the seemingly sacred act of vowing to give one's resources to a religious institution.

R. T. France: Jesus now accuses his opponents of undermining this basic principle of OT law by a formal legal device of their own invention. The scribal practice with regard to "**Qorban**" is described so briefly as to be quite cryptic to those not familiar with it, but Matthew's readers were presumably well aware of this convenient manipulation of the rules for dedication of property. These rules are the subject of extensive rabbinic discussion, collected in the Mishnah tractate Nedarim, "*Vows*," where the term *qorbān* and its equivalent *qōnām* occur frequently as a

formula for dedicating food, money or property to God, which in practice meant to the temple treasury. Anything so dedicated was thus placed out of reach of other people who might otherwise have a claim on it, and the formula seems to have been deliberately used for this purpose. What is not so clear is how such a dedication could be made without the donor also losing the right to his own property (was it a pledge to be honored only at the donor's death?), but the rabbinic discussion makes it clear that in some way this could be achieved.

Stu Weber: Jesus was referring to a Jewish practice in which a person gave a gift that was devoted to God so it could be kept for oneself and not used for the good of others. Part of an adult child's obligation in honoring his parents was to care for them financially when they were in need, particularly as they grew older and were no longer able to make an adequate living. Widowed mothers or grandmothers were especially desperate for help. There was little opportunity for them to earn money, and they were unlikely to find a new husband to support them (**1 Tim. 5:8**). The **Pharisees' loophole** ("sorry, it is all 'devoted' to God") kept the younger generation from having to take care of their parents in their old age, and thus contradicted the Word of God.

3. (:6b) Elevating Man's Traditions over God's Commandments

"And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition."

R. T. France: The explicit contrasting of "*your own tradition*" with "*the word of God*" suggests a **robust view of the authority of Scripture** in relation to all human teaching, however venerable and however piously motivated.

Daniel Doriani: Tradition looks at the letter of the law and often seeks to manipulate it or exploit loopholes. It ignores the law's spirit and the people whom the law protects and directs. Traditions look at the hands; God's law examines the heart. . .

Without **love for God**, the quest for holiness becomes **legalistic**. It substitutes human tradition for God's law and substitutes human effort for God's grace. The traditions of the Pharisees started with God's laws, then added mind-boggling details about rest, food, washing, and even spitting. The tradition regulated the wrong things, lesser things, and in the wrong way, leaving the heart untouched (**23:16–24**).

C. (:7-9) Condemnation by Isaiah as Hypocrites and False Teachers

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,"

Grant Osborne: The Pharisees are people who claim to be one thing but whose actions prove them to be something else (used also of the Pharisees in **22:18; 23:13, 14, 15**). **Isaiah 29:13** is from an OT passage frequently used in the NT (**Matt 11:5; Rom 9:20; 1 Cor 1:19; Col 2:22**). What does Jesus mean when he says Isaiah actually "*prophesied*" about them, especially since he was speaking of the people of his own time? Jesus uses typology here; that is, the Pharisees and scribes fit the pattern perfectly and are a **typological fulfillment** of that passage.

Stu Weber: A hypocrite is a person who puts on an outward display that is not representative of what is truly inside.

1. (:8) Hypocritical External Form of Worship

"This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me."

Jeffrey Crabtree: Isaiah taught that God rejects hearts that are far from Him, i.e., hearts that do not love Him and are not loyal to Him. **Love and loyalty** are heart matters. A heart not right with God cannot produce a life right with God.

Some Christian groups today also rely heavily on **tradition** at the expense of Scriptural authority. The **Roman Catholic Church**, for example, teaches three sources of authority:

- (1) Scripture,
- (2) the infallibility of the pope when speaking *ex-cathedra*, i.e., “as the head of the Church on earth concerning faith and morals” (**Cairns** 427), and
- (3) church tradition.

Roman Catholic doctrine has long taught that Scripture alone is not enough for salvation and holy living and that church tradition “as it was expressed in the decrees of popes and councils, [is] the only permissible, legitimate and infallible interpreter of the Bible” (**Dowley** 366). In 1545, the Council of Trent affirmed that the Bible and tradition are equally authoritative. This remains the official position of the Roman Catholic Church. . .

Tradition, whether individual, local church, denominational, or that of the entire visible church, can serve well only as long as it agrees with and remains subservient to Scripture.

2. (:9) Humanistic Subverting of Divine Truth

“But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”

II. (:10-20) DEFILEMENT COMES FROM WITHIN NOT FROM WITHOUT

A. (:10-11) Addressing the Multitude -- Source of Defilement = Internal Not External

“And after He called the multitude to Him, He said to them, ‘Hear, and understand.’”

Stu Weber: *Listen and understand* is essentially the same as, “*He who has ears, let him hear*” (**11:15; 13:9,43**). Only those who would “*hear*” with a heart of faith and “*understand*” would accept Jesus' answer to the question of the Pharisees and scribes.

1. (:11a) Negatively Stated

“Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man,”

2. (:11b) Positively Stated

“but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”

Grant Osborne: The key contrast is between “*into*” (εἰς) and “*out of*” (ἐκ). It is not external things like food coming “*into*” the mouth that produce impurity but those thoughts and words from the heart that proceed “*out of*” the mouth that make a person impure. The rabbis should not disagree with this second point, but the whole import hits too close to home. Jesus already said this in **12:34** of the Pharisees, “*For it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.*” One’s words reflect the heart, and that is the true source of defilement. **Words and actions, not external piety, are the true measure of a person.**

B. (:12-14) First Interaction with Disciples – False Teachers Will Ultimately be Judged

1. (:12) Powerful False Teachers Oppose God’s Truth

“Then the disciples came and said to Him,

‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?’

Michael Wilkins: Jesus’ disciples report that Jesus has “*offended*” or “*scandalized*” (*skandalizō*) the Pharisees. They rightly understand that Jesus has elevated himself as critic of their entire religious tradition, which would undercut their influence with the people.

Jeffrey Crabtree: It was no wonder the Pharisees were offended. Jesus appeared to have set aside a significant portion of the law, had publically disagreed with the Pharisees and scribes, had struck down the tradition of the elders—and that openly, and had thus publicly challenged the authority of these men, their elders, and their traditions.

Charles Swindoll: We can sense that the disciples were getting a little nervous about Jesus’ confrontational tone with His opponents. Away from the public eye, they came to their Master and notified Him that he had offended the Pharisees. . .

2. (:13-14) Powerful False Teachers Can be Ignored Because They Are Irrelevant and Headed for Judgment

a. (:13) Plants Not Planted by God -- No Root and No Life

“But He answered and said,

‘Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up.’”

Leon Morris: In this way Jesus makes clear his **contempt** for the teachers who so confidently claimed to know the ways of God, but who had not been “*planted*” by the God to whom they so brazenly appealed. So far from being reliable expositors of the kingdom of God, the Pharisees **were not even in the kingdom.**

Stu Weber: Jesus’ calm confidence came out of the assurance that the Pharisees would be judged justly—both by God (**15:13**) and by the natural consequences of their own blindness (**15:14**). The plant terminology (**15:13**) brings to mind the parable of the weeds (**13:24-30, 36-43**). The hardened hearts of the Pharisees were not products of God’s work. Although they claimed to represent God, they were actually some of the “*weeds*” planted by the Evil One. They were among those who, in rebellion against God, did evil themselves and caused others to do evil as well (**13:41**). So they would experience God’s judgment. We will always have false religion in this world.

David Turner: Perhaps the disciples are concerned that the opposition of the Pharisees will be exacerbated by Jesus’ scathing words. Or if **Josephus** can be trusted (J.W. 1.110–12; Ant. 13.399–404), perhaps they are nervous about Jesus’ directly confronting the most popular interpreters of the law.

b. (:14) Blind Guides -- No Sight and No Future

“Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.

And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Grant Osborne: There is no use debating with those who are intractable. You expect them to oppose whatever you say, so leave them alone.

R. T. France: The Pharisees’ adverse reaction to Jesus’ words neither surprises nor dismays him; so direct a challenge to an essential principle of rabbinic thought could hardly expect any other

reaction. But they are **irrelevant**, plants not planted by God and blind guides. We shall hear much more of Pharisees and scribes before the gospel is over, and Jesus will be engaged in hot debate with them again in Jerusalem (22:15–23:39). But already from the new perspective of the kingdom of heaven they are side-lined: “Leave them alone.” . . .

If these leaders of Israel have themselves missed the way in their understanding of what it means to be the people of God (as vv. 7–9 have powerfully alleged), their influence on other Jews can only lead them into the same “*ditch*” of distorted religious values. It is to draw people away from that damaging influence that Jesus has launched his appeal over their heads to the crowd (v. 10), as he will do again in 23:1–12.

Warren Wiersbe: Why be afraid of rootless plants that are dying, or blind guides who cannot see where they are going?

Donald Hagner: The absurdity of the situation of the Pharisees and their disciples is set forth in the proverbial image of a blind person leading another blind person, both of them falling into a pit (cf. **Luke 6:39**). It would be hard to find a more vivid image of lostness, hopelessness, and futility.

C. (:15-20) Second Interaction with Disciples – Defilement is a Heart Issue

1. (:15-16) Dull Disciples

*“And Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Explain the parable to us.’
And He said, ‘Are you still lacking in understanding also?’”*

Grant Osborne: Jesus is incredulous that the disciples, after all that has transpired and all the teaching they have received at his feet, can still be so “*dull*” (ἄσύνετος), uncomprehending, senseless, and foolish. Jesus told the crowds to “*listen and understand*” (v. 10), and now his very disciples have failed to do so. They should have understood immediately what Jesus said.

2. (:17-19) Moral Lesson Based on a Biology Analogy

a. (:17) Biology Analogy

“Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?”

R. T. France: This earthy description of the alimentary system (a tighter version of Mark’s rather sprawling formulation, **Mark 7:18–19**) makes the point that physical food, while it goes into and through the body, is merely an aspect of animal existence and **does not affect the heart**, understood here as generally in biblical literature as the **seat of thought and will** (rather than of emotion, as in our idiom today). And since Jesus is going on to locate true purity and impurity in the heart and its products, the nature and origin of that food cannot therefore affect the matter. It is not a matter of what you eat but **who you are**; for the same principle cf. **Rom 14:14, 17; 1 Cor 8:8; Heb 9:10**.

b. (:18-19) Moral Lesson

“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew listed seven examples of activities that defile a person before God.

Mark's list (7:21) has thirteen. Matthew included one not in Mark's list, **false witness**, which shows that neither list is meant to be exhaustive, only **representative**. Both lists teach that people who live in sin are not right with God.

Grant Osborne: This is the true characteristic of the "*hypocrite*" (v. 7), a person who works hard at looking good and centers on all the external things but ignores the true source of the defilement, the inner reality of the heart.

Leon Morris: The list is no more than a sample of the evils that proceed from the heart. All sin defiles, and we should understand Jesus to mean that his followers must avoid evil of any sort. To follow the example of the Pharisees and concentrate on avoiding ceremonial defilement is to waste time and energy. Much more important is the avoiding of evil deeds, which really do defile the doers.

3. (:20) Thesis Summarized – Defilement is a Heart Issue

*"These are the things which defile the man;
but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."*

Richard Gardner: In short, Jesus defines defilement in **moral terms** rather than **ceremonial**. It is not failure to observe a particular ritual of cleansing that defiles or profanes, but failure to act with wholeness in our relationships with God and fellow humans. Jesus underscores this point in his concluding pronouncement in **verse 20**, which recalls the issue raised at the outset of the story (v. 2) and proclaims the disciples innocent of any substantive offense.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the intention of the Pharisees in trying to enforce their detailed regulations?
- 2) Where have you seen the Christian church today elevate tradition over the Word of God?
- 3) Does our speech and conduct reflect a regenerated and transformed heart?
- 4) Why were the disciples so slow to understand the teaching of Jesus on this subject?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: Above all others the Pharisees were respected and admired for their serious pursuit of righteousness (cf. 23:2–3). Perhaps this is exactly why Jesus criticized them so harshly. The source of their perspective was not God; they were themselves but blind guides of blind disciples. As had been pointed out in the preceding passage, they sadly allowed human teachings to cancel out the very commandments of God. They so valued the items of minor significance and a ritualistic formalism that they neglected emphasizing what truly makes a person unclean (cf. 23:23). The passage thus stands as a warning to all those who concern themselves with the intensive pursuit of righteousness and who in so doing elevate human tradition and formalism to a level equal with or even higher than scripture itself. The true

problem of sin is not to be found in a failure to perform correctly some external minutiae of human making; sin is an interior matter that concerns the evil thought, words, and deeds that come from the heart. Moral righteousness is thus far more important than ritual purity. The fundamental problem of humanity is more basic than the Pharisees dreamed. The Pharisees simply failed to address sin as a radical human problem. The overcoming of sin, however, was essential to the purpose and work of Jesus (cf. **1:21; 26:28**).

Grant Osborne: Consider the sins of your heart before you consider the actions of your life. The problem with the Pharisees was the false order of their priorities, and that is our difficulty as well. Until the heart is changed, actions will never suffice. When evil thoughts predominate, we never dare think our actions are viable. That is what happens with internet pornography. When we are immersed in such pernicious thoughts, how can we pretend to be serving God elsewhere? We are negating the so-called “good” we pretend to do. We must get our house in order before we start thinking our actions are good.

William Barclay: Here is the clash and the collision; here is the contest between two kinds of religion and two kinds of worship. To the scribes and Pharisees, religion was the observance of certain outward rules and regulations and rituals, such as the correct way to wash the hands before eating; it was the strict observance of a legalistic outlook on all life. To Jesus, religion was a thing which had its seat in the heart; it was a thing which issued in compassion and kindness, which are above and beyond the law.

To the scribes and Pharisees, worship was ritual and ceremonial law; to Jesus, worship was the clean heart and the loving life. Here is the clash. And that clash still exists. **What is worship?** Even today, there are many who would say that worship is not worship unless it is carried out by a priest ordained in a certain succession, in a building consecrated in a certain way, and from a liturgy laid down by a certain church. And all these things are **externals**.

Jeffrey Crabtree: This exchange between the Jewish leadership and Jesus contributed to the **growing divide** between them. In **9:3**, some of the scribes accused Jesus of blaspheming because He claimed to be able to forgive sin. In **9:11**, the Pharisees questioned the propriety of Jesus’ willingness to eat with sinners. In **12:1-8**, some Pharisees challenged Jesus for allowing His disciples to break the Sabbath law. In **12:24**, they accused Jesus of being empowered by Satan rather than God’s Spirit and He warned them that such statements are blasphemous and unforgivable. Later some scribes and Pharisees approached Jesus asking for a super sign (**12:38**). He rebuked them and promised them a great sign to come. Now representatives from the same two groups challenge Jesus again, this time on His failure to teach His disciples to obey the tradition of the elders. Jesus called them hypocrites and told everyone within earshot that these men were wrong. They were unhappy. The dislike would soon be hatred.

Daniel Doriani: Local churches have their traditions too—their prayers, their styles of speech that grant a sense of belonging to the group. The gospel never changes, but each generation must restate and reapply the gospel to meet the challenges of the day. At a minimum, thoughtless adherence to aging traditions can impede that goal. At a minimum, we can become complacent, viewing our long-standing, comfortable way of stating the gospel as the best way. At worst, we can start to imply that our way is the only proper way of stating and organizing the faith and that other ways are not simply flawed; they are immoral.

Anyone can lapse into legalism. At first glance, legalism seems like a courageous attempt to fulfill all of God's claims. The legalist strives to list all the duties he owes God and then to follow them. Oddly, in the end, legalism usually limits our service. If we look to laws, lists, and traditions to specify everything we must do, we will be tempted to say, "When I have done everything that the law and tradition require, when I have checked off everything on my list, then I have completed all my duty. God can ask no more." Thus the legalist serves the rules; he forgets to serve people, forgets to serve the Lord.

Legalism also removes the need to live by God's strength and grace. If we list everything we must do to avoid sin, we imply that we have the capacity to do it all, if we try hard enough. If so, then we hardly need grace, do we? The Christian life becomes manageable, entirely within human control. That is the message of "religion."

J. Ligon Duncan: Now this exchange with the Pharisees and the scribes gives Jesus the opportunity to talk about the relationship between **ceremonial law and true religion**, true holiness, the keeping of the moral law. And by the way, this exchange here also reminds us of another truth that our mother's taught us when we were young: **The road to destruction is paved with good intentions.** There is no doubt that the Pharisees, when they began their work of old tradition, did it with the best of motives. You remember Israel had been sent into exile because she had not been careful in the keeping of the law, because she had not followed in the ways of the Lord. And when Israel came out of exile, she was very interested that she not do that again. And so there were many people who were teaching in the religious circles of those days who said, let's make doubly sure that we don't get in that situation again. We'll not only keep the law of God, but **we'll keep this hedge around the law of God.** So more and more and more tradition came between the people and the word of God. Intentions are not enough. We must submit ourselves to the authority of the word. We must learn to teach in the spirit of the word, and we must neglect no part of the word. Remember, never in the New Testament will you find Jesus accusing the Pharisees or the scribes or the Sadducees, or any other party in Israel of caring too much about the word of God. It is always that by their own **manmade traditions**, they have taken away from the authority from the word of God. . .

He says, by your traditions you have made the word of God null and void. In other words, your traditions, rather than upholding the word of God, has actually undercut the authority of the word of God, by adding to God's word, you have taken away from God's word. It is subtraction by addition. They have subtracted from the word of God by adding to it their own manmade rules. .

Jesus is saying, "Moral defilement is more important than ritual defilement." The implication of Jesus' statement is, by the way, is that He is **abolishing the ceremonial code** for His followers under the covenant. Mark makes that clear in Mark chapter 7, verse 19. Mark adds this comment after the passage in which Jesus says that it is not what comes from in from the outside that defiles you. It is what comes out from the inside. Mark adds this phrase. By saying this, "*He made all foods clean.*" In other words, He's saying that no longer was the ceremonial requirement valid for all the followers of the Lord with regard to clean and unclean food. This is a very significant moment in redemptive history when Jesus Christ is announcing that the ceremonial law is no longer binding on His people. . .

I want you to see what Jesus is aiming for. Jesus, in **verse 11**, is aiming for the **heart**. He is telling us that it is not what is superficial that makes this holy. It is what is inside and deep and profound. It is that from which holiness emanates. It from the inner man, the mind, the will, the

whole man. That is where holiness proceeds from. It is a holiness that is from the inside out, and it characterizes all of our lives. That's the kind of holiness that Jesus is looking for in his disciples. Listen to these words from **J.C. Ryle**: "What is the first thing we need in order to be a Christian? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to Him? A broken and a contrite heart. What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart. What is genuine obedience. To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith. What is the chief request that wisdom makes to everyone? My Son, give me your heart." The Lord Jesus doesn't want merely superficial holiness in His people. He wants a transforming holiness from the outside out. And this is what he's saying to the Pharisees. That's not what you are about. You were about a superficial, a ceremonial, a ritual holiness. It is a man-made holiness about which was about, but I want my disciples transformed from the inside out. And so He warns the crowd that it's not the things that enter into them that make them unclean. It's what's on the inside that makes them unclean. . .

He is telling His disciples here that false doctrine kills. It is like the blind leading the blind. False doctrine leads us in the false ways of living. Jesus is alerting us to the spiritual danger of false teaching here by reminding us of its two consequences. False teaching leads to judgment by God, and unfortunately, false teaching leads many astray into false ways of living. Bad doctrine will lead to bad practice. And so the Lord Jesus Christ is very concerned that His disciples not be affected by the false teaching of the Pharisees.

TEXT: Matthew 15:21-31

TITLE: *COMPASSION EXTENDED TO GENTILES:
MEGA FAITH REWARDED AND HEALINGS ON THE HILL*

BIG IDEA:

MERCY EXTENDED TO THE GENTILES DESPITE JESUS FOCUSING ON THE PRIORITY OF HIS MISSION TO THE JEWS

INTRODUCTION:

Stanley Saunders: From the woman's perspective, this is a story about walls, obstacles, persistence, ingenuity, and faith. The Gospels consistently associate strong demonstrations of faith with boundary crossings. In this story the woman scales the walls of race and gender, but she also must overcome Jesus' own tenacious adherence to his mission. Three times Jesus seeks to turn her away, but she never quits. And while Matthew preserves the sense that Jesus remains undeterred from his calling, the story also suggests that she converts him. Faith not only brings healing, it transforms relationships. The woman's faith stands in sharp contrast to the dogged defense of the status quo, with all its walls and hierarchies, of the Pharisees and scribes (cf. **15:1–20**).

David Turner: The woman's final plea is amazing in both humility and insight, asking Jesus to permit her a scrap from the children's bread. His response commends her great faith and grants her request (**15:27–28**). The drama of repeated requests and responses heightens the reader's anticipation as Jesus places obstacle after obstacle in front of the woman. The inclusion of Ruth and Tamar in Jesus's genealogy (**1:3, 5**) prepares the attentive reader for this episode.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus was trying to remain hidden (**Mark 7:24**), but somehow this Canaanite woman heard where He was and came to Him with her need. Keep in mind that our Lord responded to this woman as He did, not to destroy her faith, but to develop it. Her own replies showed that she was growing in faith and unwilling to let Him go without getting an answer.

Leon Morris: From a story of unremitting hostility Matthew turns to one of outstanding and unexpected trust. This is one of very few stories of healings of people outside the Israelite nation, and it presents Christians with a problem in that Jesus seems to take up a harsh attitude toward the suppliant woman. Mark has this story too, though with differences. But in both it is clear that the woman had exceptional faith and that her persistence received its due reward.

Richard Gardner: Having challenged traditional ways of viewing clean and unclean (**15:1-20**), Jesus proceeds to take a journey to an unclean land. He heads for the district of Tyre and Sidon (**15:21**), the Gentile area of southern Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon). After an episode with an inhabitant of this region, Jesus returns to the area around the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee (**15:29**). Here too, however, there are hints that the events described are taking place on the boundary of the Jewish world. Unlike the typical audiences up to now, the crowds here respond to Jesus' ministry with fervent praise. And the very name Galilee, as understood by Matthew, denotes a place of hope for other nations as well as Israel (cf. **4:15-16; 28:16-20**).

What we have then in **15:21-39** are several episodes which look ahead to the salvation of the Gentiles, even though Jesus' mission is itself confined to Israel. Each of the episodes attests Jesus' miraculous power, so that formally the unit is a collection of miracle stories. In the first episode (**vv. 21-28**), a conversation on how far Jesus' mercy may extend leads at last to the healing of a woman's possessed child. The second story consists of a Matthean summary (**vv. 29-31**), describing the healing of numbers of people with a variety of diseases and disabilities. And in the third and final account (**vv. 32-39**), we find a gift miracle which reads like a reprise on the story in **14:15-21**.

(:21) GEOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION – SURPRISING GENTILE DESTINATION

“And Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon.”

Stanley Saunders: Here, as in most instances, flight is followed by healings (cf. **4:23–25; 9:24–25; 12:15; 14:13–14**). Tyre and Sidon are known in the prophetic writings (**Ezek. 27–28; Isa. 23**) for their economic disparities and arrogance. Yet Jesus has already said that these two cities will find more favor on the judgment day than the cities of Galilee, where he has ministered (**11:22**).

David Turner: This is Jesus's fourth strategic withdrawal from conflict (cf. **2:12–14, 22; 4:12; 12:15; 14:13**). He leaves Galilee for the region of Tyre and Sidon (cf. **11:22; Isa. 23:1–4; Jer. 25:22**), a journey less than fifty miles to the north (cf. **Mark 7:24–30**). Jesus's previous statements about true purity (**Matt. 15:10–20**) are immediately put into practice in **ministry to unclean Gentiles**.

R. T. France: This was not a mission to the pagan cities (like Jonah's to Nineveh), but a retreat to a place where Jesus and his disciples could be away from Jewish opposition and Jewish crowds. There is no indication that he sought contact with the local people; it is the woman in **v. 22** and the crowd in **v. 30** who initiate the contact, and Jesus here shows no enthusiasm for the encounter.

Broadus: The jealousy of Herod (**Mt 14:1 f.**), the hostility of the Pharisees (**Mt 12:14; 15:1, 12; also Mt 4:12; John 4:1–3**), and the fanatical notions of the masses (**John 6:15**), still required that Jesus should withdraw from Galilee, as heretofore in **Mt 14:13**.

David Thompson: Two of the most despicable cities in the entire Bible were the cities of Tyre and Sidon. They were godless, arrogant, satanic places that are judged by God. It is a tragedy when Jesus finds greater refuge in godless environments rather than in His own hometown or environments that are supposed to be godly.

Tyre was 35 miles from Galilee and Sidon was about 60. The region was a Gentile area located along the northwestern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Christ had referred to these two cities earlier in His ministry when He said that if He had done His miracles in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented (**Matt. 11:21**). But the truth is Jesus didn't do His miracles in this area. He came to offer Himself as King to Israel, not to evangelize the judged cities of Tyre and Sidon, or try to win Canaanite people who should have been destroyed (**Deut. 20:16-17**).

I. (:22-23a) MEGA FAITH REACHES OUT TO THE SAVIOR

A. (:22) Surprising Mega Faith Reflected in Plea for Mercy

1. Surprising Mega Faith Coming from a Gentile woman

“And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region,”

D. A. Carson: The introductory *idou* (lit., “*behold*,” untranslated in NIV) probably points to the extraordinary nature of the story. Mark (7:26) calls the woman “*a Greek* [i.e., a non-Jewess], *born in Syrian Phoenicia*.” Matthew’s use of the old term “*Canaanite*” shows that he cannot forget her ancestry: now a descendant of Israel’s ancient enemies comes to the Jewish Messiah for blessing. *Exelthousa* (lit., “*coming out*”) does not mean that she came out of that pagan region to meet Jesus but either that her ancestry was there or that she had left her home (**Bonnard, Lohmeyer**). Her calling Jesus “*Son of David*” shows some recognition of Jesus as the Messiah who would heal the people.

2. Surprising Mega Faith Focusing on the Identity of Jesus as Messiah to the Jews

“and began to cry out, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David;’”

3. Surprising Mega Faith Showing Confidence in the Power of Jesus over Demonic Forces

“my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.”

Charles Swindoll: Everything about the situation had the makings of an awkward, puzzling, and even **scandalous clash of cultures**.

- First, in that context it was socially improper for a woman to be addressing a man in this way.
- Second, though the woman was a Gentile, she acknowledged Jesus as “*Lord*” and “*Son of David*” – a startling confession of faith in Jesus’ messianic identity, especially in light of the fact that the Jewish religious leaders had rejected it.
- And third, to this point Jesus’ preaching and ministry had been focused almost exclusively on Jews, on calling the house of Israel to repentance.

B. (:23a) Surprising Silence of Jesus to Her Initial Plea

“But He did not answer her a word.”

Craig Blomberg: Surprisingly, Jesus breaks his pattern of immediately responding to requests for healing. His silence therefore seems deliberate and dramatic. The closest parallel to date has been the seemingly unintentional delay before Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter (9:18-26), a delay that ultimately magnified both the miracle and God’s glory.

J. Ligon Duncan: **At first, He says nothing.** And it is very important for you to understand that this is **not insensitivity**. Not only does your doctrine of Christ tell you that that could not be what this is, but Matthew himself is going to let you know in no uncertain terms in this text that Jesus’ initial silence and His initial hard words to this woman are deliberate. They are part of a plan. Jesus is saying what He is saying for a reason. And the reason is going to be a blessing for this woman. And so Jesus is not simply being rude. He is not being insensitive. **Jesus is doing this for a reason and it for her benefit.** In fact, the exchange between Christ and this woman is not only for her benefit but it is actually **for the benefit of the disciples**. And some of the words that Jesus will speak, are designed to prick the hard hearts of His own disciples so that they might see **their lack of compassion**. . .

Now, I want you to understand that Jesus, by speaking to her in **verse 24**, is explicitly refusing the request of the disciples. You see, you'd think in **verse 23** that by not responding to her that Jesus is showing some form of cruelty. But in **verse 24**, by speaking to her when His disciples have asked Him to send her away, Jesus is showing that He has something cooking. Jesus has something going on in the response He wants to give to this woman. And **He's explicitly rejecting what His disciples have requested**. They want her out. They want her away. They want her gone. But the Lord Jesus engages her in conversation, and even though His words are hard they are not only difficult to comprehend, but they may seem to be insensitive in **verse 24**, recognize that those words represent the fact that Jesus has absolutely no intention of doing what His disciples want Him to do, and that is to ignore this woman in her hour of need.

II. (:23b-24) MISSION OF JESUS RESTATED – PRIORITY MUST FOCUS ON THE JEWS

A. (:23b) Disciples Are Dismissive

*“And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying,
‘Send her away, for she is shouting out after us.’”*

D. A. Carson: Jesus' silence does not quiet the woman; so his disciples beg him to stop her persistent cries (**v.23**). If they mean “*send her away without helping her*,” either they suppose she is annoying him or they themselves are being annoyed. But their words could also be taken to mean “*send her away with her request granted*” (so **Meyer, Benoit**). Indeed only this interpretation makes sense, because **v.24** gives a reason for Jesus' not helping her rather than for not sending her away.

David Turner: It is possible that **Matt. 15:23–24** should be understood a bit differently, with the disciples asking Jesus to heal the woman in **15:23** and with Jesus answering them, not her, in **15:24** (**Légasse** 1972b: 28). But it is unlikely that ἀπόλυσον (*apolyson*) means “*set free*” (by healing her daughter) rather than “*dismiss*” (cf. **BDAG** 117–18).

B. (:24) Deeds of Mercy Must Be Directed

*“But He answered and said,
‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”*

D. A. Carson: It appears, then, that Jesus wanted his disciples and the Canaanite woman to recognize “that his activities were circumscribed not only by the inevitable limitations of his manhood, but by the specific part that he had been called to play during his brief earthly life” (**Tasker**, 150). True, Jesus was “*Son of David*,” as the woman said, but that did not give her the right to enjoy the benefits covenanted to the Jews. The kingdom must first be offered to them. The thought is like **John 4:22**: “*Salvation is from the Jews*.” The Samaritan woman, like this Canaanite woman, had to recognize this—even if a time was coming when true worship would transcend such categories (**Jn 4:23–26**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: Interpreters debate whom Jesus was speaking to in **verse 24** since He did not specifically address His comments to either the woman or His disciples. **Gundry** (312-313; also **Walvoord** 118) says Jesus was talking to His disciples and the woman overheard him. He says that Jesus' restricted calling and His disciples' antagonism were obstacles that highlighted this Gentile's faith. **Bruner** (2:99) suggests He may have been talking to Himself.

Whether speaking directly to her or not, He was clearly talking about her and **intended that she hear**. She seized the opportunity to beg and came closer.

S. Lewis Johnson: There are a lot of people, unfortunately, that seem to be disturbed by the **doctrine of election**, and allow this great doctrine in which we should rejoice—the Lord Jesus said remember, rejoice that your names are written in heaven. This is something to be happy about. She doesn't allow the doctrine of election in which on the surface it appears that she's not included to disturb her. This doctrine of the divine choice of a people from before the foundation of the world acts with a very depressing effect on some people—the non-elect—and acts with a very depressing effect on the elect, often, until they have been wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, then they begin to rejoice in the thing that used depress them. Strange people these Christians.

“We've known poor seekers mournfully to say,” **Mr. Spurgeon** used to say, “perhaps there's no mercy for me. I may be among those for whom no purpose of mercy has been formed.” It always puzzles me when we read in the word of God that the gospel is for sinners – that's a pretty broad term, sinners. As a matter of fact, it includes everyone in this room, and in the room over there too, and those sitting out in the hall as well. Maybe especially you out in the hall [laughter]. Sinners, that's comprehensive enough to include every son of Adam and Adam too. Why this should be disturbing to some I don't know. But nevertheless, **this woman is not disturbed by doctrines of distinguishing grace.**

III. (:25-28) MEGA FAITH REFLECTS A GENUINE HEART

A. (:25-26) Genuine Heart of Worshipful Expectation Despite Multiple Obstacles

1. (:25) Her Plea for Help from Posture of Worship

*“But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying,
“Lord, help me!””*

Stanley Saunders: The doctor is not taking new clients at this time. She fits neither his mission objective, restoring Israel, nor the demographic profile of his constituency. She ignores this rationale, falls before him, and pleads: “*Lord, help me.*” He explains again the exclusive nature of his mission.

Stu Weber: The woman came close to Jesus and knelt before him. The verb *knelt* is the common word that means “*to worship*” (e.g., **15:9**). In this vivid account, there is probably an emphasis on the literal meaning of the word, “*to bow down*,” but there is also a deliberate contrast between this woman's genuine, heart-felt response to Jesus and Israel's false, superficial “*worship*” in **15:9**. This woman knew she needed a Savior, but Israel thought they were doing fine on their own.

This is true worship in its most basic form—to cast ourselves on God in helplessness, acknowledging the Lord's power, love, and wisdom as our only source of help.

2. (:26) The Lord's Response from Priority of Mission

*“And He answered and said,
‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.’”*

David Turner: The point here is the redemptive-historical priority of Israel (**Calvin** 1972:2.169–70; **Carson** 1984: 355–56). Jews come first in Jesus’s ministry, yet he can also be compassionate to Gentiles once the “*children*” have been fed. Ancient negative stereotypes resulted in frequent epithets like this being hurled by Gentiles at Jews and by Jews at Gentiles, but Jesus’s speech is motivated by pastoral concerns. His blunt language reflects his culture, yet his commendation of the woman’s faith and his upcoming gentile mission **transcend that culture**.

Charles Swindoll: Everything He said was true, but His statement was intended to provoke the woman to demonstrate her persistence, not to crush her spirit.

Warren Wiersbe: The Greek word means “*a little pet dog*” and not the filthy curs that ran the streets and ate the garbage.

R. T. France: We can only speculate on why Jesus felt it appropriate in this case to raise the stakes so high in reminding the woman of the primarily Israelite focus of the Messiah’s mission before eventually acceding to her feisty response. Cold print does not allow us to detect a quizzical eyebrow or a tongue in the cheek, and it may be that Jesus’ demeanor already hinted that his discouraging reply was not to be his last word on the subject. Need we assume that when eventually the woman won the argument Jesus was either dismayed or displeased? May this not rather have been the outcome he intended from the start? A good teacher may sometimes aim to draw out a pupil’s best insight by a deliberate challenge which does not necessarily represent the teacher’s own view -- even if the phrase “devil’s advocate” may not be quite appropriate to this context!

B. (:27-28) Genuine Heart of Humble Self-Awareness in Her Persistent Plea

1. (:27) Her Plea from Posture of Humble Submission – Crumbs for a Canaanite

“But she said, ‘Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’”

D. A. Carson: As does Paul in **Romans 9–11**, the woman preserves Israel’s historical privilege over against all radical idealization or spiritualization of Christ’s work, yet perceives that grace is freely given to the Gentiles.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The woman’s self-identification with dogs shows that she understood what Jesus meant and accepted her place as one outside the covenant community. She had no right to ask this favor. She understood that Jesus was speaking of “order of priority” (**Newman** and **Stine** 512-513). He was the Jews’ Messiah first. She believed, though, that her needs could be met immediately.

R. T. France: The “debate” reaches its climax in an unexpectedly **feisty response** from this Gentile woman. Far from being the meek acquiescence which most versions imply, it is a **robust refusal to accept the apparent implication of Jesus’ words**. She turns Jesus’ own parable against him. If Gentiles are to be “*dogs*,” then at least let the dogs have their due. The dogs do have a right to be fed, even if all they get is the left-overs. Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel (“*Son of David*,” v. 22), must indeed first go to his own people, but **that does not mean that his mission must stop there**. Her reply, whether she knows it or not, thus encapsulates the important biblical theology of the election of Israel not for their own benefit alone but to be a means of blessing to all nations, a light to the Gentiles (**Gen 12:3; Isa 49:6**). “Yes, it is right, Lord!”

J. Ligon Duncan: This woman reminds us that **no one deserves the grace of God**. No one has a claim on God. No one can say, “You must give me this, God!” She teaches that we all stand as beggars before God, deserving only wrath and condemnation. And yet she willingly holds out her hands, and she says, ‘You are my only hope, give me the crumbs.’ What she’s teaching us there is that we’re all dogs. We all stand precisely in the same position.

You see, this is not about where Gentiles stand in juxtaposition to those of Israel in Jesus’ day. Ultimately, this is about where every human being stands before God. We do not stand before God in a position where we may demand of Him His grace. We stand before Him deserving condemnation and begging grace. For the woman, Christ gave her an opportunity for her faith to be strengthened. For the disciples, He is laying the groundwork for their eventual mission to the Gentiles. You remember in the previous passage, He’s already declared all foods clean. Now He is implying that that Old Covenant divide between Jew and Gentile is going to be brought down into rubble in His kingdom. And that the Gentiles, the Canaanites, will worship the God of Israel by the grace of the Messiah of Israel. We learn here that faith never looks at the salvation of God, at the grace of God, at the blessing of God as an **entitlement**. We are *entitled* to nothing but hell. **Grace is grace.**

2. (:28) The Lord’s Response from Recognition of Her Mega Faith

“Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed at once.”

Craig Blomberg: Jesus apparently wants to demonstrate and stretch this woman's faith. The “*children*” must then refer to Israel and the “*bread*” to the blessings of God on the Jews, particularly through Jesus' healing ministry. The woman disputes none of Jesus' terms but argues that, even granting his viewpoint, he should still help her (v. 27). The Gentiles should receive at least residual blessings from God's favor on the Jews. In fact, the Old Testament from **Gen 12:1-3** onwards promised far more than residue. The woman reveals a tenacious faith even as a Gentile (v. 28). Jesus explicitly commends this faith, closely paralleling the narrative of **8:5-13** (as does also his instantaneous healing from a distance). Matthew's distinctives underline her faith by the addition both of her words in v. 22 and of Jesus' praise here. “*Your request is granted*” more literally reads let it be done for you as you wish.

Leon Morris: It is interesting that Jesus does not commend the woman’s persistence or her humility; it is her **faith** that is basic. She believed in Jesus, and in the end she obtained her petition. Jesus says that it will be “*as you wish*”; the woman’s deep desire was granted. Matthew tells us that the girl was healed immediately. He never gives an indication of the nature of the illness; for him two things were important: the faith of the Canaanite woman and the immediacy of the cure of her daughter.

Stu Weber: There was no longer any reason to test the woman's faith, so Jesus assured her that her deepest desire had been granted. Just as with the centurion's servant (**8:13**), Jesus performed a long-distance healing. Matthew records that the woman's daughter was healed that very hour.

Warren Wiersbe: It is worth noting that both of the persons in the gospel of Matthew who had “*great faith*” were Gentiles: this Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (**Matt. 8:5-13**). In both cases, Jesus healed the one in need from a distance. Spiritually speaking, the Gentiles were “*afar off*” until Calvary, when Jesus Christ died for both Jews and Gentiles and made reconciliation possible (**Eph. 2:11ff.**).

(:29-31) GEOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION – HEALINGS ON THE HILL – SUMMARY OF HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS

A. (:29) Jesus Still Seeking Seclusion

“And departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up to the mountain, He was sitting there.”

Stanley Saunders: Matthew again uses a summary of Jesus’ healing ministry as a narrative transition (cf. **4:23–25; 9:35–38**). Jesus, who has been temporarily sidetracked from his mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (**15:24**), now passes from the region of Tyre and Sidon (**15:21**) back along the Sea of Galilee to an unnamed mountain (**15:29**), where he sits down, as if to teach (cf. **5:1–2**). It is not students who come to him, however, but “*great crowds*” bringing Israel’s lame, maimed, blind, and mute for healing. Each of these conditions represents not only physical disorders that afflict individuals, but Israel’s own maladies. These are the symptoms of oppression, exploitation, and rebellion against God. Whereas the Pharisees and scribes have challenged Jesus’ authority and its source (**12:1–14, 22–37; 15:1–9**), the crowds rightly “*see*” the power of “*the God of Israel*” at work (**15:31**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: The travel from Galilee to Tyre, on to Sidon, and then back down into the Decapolis, would have taken a few weeks, perhaps as much as six months (**Barclay** 2:147). The feeding of the five thousand was in the spring (**Jn. 6:4**) and by the fall Jesus was back in Galilee with His family (**Jn. 7:2-3**)—and six months from the cross! The Decapolis ministry and miracles, then, took place in mid to late summer of the final year of Jesus’ ministry and was in an area populated mainly by Gentiles.

Homer Kent: Mark shows that Jesus proceeded northward in Phoenicia through Sidon, then eastward across the Jordan, and finally southward through Decapolis till he reached the Sea of Galilee. This route suggests that he deliberately avoided the domain of Herod Antipas.

B. (:30-31) Jesus Still Responding to Desperate Needs

1. (:30) Multitude of Healings

“And great multitudes came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them,”

R. T. France: The summary of Jesus’ healings in this Gentile area is as comprehensive as among the Jews in **14:34–36**, but this time it is expressed in terms of **specific complaints** rather than in purely general terms, though with a generalizing “*many others*” at the end of the list. The complaints mentioned recall **Isa 35:5–6**, the blessings promised as part of God’s redemption of his people, a passage which was also echoed in Jesus’ depiction of the “*deeds of the Messiah*” in **11:5**; but now those messianic blessings are being experienced also outside the covenant people.

William Hendriksen: The very simplicity of the account makes it all the more touching. As far as the record goes no questions were asked as to whether a person happened to be Gentile – this was Gentile territory – or Jew. There is nothing at all to indicate whether the handicapped individual had already accepted Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior (which seems improbable) or whether perhaps he or his sponsor “believed” in him only as a worker of miracles. All that

mattered was that this man or woman or child needed help, and that Jesus was able and was eager to provide this help, this healing. . .

2. (:31) Marveling Response

a. Response of Wonder

“so that the multitude marveled as they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing;”

b. Response of Worship

“and they glorified the God of Israel.”

R. V. G. Tasker: that Jesus was now in predominantly non-Jewish territory is implicit in the statement that the praise offered by those who experienced Jesus’ healing power was ascribed to *“the God of Israel.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why this Gentile focus at this particular juncture of the mission of Jesus?
- 2) Where have you had the opportunity to demonstrate mega faith?
- 3) How is the attitude of Jesus contrasted with that of the disciples?
- 4) What spiritual maladies did the healing of these physical infirmities represent?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: Jesus was demonstrating his frustration with unbelieving Israel (**11:16-24; 13:10-17; 15:7-9**). Jesus decided that the “washing” controversy of **15:1-20** was to be the “last straw.” He was not abandoning Israel entirely, for there would continue to be a faithful remnant, but he demonstrated to Israel that their faith was inadequate. Their faithlessness was accentuated when compared to ignorant Gentiles, who did not have the privileged revelation of God's mind and heart through the Scriptures. Jesus stopped treating Israel with “favored nation status.” But because of God's promise to Abraham, Israel would always play a special role in his plan.

Donald Hagner: Jesus’ healing ministry continues, although as but part of the larger purpose of his ministry. The miracles point to the reality of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and of his identity as messianic king (note the resemblance to **11:5** in response to John the Baptist’s question). It is the God of Israel who is at work in the miracles of Jesus. Matthew’s emphasis on fulfillment elsewhere is exactly in keeping with this assessment. That this was particularly meaningful to Matthew’s Jewish-Christian church in its defense against the counterarguments of the synagogue is obvious. If it is the God of Israel who is at work in the ministry of Jesus, then God’s faithfulness to his people is confirmed in the same way that the limitation of Jesus’

mission to Israel confirms it. Matthew's Jewish-Christian church never ceased giving thanks to the God of Israel, who was the God of Jesus and of the church.

J. Ligon Duncan: Notice also that we learn in this passage that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than He is. There may be many of you here today who have been put off by Christians before. Christians have been unkind to you and you have been disappointed. Maybe some of you have been so disappointed as to be cynical about Christianity and even cynical about Christ. I want to remind you that even the Apostles stumbled in this area, and it did not make what Jesus was saying untrue, and it did not make Jesus untrue. Jesus' followers will fall short of His calling. And it'll happen more often than not. But to those of us who are followers of Christ, is this not a warning that we must not fall in the Spirit of **spiritual selfishness** into which the Apostles had fallen? We must manifest the same compassion that the Lord Jesus Christ manifested even to those who are different than we are. We believers need to beware this kind of a Spirit, and practice the same kind of grace and compassion as our Lord.

William Hendriksen: 7 Characteristics of this Canaanite woman:

- her reverential attitude towards Jesus – calls Him “*Lord*” and “*Son of David*”
- her agony – crying out constantly
- her intense love for her little daughter
- her humility
- her quick-wittedness
- her unswerving God-given faith in Jesus
- her perseverance

David Thompson: IN ANY DISPENSATION, ANY SINFUL PERSON WHO WILL PLACE HIS OR HER FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST SHALL BE SAVED, EVEN IF THE PROGRAM OF GOD IS NOT DIRECTED TOWARD THAT PERSON.

Just as a Gentile is saved here, so any Jew can be saved today. This is a tremendous passage of grace and a very important passage in Matthew, for several reasons:

- 1) It shows that Jesus Christ came for Israel. **15:24**
- 2) It shows that Jesus Christ did not come for Gentiles. **15:26**
- 3) It prefigures the fact that Christ's program would branch out to Gentiles. **15:28**
- 4) It shows the kind of attitude Gentiles should have toward Israel. **15:27**

Ed Dobson: **Developing Mega-Faith**

Can you sense this woman's faith? Jesus did. “*Woman,*” He said, “*you have great faith!*” The Greek word is *μεγας* (*meg'-as*), source of the English prefix *mega*. This woman had **mega-faith!** From this story, notice the characteristics of mega-faith:

1. Mega-faith **does not deny the problem**. It is not the power of positive thinking or a way of looking at life through rose-colored glasses. Mega-faith is **realistic**, acknowledging the challenges, difficulties, struggles, and sufferings.
2. Mega-faith **goes directly to the source of blessing**. As soon as she heard of Christ, she came and fell at His feet. We sometimes depend too much on our own abilities and resources. But great faith knows that beyond our own resources is the source of all power and blessing—God Himself! (See **Heb. 4:14–16+**)
3. Mega-faith **throws itself at the feet of Jesus**. This was an act of submission, carrying the idea of abandonment to the purpose, plan, and power of God. She didn't come with her own plan and ask Jesus to bless it. She said, “*Lord, I give this to You.*” It's frightening to

- give up control, but when we yield control to Christ, what freedom comes!
4. Mega-faith is **persistent**. At first, Jesus doesn't answer this woman; and when He finally did answer her, His tone was discouraging. But she kept begging. We should always pray and not faint. Prayer and faith persist, even when God seems to respond not a word.
 5. Mega-faith **repeats the word of God**. This woman took what Jesus said, repeated it back to Him, then added a request to it. Great faith is anchored in Scripture.
 6. Mega-faith **responds with submission**. "*Yes, Lord,*" the woman said. Those are two very important words in our prayer vocabulary. They acknowledge Him who is in charge, like Jesus in the Garden, ". . . *not my will, but Your will be done.*" Great faith surrenders the outcome to God, Who knows what is best for us.
 7. Mega-faith is **always rewarded**. Going home, this woman found her child whole and the demon gone. Great faith is always rewarded with **divine intervention** which comes either through a miracle or through a specific message from God that enables us on the journey.

David Guzik: Why her faith was great:

1. Her faith was great, even compared to her other virtues. She was humble, she was patient, she was persevering, she cared for her child. Yet Jesus didn't compliment any of these good things, but only her faith.
2. Her faith was great because it was **unlikely**. No one might have expected a Gentile to trust Jesus so much.
3. Her faith was great because she **worshipped Jesus** even before she had an answer from Him.
4. Her faith was great because it had been **tested so severely**. It's hard to think of a greater test than a demon-possessed child; but her faith was also tried by the seeming indifference or coldness of Jesus.
5. Her faith was great because it was **clever**. She turned Jesus' word inside-out and made what might have been taken as an insult as a door open for faith
6. Her faith was great because it **concerned a need right in front of her**, and a real need at that. Many people have faith for everything except those things that are right in front of them.
7. Her faith was great because **it would not give up**. She did not stop until she got what she needed from Jesus.
8. You could say that her faith conquered Jesus. He not only healed her daughter but He did so immediately, something that she had not even asked for.

John MacArthur: The Quality of Great Faith

Now, what is it about the faith of this woman that constitutes it as **great faith**? We know the Bible speaks of little faith, it speaks of weak faith, speaks also of strong faith, abiding faith, continuing faith, bold faith, rich faith, obedient faith, steadfast faith, dead faith, precious faith, common faith, unfeigned faith, working faith, and all faith. But what is the nature of great faith? Mega-faith? . . .

And so it was the **political** and the **religious pressure** that drove Him really to seek a time of **seclusion** with His own. He had tried that earlier, in going across the Sea of Galilee to the northeastern shore, going up into a mountain, but you remember that the multitude gathered below, and that was brought to a halt. He sought it again by going across the sea to the other side, only to find the multitude there. He went into Gennesaret, which was an area of farmland without city, only to find another multitude there.

Then seeking again the rest and the seclusion and the quiet and the time with His own, anticipating the cross only a year away, and knowing there was much to be readied in their hearts, He sought seclusion. And so from the frenzy of Galilee, He went into the north. He went beyond, if you will, the political and religious jurisdiction of the leaders of Israel. . .

Now, for Jesus, this was a deliberate withdrawal. It was not out of fear, it was out of a desire for time alone with His twelve men, time for preparing them for the cross, for the mission at hand, time to take the pressure off the frenzied situation in Galilee. Palestine obviously afforded Him no privacy. No matter where He went, there was a mob there, and He needed this time. . .

And so there is a sense in which - although He is not fully opening the ministry to the gentiles, He is not canceling out the priority of Israel, He is extending Himself to open hearts. And even though He did not go there purposely to minister as such but to seek seclusion, He knew when He got there that He'd meet this woman because He knew everything. And before He left, according to Mark's gospel, chapter 7, verse 31, He did minister on a wide range to the people in that area. So **He did go to some open hearts.**

And I see a sense of pathos in this. He could only take the resistance, He could only take the shallowness, He could only take the hostility and the animosity of Israel so long, and He was driven to go to a place where hearts were more open. And there is symbolism in this. He is abandoning traditional religion for true faith. He is abandoning religious pride for humility. He is abandoning the one who seeks nothing for the one who seeks with an open heart. And He is always available to that person. . .

Great faith is a relative term. To her, it was great faith because she had so little on which to build it. In other words, she was a pagan outside the covenant, outside the law, outside the promises, outside the Word of God, outside the Scriptures, and she had been in area where the Lord Jesus had not been doing His mighty deeds. So based on the amount of content and information she had, her faith is great.

On the other hand, when the Lord says to the disciples, "*Oh, you of little faith,*" it is only little in a **relative sense**. Relative to all they knew and to all they had been exposed to, they should have had a greater faith. But in her case, this is great faith. And I believe that that is the key to the whole passage, and if you don't understand that **the faith of the woman is the issue**, you can't understand what goes on.

Now follow. We see, then, there the first element of great faith, and I want to give you about five, **five qualities that mark great faith**. Now, the first one is this: great faith - or mega-faith, if you choose - **is properly directed**. She put her faith in the right person. . .

Secondly, it is not only properly directed, it is **repentant**. And I've already said that repentance has two elements. It is turning from sin to God, turning from idols to God, and wrapped in it is a sense of penitence. . .

There's a third element. Her faith was not only properly directed and repentant, but it was **reverent**. . .

Let me give you a fourth thought, and this is the heart of the text. Watch how it unfolds. It is **persistent** - it is persistent. Great faith is persistent. Now, I want you to notice that beginning in **verse 23**, Jesus puts up a series of barriers for this woman. You know, some people come to Christ and they have to struggle through their own doubt. Some people come to Christ in the Gospel of Matthew and they have to struggle through the inability of the disciples, say, but this woman, in order to get through to Christ, has to struggle through the barriers that He puts up. . .

You say, "Well, did He care?" Sure, He cared. "Did He have compassion?" Of course He had compassion. "Well, what is He doing? Why doesn't He say something?" You see, He had had enough of shallowness, He had enough of superficiality, He had enough of people who came and got what they wanted and left. He had all He needed of that in Galilee. There was enough shallow soil, enough weedy ground, and I believe that He wanted to strengthen and test and pull this woman's faith to its full flower. And so He puts up barriers through which she must persist to show the reality of true faith. . .

I mean she is really persistent, isn't she? "You're going to make Jewishness an issue, I'll go through that." "You want to make this little analogy an issue, I'll turn the analogy to fit the situation." That couldn't stop her, either. And it's true, through the time that Jesus was feeding the children of Israel, there were the crumbs dropping to the gentiles, weren't there? And we see it all through the gospel account. And finally, of course, the dawn will come when the church is born and gentiles are embraced in a marvelous way. . .

Look at **verse 25** and see the next characteristic of her faith; it was **humble**. Properly targeted, repentant, reverent, persistent, and humble. "*Then came she*" - I love this - "*and worshiped Him.*"

TEXT: Matthew 15:32-39

TITLE: FEEDING OF THE 4,000 – EXTENSION OF MESSIANIC PROVISION TO THE GENTILES

BIG IDEA:

COMPASSION AND PROVISION SHOWN TO THE GENTILES BY THE MESSIAH CONTRASTED WITH THE DISMISSIVE ATTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLES

INTRODUCTION:

Leon Morris: Matthew clearly regards the two incidents as **distinct**: the numbers of people are different in the two incidents, as are the quantities of food and the amounts left over; the words for “*basket*” are different; the people in this incident had been with Jesus for three days (v. 32) whereas in the earlier incident they had just gone around the lake to head him off (14:13-14); and the times appear to be different, the earlier feeding being when the grass was green (Mark 6:39), that is, in spring, while here there is no mention of grass and the ground appears to be hard (v. 35); in other words, it is late summer. The feeding of the five thousand is found in all four Gospels, but this miracle is related **only in Matthew and Mark**.

Warren Wiersbe: Chart showing the differences in the two incidents:

Feeding 5,000	Feeding 4,000
Primarily Jews	Primarily Gentiles
Galilee, near Bethsaida	The Decapolis
5 loaves, 2 fish	7 loaves, “a few fish”
12 baskets over	7 baskets over
Crowd with Him 1 day	Crowd with Him 3 days
Spring of year (green grass)	Summer season
Tried to make Him King	No popular response

Donald Hagner: At first glance this miracle involving the feeding of the four thousand seems to be merely a less impressive repetition of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Both

stories are clearly stories of messianic provision foreshadowing the blessings of the eschaton, and this one, especially in retrospect, intimates the **extension of messianic blessing even to the Gentiles**. The fulfillment brought by Jesus is finally to involve the feeding of the hungry of the nations. The universalism implicit here is important to the evangelist's understanding of the meaning and significance of Jesus' messianic mission. Theologically, this feeding, like that of the five thousand, is closely related to the feeding symbolized in the eucharist, which also points in its own way to the experience of eschatological blessing. The feeding of the four thousand points to the **blessing of the Gentiles**, who, together with Israel, will also be the recipients of eschatological blessing through the provision of Jesus.

J. Ligon Duncan: And there is a different reason, **a different purpose** in these miracles in Jesus instruction of His disciples. Listen to **R.V.G. Tasker**: "In the first story, Jesus seems to be concerned that the disciples should **understand how utterly dependent upon Him they must always be**. If they are to do what they would have them to do, they must be in dependence upon Him." You will remember that the disciples come to Jesus in the feeding of the 5,000. They say the people are hungry, and what do we do? And Jesus shows by His mighty miracles that the disciples must depend upon Him, because He turns around and He says, "You go feed them." And the disciples say, "We can't." And the point is: "Right, you can't, I can." If you're going to feed the people, if you're going to shepherd the people, **you're going to have to be dependent on Me**.

But listen to what **Tasker** says is the reason for this miracle: "In the second story He seems to be indirectly **reproving them for their lack of sympathy for the needs of the Gentile world**." Have you ever noticed the difference between these miracles? Jesus is right off the shore of Galilee, ministering in a Jewish region, and the disciples come to him and say, "Lord, these wonderful people are hungry." Now Jesus is ministering in a Gentile region. Do the disciples come to him? No. Jesus comes to the disciples. These people have been with Jesus for three days. For three days these people have been with Jesus and they've run out of their food supplies and do the disciples come to Jesus and say, 'Lord these good people are hungry'? No! The disciples don't even notice. Jesus comes to His disciples and He says, '*I have compassion on these people*.' What's implied? You don't. 'I want to feed them. So you feed them.' **The scenario is entirely different**. Jesus is again showing the disciples **His compassion for the Gentiles** and this was key to their later missionary work. Jesus is laying a very important foundation for the missionary task. And Jesus' compassion being highlighted is not a unique experience in the gospels. No less than 9 times in the gospels Jesus is accounted as being a **person of compassion**. . .

All of us are tempted to overlook those who are isolated and hurting and needy and who are different from us. And Jesus is calling on us here to show His kind of compassion to those who are marginal, to those who are different, to those who we might even be inclined to shun. Jesus is calling us to them.

William Barclay: The wonder of this story is that in these healings and in this feeding of the hungry, we see the **mercy and the compassion of Jesus going out to the Gentiles**. Here is a kind of symbol and foretaste that the bread of God was not to be confined to the Jews; that the Gentiles were also to have their share of him who is the living bread.

I. (:32-34) WHO WILL TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF HUNGRY GENTILES?

“And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said,”

A. (:32) Contrast between Jesus and His Disciples

1. Compassion of Jesus for the Gentiles

*“I feel compassion for the multitude,
because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat;”*

Stu Weber: The crowd was the same Gentile people who had been with Jesus on the mountainside near the Decapolis throughout three days of teaching and healing ministry (15:29-31).

Bruce Hurt: Our English word *compassion* is from Latin and means to suffer with and as one source has said is “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain and remove its cause.”

Broadus: Jesus was quite the preacher to keep them listening for 3 days! They had no doubt brought some food with them, which was now exhausted. They showed great zeal to see and hear and be healed, remaining so long in the thinly inhabited region, sleeping on the ground two nights in the open air, living on the food brought with them, and slow to leave when it was gone.

Grant Osborne: The crowd is so filled with amazement that they do not want to leave and so stay with Jesus until it is getting dangerously late, and Jesus is aware of their predicament.

2. Dismissive Attitude of the Disciples

“and I do not wish to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”

Leon Morris: The people had evidently not come prepared for as long a stay as it had turned out to be. The meaning is not that the crowds had been fasting for three days, but that during that time they had exhausted their food supply. Now Jesus says that he does not want to send them off without something to eat. It would be a long way home for some of the people, and without food it would be a distressful journey. Jesus cares for them. They had come to him for help, and he is not willing to send them off in such a way that they would end up fainting (**Hendriksen**, “*lest they collapse*”) on the way.

Daniel Doriani: This time Jesus preempts them. He says, to paraphrase: “I know you will soon suggest that I dismiss this needy crowd, but I am not willing to do so while they are hungry. They may collapse on the way” (15:32). The disciples always seem to want to **dismiss people** who have needs and make demands, but Jesus does not. The pattern is consistent enough that it amounts to a policy statement for the disciples and the church: We do not “dismiss” people around here. If they are needy, if they are annoying, we take their needs seriously. **If we can help them, we do.**

B. (:33) Disciples Focus on Lack of Resources and Inability to Meet Needs

“And the disciples said to Him, ‘Where would we get so many loaves in a desolate place to satisfy such a great multitude?’”

R. T. France: The disciples, who in **14:15–17** merely stated the problem of the inadequate resources available, here make a more **emphatic protest** (v. **33**) about the impossibility of the idea of feeding such a large crowd. This is the more remarkable because the narrative sequence of the gospel suggests that whereas in **14:13–21** they were taken by surprise, in the light of that experience they ought by now to be ready for such a miracle again. . .

In **16:7–10** Jesus will comment on the disciples' inability to learn the significance of both feeding miracles, as they again worry about not having enough food, and this second expression of incredulity suitably prepares the way for that rebuke. But the reader is left wondering how the disciples could have been so slow to learn.

Craig Blomberg: At first the disciples' question seems to reflect the height of obtuseness. The solution to their problem is obviously for Jesus to do what he did before and work a miracle. But the emphatic “*we*” (a uniquely Matthean touch), corresponding to the emphatic “*you*” of **14:16**, may explain matters. Previously, Jesus had told his disciples to solve the problem themselves. They couldn't, so he did. But he has consistently passed on his miracle-working authority to the Twelve, including as recently as **14:28-31** (despite the abrupt ending of Peter's walking on the water). Most likely the disciples think that Jesus' remarks in v. **32** imply that they should miraculously provide food for the crowd, and they are not convinced they can do it. **This makes their question much more understandable**, though, in any event, Matthew does not present the disciples in a particularly positive light.

Daniel Doriani: We should note the capacity all disciples have to **forget God's goodness**. We have experienced God's kindness in times past, but we fail to draw the right conclusions from that kindness today. As if they had never before seen Jesus provide, the disciples forget to ask Jesus for relief. We do the same, forgetting to contemplate his power and blessings. So we deprive ourselves of the full benefits of living by the Lord's love and power.

C. (:34) Jesus Focuses on Availability of Resources and Ability to Meet Needs

1. Investigative Question

“And Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’”

2. Impotent Response

“And they said, ‘Seven, and a few small fish.’”

II. (:35-38) THE MESSIAH PROVIDES MORE THAN ENOUGH TO MEET ALL NEEDS

A. (:35-36) Simplicity of the Miraculous Meal

1. (:35) Preparation

“And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground;”

2. (:36) Provision

“and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples in turn, to the multitudes.”

B. (:37a) Satisfaction with the Provision

“And they all ate, and were satisfied,”

C. (:37b-38) Superabundance of the Provision

1. (:37b) Leftovers

“and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full.”

Donald Hagner: The type of basket referred to here was a more flexible basket than the baskets (probably wicker) referred to in the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand (cf. **14:20**). That there were seven loaves and seven baskets full of remaining fragments in this feeding of the multitude cannot be accidental. The number seven points to fullness and perfection, or, somewhat less plausibly, to the “seventy” gentile nations. Much less likely is **Lohmeyer’s** suggestion that the number refers to the seven deacons of **Acts 6:1–6**, who after all were Hellenistic Jews and not Gentiles. If it is taken in conjunction with the twelve baskets full of remainders in the feeding of the five thousand, which almost certainly points to the twelve tribes of Israel (or the twelve disciples), i.e., the Jews, then the sevens—even though those who actually had been fed were Jews—may well symbolize the **meeting of the needs of the Gentiles**, i.e., the fullness of **messianic provision for the entire world**.

Michael Wilkins: If the number of twelve baskets left over in the feeding of the five thousand is symbolic of Israel, as most suppose, then the number seven here—normally symbolic of **perfection or completion**—may symbolize the completion or fullness of God meeting the needs of **all peoples, now including Gentiles**.

William Barclay: In the feeding of the 5,000, the baskets which were used to take up the fragments are called *kophinoi*; in the feeding of the 4,000, they are called *sphurides*. The *kophinos* was a narrow-necked, flask-shaped basket which **Jews** often carried with them, for Jews often carried their own food, in case they should be compelled to eat food which had been touched by Gentile hands and was therefore unclean. The *sphuris* was much more like a hamper; it could be big enough to carry a person, and it was a kind of basket that a **Gentile** would use.

2. (:38) Large Numbers Fed

“And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.”

Stu Weber: The four thousand men is representative of at least twice that number of people, when including women and children.

Richard Gardner: 4000 is a multiple of four, which is linked with the idea of **universality** (cf. the four comers of the earth in **Isa. 11:12** and **Rev. 20:8**, and the four winds from the four quarters of heaven in **Jer. 49:36**).

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus did not preach a sermon to this crowd on “*the Bread of Life*” as He did to the Jews in Capernaum, following the feeding of the five thousand (**John 6:22ff.**). The facts about the Old Testament manna and the “*bread of God*” would have been foreign to these Gentiles. Jesus always adapted His teaching to the needs and the understanding of the people to whom He ministered.

(:39) EPILOGUE – GEOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION

*“And sending away the multitudes,
He got into the boat, and came to the region of Magadan.”*

Michael Wilkins: Magdala is generally identified with Migdal Nunya (“*Tower of Fish*”) of Talmudic times (b. Pesah. 46b), located about three miles north of Tiberias on the Gennesaret plain, which is usually connected with the town about which Josephus writes, the Greek name of which was Taricheae, roughly translated “the place where fish were salted.” During Jesus’ day and up to Talmudic times, Magdala-Taricheae was the center of Galilee’s fish-processing industry, making it one of the most important fishing centers on the Sea of Galilee and the administrative seat of the surrounding region. Archaeologists uncovered in Magdala a decorative mosaic depicting a boat with a mast for sailing and oars for rowing in the ruins of a first century A.D. home, and discovered about a mile north of the town the remains of the famous first-century A.D. “Kinneret boat”. These discoveries have been invaluable for recreating life in first-century A.D. Galilee.

David Turner: After the miracle, Jesus crosses over the sea in a boat and arrives at Magadan. This is an obscure town, like Mark’s Dalmanutha (**Mark 8:10**). Both are mentioned only in the Gospels. Perhaps Magadan should be identified with Magdala on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. At any rate, Jesus is clearly now in **Jewish territory** and back in touch with the Pharisees’ opposition (**Matt. 16:1**).

Charles Swindoll: However, as Jesus’ “fans” increased and His friends regrouped in Magdala, His foes were also on the move – plotting, scheming, and setting traps to catch Him in some kind of punishable crime. As the sun set over the Sea of Galilee, casting long shadows over the small village of Magdala, the hostility and resistance to Jesus’ ministry was about to rise to a greater pitch of fury. Nevertheless, in the face of this growing resistance, Jesus would continue to teach and preach, to **model compassion**, and to prove to those with eyes to see and ears to hear that **He really is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why the repetition of such a similar miracle as the feeding of the 5,000? Is there a different emphasis or just the value of repetition of similar themes?
- 2) What did the disciples expect would happen were Jesus just to dismiss the crowd without providing food for them?
- 3) Why does Jesus use the disciples in the distribution of the food to the multitudes?
- 4) How quick are we to forget God’s past demonstrations of His faithfulness and goodness?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: The structure of this pericope, especially after the opening verse, is very similar to that of the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand. Here again there is no concluding reference to the crowd’s reaction, nor is a christological point drawn. The story stands by itself.

The pericope may be outlined as follows:

- (1) Jesus' compassion upon the hungry people (v. 32);
- (2) the problem (v. 33);
- (3) the scanty resources (v. 34); and
- (4) the solution, consisting of
 - (a) the miracle (vv 35–37a),
 - (b) the abundance (v. 37b), and
 - (c) the number fed (v. 38).

No striking syntactic parallelism is evident in the pericope, which consists of straightforward narrative. . .

R. T. France: It seems to me that two factors are required to account for the presence of this pericope. First, the belief of both Mark and Matthew that as a matter of fact two such miracles did take place; and secondly, a deliberate intention to draw a parallel between Jesus' Jewish ministry and his ministry to Gentiles, such as we have already noted in the summary of healings in **15:29–31** to parallel that in **14:34–36**. The latter point is given added force by the observation that between the two feeding miracles, both in Mark and in Matthew, we find the debate about purity, with its radical implications for Jew-Gentile relationships, and the encounter with the Gentile woman which focuses on the right of the Gentiles to "*the children's bread*." The literal provision of bread to a Gentile crowd, as previously to a Jewish crowd, vividly illustrates that principle and the extension of Jesus' messianic ministry which it entails. But the numbers are scaled down; the **children's bread remains the prior commitment**. Without this element of comparison and contrast between the Jewish and Gentile feeding miracles it is not easy to explain what seems otherwise to be a needless (and strangely less impressive) repetition of the previous story.

Richard Gardner: Not surprisingly, **Menno Simons** selects this woman as one of ten examples in a list of biblical persons who illustrate true faith (cf. 383-391), and other writers view her faith with equal admiration. In some texts the facet of faith lifted up is her **humility** (she accepts the label dog and only asks for crumbs of mercy). In other cases the emphasis falls on the quality of **persistence**, on faith that refuses to give up. **Luther's** comments on this point are especially perceptive: The woman demonstrates unshakable confidence in God's grace and goodness, even when it seems that God is turning aside and saying no. This, as **Luther remarks**, is the essence of true faith (cf. 507-511).

Grant Osborne: The very same themes as in the feeding of the five thousand (**14:13–21**) are here. The **sovereign authority** of Christ is even more strongly presented here, as he takes charge rather than asking the disciples a series of questions. Also, the **merciful provision** of God and Christ for the needs of the people is evident. **Discipleship failure** on the part of the "*little-faith ones*" is somewhat present and will become more evident in **16:5–11**. Finally, Jesus as the great messianic prophet who is **establishing a new community** is evident in the banquet scene.

The important implicit addition is the **extension of these blessings to the Gentiles**, not explicit in the text but implicit in the setting and possibly in some details (like the term for "*baskets*"). A further addition could be the **eschatological Zion typology** that looks forward to the coming of the final kingdom. Also, by deliberately telling the story in such a way that the parallelism with

the other feeding miracle is obvious, the themes are extended further and given even greater stress.

John MacArthur: From Jesus' ministry to the Gentile crowd in the Decapolis a number of **important lessons** can be learned.

First, we see again Jesus' unrivaled divine power. Because only God can create, only God could have multiplied those seven loaves of bread and a few fish even one-fold, not to mention many thousand-fold. He is the God of Abraham, who believed in Him "*who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist*" (**Rom. 4:17**). Just as He had created healthy tissues to replace diseased ones, whole limbs to replace deformed and missing ones, and seeing eyes to replace blinded ones, He also created a superabundance of food to replace a little.

When the apostles were establishing the early church, many miracles were performed through them. But their miracles were performed in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ, for whom they served merely as instruments. Jesus, however, performed miracles in His own name and power, because He was the **source of the power**. He did not heal, deliver, raise the dead, and multiply food as God's agent but as God.

Second, the fact that He not only cured diseases and restored hearing and sight but restored those who were *kullos* (maimed and sometimes completely without arms, legs, eyes, or other parts of the body), He set Himself totally apart from self-proclaimed divine healers of past years and modern times. You look in vain among those healers for verified accounts of anyone who was given an arm, leg, or eye to replace one that was missing. Their "cures" are at best psychosomatic and are extremely minor compared to those the Lord performed during the three years of His earthly ministry. God is still capable of sovereignly healing the most hopeless disease and of creating new limbs where there are none. But the only **age of healing** in the church was the **time of authenticating the Messiah Himself and of His Word** through the apostles. Once those ends were accomplished, the gift of miracles ceased. (For a more complete discussion of this subject, see the author's book *The Charismatics*, published by Zondervan.)

Third, we learn that the goal of ministry is worship. Although most, if not all, of the multitudes in Decapolis were pagan Gentiles, when they saw the magnitude and perfection of Jesus' healing power, they not only were astonished beyond measure but also "*glorified the God of Israel*" (**v. 31**). Witnessing such a divine display demanded much more than awe; it demanded reverential worship, which those Gentiles offered as best they knew how. Their worship was Jesus' supreme goal. He had unqualified compassion to heal their broken bodies and to fill their empty stomachs. But He was infinitely more concerned that, through their trust in Him as Lord and Savior, He could also save their souls from eternal damnation and make them citizens of His heavenly kingdom. Christ's followers are likewise called to minister not only to people's physical and temporal needs but to lead them to glorify God, "*that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God*" (**2 Cor. 4:15**). The goal of evangelism and of Christian living is to "*worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers*" (**John 4:23**). Only when devotion to the Lord is sincere and unqualified, service to others truly selfless, and daily living consistently Christlike, will God be glorified. That is an especially important lesson for our day, in which self-love and self-satisfaction have become accepted and touted even in much of the church. We are tempted to offer the gospel simply for what it can do for a person, with no suggestion of the need to turn from self to God and from our own priorities to His. We like to make the way of salvation seem

wide, although the Lord says it is narrow (**Matt. 7:14**). We want to make the Christian life appear easy, although Jesus declared that “*he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*” and that only “*he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it*” (**10:38–39**).

Fourth, this story teaches the necessity of relying on divine resources. Like the disciples, we are most usable to the Lord when we acknowledge our own lack of resources and turn to Him. Whatever we may have in ourselves is never enough to meet the needs of others or to accomplish anything for God. Jesus did not command the apostles to be His “*witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” until He had first promised, “*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*” (**Acts 1:8**). “*Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights,*” James says (**James 1:17**). . .

Fifth, we learn from this story that God’s resources are never diminished, much less exhausted, because **He has an infinite capacity to create**. He did not need the seven loaves and few fish in order to feed the multitude. He could just as easily have made the food from nothing, just as He created the world from nothing. He used the loaves and fish in order to involve the disciples and to help teach them to give what they had into His care. “*Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return*” (**Luke 6:38**). God’s people would never lack resources to do what He calls them to do if they trusted that promise.

Sixth, we learn about the servant’s usefulness. Although the Lord is able to do His work without us, **He chooses to do it through us**. He did not need the disciples’ help to distribute the food any more than he needed the seven loaves and the fish to make the food. He could have done in an instant what took them several hours to do. But in His infinite wisdom and mercy God chooses to use human instruments to do His divine work of carrying the gospel to the world and of ministering to its needs. In submissively serving others in our Lord’s name and power, we learn to serve Him—in preparation for serving Him for all eternity in dimensions we cannot now conceive.

Seventh, we learn that **God gives liberally**, in “*good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over*” (**Luke 6:38**), as we have already seen. Everyone on the mountainside ate until he was completely satisfied. There was even more than enough, so that seven large baskets of food were left over.

Eighth is the lesson of spiritual investment. When the disciples gave all they had to Jesus and then helped Him give it away to others, they had seven full baskets remaining for themselves. “*He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully*” (**2 Cor. 9:6**).

The **ninth** and overarching lesson is the limitless compassion of Jesus Christ. He has compassion for all our needs—eternal, lifetime, and daily. He has compassion on Jews and on Gentiles, on the severely afflicted and the merely hungry. Following the example of our Lord, we are to “*do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” (**Gal. 6:10**). **Our compassion is not measured by our feelings but by our giving.**

TEXT: Matthew 16:1-12

TITLE: THE SIGNS OF THE TIME AND THE LEAVEN OF FALSE TEACHING

BIG IDEA:

BE AWARE OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIME AND BE WARY OF FALSE TEACHING

INTRODUCTION:

Walter Wilson: Once again, a scene depicting conflict gives way to a scene depicting instruction (cf. **15:1–20**). This time, Jesus’s opponents are the Pharisees and Sadducees, who “*test*” him (cf. **4:1, 3**) by asking him to certify his messianic identity by performing some spectacular feat. As in **12:38–42**, he responds by condemning the “*generation*” that makes such a request, maintaining that the only sign they can expect to receive will be the “*sign*” of Jonah, a reference to Jesus’s death and resurrection. Having rebuffed the leaders’ hostile overture, Jesus leaves them and meets the disciples as they come ashore, greeting them with a warning about the leaders that takes the form of a riddle. The disciples’ confusion regarding what Jesus means by “*leaven*” prompts him to chide them for their “*little faith*” and remind them about the miracles of the loaves. In the end, Jesus’s teaching leads the disciples to understanding (**16:12**; cf. **13:51**), even if (as we will soon see) their understanding is still far from complete (cf. **16:22**).

Stu Weber: This passage is similar to **12:38-45**. In both passages:

- Jesus' previous contact with the religious leaders had included a scathing condemnation of the hypocrites for serious sins (blaspheming the Holy Spirit in **12:22-37**; replacing God's commands with human tradition in **15:1-20**).the religious leaders challenged Jesus' authority by demanding to see a miraculous sign, proving his authority to be from God.
- Jesus called the hypocrites “*a wicked and adulterous generation*” (**12:39, 45; 16:4**) because of their desire for a sign from him.
- Jesus denied their request for a sign.
- Jesus told them they would only receive the “*sign of Jonah*.”

Stanley Saunders: The Pharisees assert that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms are signs of the power of Beelzebul (**9:34; 12:24**) rather than of God. In any case, Jesus does not tell his disciples to avoid the Pharisees and Sadducees themselves, as if the threat could be contained by quarantine, but to avoid the **leaven** that now controls his adversaries and renders their teachings both infectious and destructive of sight, hearing, and understanding. How then might the disciples recognize such leaven for what it really is? Jesus has already told them: study the **fruit** that falls from the tree (**12:33–35**).

The story names two dangers for the disciples:

- first, they may not realize what time it is and how the world is being transformed, and
- second, they may be susceptible to misidentifications of the nature of God’s power and to teaching divorced from faithful practice.

Matthew ends the narrative, however, with the assurance that the disciples finally do “*understand*” (**16:12**), thus setting the stage for Peter’s confession.

Scott Harris: There are several things to take note of in this passage.

- First, poisoned religion is not concerned with the truth.
- Second, poisoned religion is man-centered, and
- third, poisoned religion understands the temporal, but not the eternal.

The Pharisees and Sadducees had taken Judaism and poisoned it and they found many followers who wanted what they had to offer. Just as our physical body craves carbon monoxide over what is best for it, so in **religion man craves not God, but himself**. He wants to be the center of his universe, the captain of his fate, and so he finds a way to poison the revelation of God with a man-centered philosophy and then call the evil result "good." He trades the truth of God's Word and distorts it according to his own desire.

This type of poisoned religion is still all around us, but it is not just in the false religions and cults. We also find it in the evangelical-fundamental churches. It is present in the watered down gospel of easy believism that presents God as a beneficent grandfather who will overlook any and everything you do rather than as the Holy and just Creator who loves you too much to let you remain in any sinful practice. It reveals its self when people try to earn their way to heaven through rituals and good works. True Christians do good works as a response to God's love, not as a means to earn it. The poison of man-centered theologies is sweeping into the church as Biblical Counseling centered in God's grace and mercy to sinful men is replaced with secular psychology that is candy coated with Christian phrases. **Poisoned religion is all around us**, and it is recognized by its turning away from the truth of God's word and becoming centered in the thoughts of man rather than the revelation of God.

Applications:

- First, be a truth seeker.
- Second, recognize that poisoned teaching is by design **enticing**. It sounds good to our selfish natures. It makes us feel good about ourselves because it is man-centered. This is going to take self-examination into our motives. Why do you do what you do? Why do you refrain from doing what you don't do? Are the decisions you make in life for your own benefit or for God's glory? How do you spend your time? How do you spend your money? What occupies your thoughts? What do you pray for? Our purpose for existence is not the pursuit of happiness, but of holiness. Which are you pursuing?
- Third, which do you understand more about: the temporal things of this earthly life or the things of God?

I. (:1-4) IMPERATIVE OF DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIME – ESPECIALLY REGARDING THE MESSIANIC AGE (HIS MISSION AND AGENDA)

Grant Osborne: We return to the theme of Jewish opposition (**13:58 - 14:12; 15:1–20**), and this scene echoes the demand for a sign in **12:38–42**. The same irony permeates this one, for again this is a major miracle section, and the leaders are unwilling to accept the God-given "signs" and demand that Jesus act on their own terms. Moreover, Jesus has just returned to Galilee after leaving because of opposition (**15:21**) and is immediately greeted with more rejection. This will prompt two further withdrawals (symbolizing God's rejection of the people), first to the other side of the lake (**vv. 4b–5**) and then north to Caesarea Philippi (**v. 13**).

As in **12:38–40**, **rejection** governs this passage, first the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus in their demand for a sign and then Jesus' rejection of them in the sign of Jonah. **Verses 2b–3** adds the idea of "*the signs of the times*," meaning that any alert child of God should see that the **kingdom age has indeed dawned**. Since the leaders have refused to observe and read these signs, they are rejected by Jesus and by God.

Matthew McCraw: Remember, the Decapolis is on the southeastern (or bottom right) side of the Sea of Galilee. Magadan is on the northwest (or top left) side of the Sea of Galilee. All that to say, generally speaking, when Jesus is on the west side of the sea, He is in Jewish territory; when He is on the east side of the sea, He's in Gentile territory. So, here Jesus is, back in **Jewish territory**, and who is waiting for Him? The Pharisees and Sadducees.

A. (:1) Malicious Demand for Some Spectacular Sign from Heaven

*"And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up,
and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven."*

Robert Gundry: Thus Jesus has the same opponents that John the baptizer had (**3:7**), so that the parallel between these two is extended. By testing Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees play a devilish role; for "*testing*" equates with "*tempting*." They go back to the same Greek word that Matthew used for the Devil's tempting Jesus (**4:1, 3**). And the Greek verb underlying "*asked*" connotes **insistence**. That is, the Pharisees and Sadducees insist on Jesus' showing them "*a sign from heaven*," which means some heavenly display not subject to interpretation as satanically aided.

Daniel Doriani: The Pharisees and Sadducees were **rival groups** of leaders, so this is an unusual grouping. Here they operate together, for two reasons.

- First, they are the two main groups of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council (**Acts 23:6**).
- Second, they are united by a common opposition to Jesus. Apparently they think that the enemy of their enemy is their friend (cf. **Luke 23:12**).

William Barclay: Hostility, like necessity, makes strange bedfellows. It is an extraordinary phenomenon to find a combination of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They stood for both beliefs and policies which were diametrically opposed. The Pharisees lived life according to the minutest details of the oral and the scribal law; the Sadducees rejected the oral and the scribal law completely, and accepted only the written words of the Bible as their law of life. The Pharisees believed in angels and in the resurrection of the body and the Sadducees did not, an opposition which Paul made use of when he was on trial before the Sanhedrin (**Acts 23:6–10**). And – in this case most important of all – the Pharisees were not a political party and were prepared to live under any government which would allow them to observe their own religious principles; the Sadducees were the small, wealthy aristocracy, who were the collaborationist party and were quite prepared to serve and co-operate with the Roman government, in order to retain their wealth and their privileges. Further, the Pharisees looked for and longed for the Messiah; the Sadducees did not. It would have been well-nigh impossible to find two more different sects and parties; and yet they came together in their desire to eliminate Jesus. **They became united in their hostility.**

Grant Osborne: This is not a test to discern the truth as to whether he is from God or is a false prophet, for these groups have already judged him and sought his life (**12:14**). They do not want

a sign (the anarthrous σημεῖον connotes the qualitative aspect, something of “divine significance”) and have rejected the validity of all his miracles. They are only looking for reasons to turn the crowds against him. So theirs is a test like Israel’s “testing” God in the wilderness (**Exod 17:2; Deut 6:16; Ps 78:18; 95:9**) that brought divine wrath down on themselves. As in **12:38** they demand a heaven-sent spectacle like the exodus “signs” that forced the Hebrews to believe (**Exod 4:8, 30–31**), though in reality the Jewish leaders want Jesus to be unable to deliver such a sign.

Bethany Bible Church: They demanded “a sign from heaven”. Perhaps they wanted Him to cause the winds to blow down from the clouds and part the sea—as it did in Moses' day. Perhaps they wanted Him to cause the sun to stand still in the firmament—as it did in Joshua's day. Perhaps they wanted Him to cause fire to come down from sky and consume an offering—as it did in Elijah's day.

In any event, they weren't satisfied with how Jesus had already proven Himself. They were not satisfied with what God had already done to testify of Him. They wanted more. They despised the healings and the feedings. They wanted something big and dramatic—not just something “on earth”. They wanted to dictate the terms—and demanded a sign from heaven of their choosing.

And finally, notice the **motive** behind this demand for a sign. It wasn't because they truly wanted a sign. The text tells us; they came “testing Him”. The word used (*peirazo*) is the same one that was used of the actions of the devil, when we read in **Matthew 4:1** that “*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*”

They didn't ask Jesus for a sign from heaven in order to test and see if He truly was the beloved Son in whom God was well pleased. Their minds had already been made up about Him when they asserted, “*He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons*” (**9:34**). Rather, these were seeking to trap Him in order to discredit Him in front of the crowds, and to justify their hard-heartedness toward Him.

B. (:2-3) Maligning Discernment Limited to Earthly Phenomena

1. (:2-3a) Able to Predict Weather

a. (:2) Both Fair Weather

“But He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’”

Craig Blomberg: As clouds move from west to east, the dawn sunlight will tint them in the west, portending rain as the day progresses. In the evening the same phenomenon suggests that the clouds have almost disappeared, bringing good weather instead. We preserve this proverb today with the rhyme: “Red sky in morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailors delight.”

b. (:3a) And Stormy Weather

“And in the morning, There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.”

2. (:3b) Unable to Perceive the Signs of the Times

“Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?”

Robert Gundry: Jesus starts with evening because Jews counted a day as starting at sunset, and he excoriates the Pharisees and Sadducees for being **adept at meteorology** but **clueless at eschatology**. They're so ignorant of the end times that they don't recognize the coming of God's reign in the words and deeds of Jesus.

Grant Osborne: In Jesus' words and deeds, those signs have been given, and the leaders are "totally lacking in spiritual discernment" so that they will be held accountable by God for their failure. The use of "*the sky*" (τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) is probably a deliberate pun on their demand for a "*sign from heaven*" in v. 1 (so **Hagner**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: The signs were Jesus' miracles (**12:28**). Jesus was not operating in a vacuum. There were many evidences if these men had just been open to them.

D. A. Carson: Here these "*signs of the times*" point neither to the future nor (contra **Hoekema**, *Bible and the Future*, 133) to what God has done in the past. Instead, they testify to **Jesus and the kingdom now dawning** (cf. **11:4–6; 12:28**).

Charles Swindoll: By "*signs of the times*," Jesus was probably referring to the many miraculous signs that had already repeatedly and clearly pointed to the fact that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Recall that when John the Baptizer had questioned whether Jesus was the "*Expected One*," Jesus had replied, "*Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*" (**11:3-5**). Based on these clear signs of the coming of the messianic kingdom, anybody with a believing heart and a discerning mind should have been able to conclude that **the Messiah was present**. But even in light of these clear signs of the Messiah, the Pharisees and Sadducees had closed the eyes of their hearts and blocked their ears to discernment. Instead, they wallowed in hard-hearted unbelief.

C. (:4a) Motives Denounced of Those Seeking Supernatural Signs

1. Exposing Their Character

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign;"

Bruce Hurt: *Evil* (wicked, bad) (*poneros* from *poneo* = work or toil, cf *poneria*) means evil, malignant character, pernicious and denotes a determined, aggressive, and fervent evil that actively opposes what is good. *Poneros* is not just bad in character (like *kakos*), but bad in effect (injurious), evil in active opposition to good. *Poneros* used to describe Satan (*ho poneros* = "*Evil one*"), the god of this age, who is corrupting man and dragging him to destruction. This denotes someone who is not content in being corrupt themselves. They seek to corrupt others and draw them into the same destruction!

John MacArthur: "*adulterous generation*" - The scribes and Pharisees (**Mt 12:24, 38+**) represented the nation of Israel, which had wandered far from God's Word and fellowship and which had become enmeshed in the superficial, self-righteous, and legalistic religion those leaders epitomized. The unbelieving Jews were not only physically and **mentally but spiritually** adulterous because they had breached the vows of their unique covenant relationship with God, a relationship the Old Testament frequently speaks of in terms of marriage (see **Ps. 73:27; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:6–10; 13:27; Hos. 9:1**). Their idolatry, immorality, unbiblical traditions, and hardness of heart marked them as an evil people. During the Babylonian captivity Jews had forsaken formal idolatry, in the sense of worshiping physical objects carved from wood, stone, or

metal. But in its place they erected idols of man-made tradition in which they trusted and put their hope. They had abandoned the Canaanite gods for ones of their own making and in doing so were just as much in rebellion against the true God as when they offered sacrifices to Baal or Molech. A Jew who faithfully served God under the covenant given to Moses would accept His Son when He came, because anyone rightly related to the Father could not fail to recognize the Son—just as did the godly Simeon and Anna (**Luke 2:25–38**), John the Baptist (**Matt. 3:14**), and the twelve disciples, except Judas (Carl Bloch's famous painting of Judas retiring from the Last Supper) (**Mt 4:20–22; Mark 3:13; Luke 5:27–28; John 1:41, 49**). Because they knew the Father, they knew the Son and **did not need a sign to verify His identity**.

Donald Hagner: It is surprising that in a wide variety of different fields of knowledge human beings can be so knowledgeable and perceptive, yet in the realm of the knowledge of God exist in such darkness. The explanation of the latter sad state is not to be found in a lack of intellectual ability—no more for the Pharisees and Sadducees than for today. The evidence is there, examinable and understandable for those who are open to it and who welcome it. **The issue in the knowledge of God is not intellect but receptivity.** The “*signs of the times*,” i.e., as narrated in the gospel of the ministry of Jesus, are there to be received and affirmed by faith. That is the key point. Again the further request for a sign under these circumstances only reveals an adamant refusal to receive the truth. To those in this unfortunate frame of mind the truth is that **no sign will suffice**.

Leon Morris: A *generation* here signifies the people alive at that time. He castigates it as evil, for it has turned away from goodness and right. It is also *adulterous*, for it is false to its vows; it professed to be the people of God but walked in the ways of the evil one. It *looks for a sign*; it directs its energies to sign-seeking. But, Jesus says, this is all in vain; the generation in question will not get the sign it seeks.

2. Exchanging their Demand for the Ultimate Sign

“and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.”

Daniel Doriani: Jonah, you recall, did not perform signs; **he was the sign**. Thrown overboard into a raging sea, swallowed by a great fish, spat out on dry ground, then preaching to great effect to the Assyrians of Nineveh, the very life of Jonah was the sign. The mere presence of a Jewish prophet in a hostile city was a sign. So too with Jesus. The leaders do not need signs by Jesus; **they need to see Jesus**. His presence, his life, is God’s greatest sign, then and now.

William Barclay: So what Jesus is saying is that **God’s sign is Jesus himself** and his message. It is as if he said to them: ‘In me you are confronted with God and with the truth of God. What more could you possibly need? But you are so blind that you cannot see it.’ There is truth and there is warning here. **Jesus Christ is God’s last word**. Beyond him the revelation of God cannot go. Here is God plain for all to see. Here is God’s message plain for all to hear. Here is God’s sign to the world. It is the warning truth that if Jesus cannot appeal to men and women, nothing can. If Jesus cannot convince them, no one can. If men and women cannot see God in Jesus, they cannot see God in anything or anyone. When we are confronted with Jesus Christ, we are confronted with God’s final word and God’s ultimate appeal. If that is so, what can be left for those who throw away that last chance, who refuse to listen to that last word, who reject that last appeal?

Matthew McCraw: Church: don't be like the Pharisees and Sadducees. **Be aware of the signs.** Be aware of what God is showing us in the Bible, what He has shown in history, what He is showing through the natural world, and what He is showing as He works supernaturally in our individual lives. Be aware of the signs. **See Jesus at work.** Know that He is, indeed, Messiah. Know that He is God.

(:4b) Epilogue – Abandonment by Jesus

“And He left them, and went away.”

Stu Weber: Jesus did not haggle any longer than necessary with those who were opposed to the truth. He did not ignore them or avoid them, but neither did he get into a long and fruitless debate. When it was clear they were more interested in debating than in learning, Jesus went another direction.

Walter Wilson: The story of Jesus being tested by the devil concludes with the devil leaving the scene (4:11). The story of Jesus being tested by the Pharisees and Sadducees concludes with Jesus leaving the scene (16:4c). As with the conclusion to other controversy stories, Jesus symbolically separates from the religious leaders of Israel, the fact that this is his final debate with leaders from Galilee lending the gesture added significance. His public ministry in Galilee is all but over (cf. 17:14–21).

Just as Jesus separates physically from the religious leaders of Israel (16:4c), his followers must do the same spiritually. Before they can do so, however, they must be led to the truth by their teacher, whose solicitude is demonstrated both by the manner in which he meets their basic physical needs (16:9–10) and by his efforts to protect them from dangerous rival teachers (16:6, 11–12).

Josiah Boyd: At this point in Matthew's gospel we've read of Jesus *withdrawing* from his opposition. [4:12a; 12:14–15a; 14:13a; 15:21] Jesus had been confronted many times with resistance from Israel and his response has been to pull-back for a respite, to re-group, and to re-aim his efforts.

But our text today doesn't say Jesus *withdrew*. Instead, Matthew reports that he *left*. If you look that word up in a Greek dictionary you'll read this: “to depart from a place, with implication of finality,” i.e., to forsake or abandon. [Eph 5:31]

Do you get the picture? As opposition increases, Jesus pulls back, pulls back, pulls back, until finally, **he just leaves.**

We've all experienced resistance to the point of resignation. You work hard with repeated attempts but, at some point you realize you're knocking your head against a wall and it's leaving time.

I picture Jesus in **verse 4**, his head hung low in grief and helplessness, turning from these so-called leaders and walking away, dusting his hands as he goes. There's a sense of **tragic finality** in the air, a sorry conclusiveness in Jesus's leaving.

And as he leaves Jesus issues a **warning**. Testing, leaving, warning.

<https://oakridgebiblechapel.org/an-evil-testing-and-an-urgent-warning/>

II. (:5-12) IMPERATIVE OF DISCERNING FALSE TEACHING – ESPECIALLY WRONG VIEWS ABOUT JESUS

Grant Osborne: This passage combines **opposition** and **discipleship**. The first part (vv. 5–6) is a warning about the spreading evil of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the second part concerns the “little-faith” obtuseness of the disciples that is turned around by the presence of Jesus into understanding. As the final interpreter of Torah, Jesus once more instructs the disciples, so this continues the emphases we have already seen dominating this section of Matthew.

David Turner: In this passage Jesus patiently yet firmly deals again with the “*little faith*” of the disciples. He improves their spiritual perception by prodding their memory. If they recall the previous miracle meals, they will realize that food is not the problem and that they must deal with the increasing opposition to Jesus. If they watch out for the teaching of the Jewish leaders, Jesus will care for their food problems. This rebuke of the forgetful disciples should sharpen the mental and spiritual focus of God’s people today. Preoccupation with temporal and material concerns continues to render disciples dull and forgetful of the values of the kingdom and of false teaching that endangers it.

A. (:5-6) Danger of False Teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees Presented

1. (:5) Worrying about Physical Sustenance

“And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread.”

Stanley Saunders: The troubling element in this episode is that the disciples are indeed still worrying about bread, when it should be clear to them by now that in the messianic time and in the presence of the Messiah himself, God will supply what they need. It’s the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees they should be worrying about.

2. (:6) Warning Issued

“And Jesus said to them,

‘Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”

Kenneth Wuest: **Watch out! and Beware** - The first verb is **horaō** “*to see, to become acquainted with by experience.*” This word gives prominence to the **discerning mind**. The disciples were to use their heads. They were to put the teachings of the Pharisees and the Herodians to the acid test of experience, not in the actual doing of the things taught, but with the mind’s eye following out the ultimate conclusion of the act of practicing what they taught. The verb is present imperative, commanding the beginning of an action and its habitual continuance. The second verb is **blepō** “*to perceive by the use of the eyes.*” It is used in a metaphorical sense, “*to see with the mind’s eye, to discern mentally, understand, to turn the thoughts or direct the mind to a thing, to consider, to take heed.*” It is also present imperative, “*Be constantly keeping a watchful eye open to consider and take heed of.*”

Grant Osborne: The disciples must always be wary and vigilant (present tense imperatives) in the face of such pernicious doctrine.

William Barclay: Leaven has a second meaning which is metaphorical and not literal and physical. It was the Jewish metaphorical expression for an **evil influence**. To the Jewish mind,

leaven was always symbolic of evil. It is fermented dough; the Jews identified fermentation with putrefaction; leaven stood for all that was rotten and bad. Leaven has the power to permeate any mass of dough into which it is inserted. Therefore leaven stood for an evil influence liable to spread through life and to corrupt it.

D. A. Carson: The “*teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees*” to which Jesus refers (vv.5–12), therefore, is an attitude of unbelief toward divine revelation that could not perceive Jesus to be the Messiah (vv.1–4) but that tried to control and tame the Messiah they claimed to await. The disciples are to avoid that. This is why the next pericope (vv.13–20) is so important: Peter makes the **confession that Jesus is the Messiah**, not on the basis of manipulative signs, but by **revelation from the Father**.

B. (:7-11) Dullness of the Disciples

1. (:7) Distracted Focus on Physical Nourishment

“And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we took no bread.’”

Charles Swindoll: Jesus was perturbed that the **dull disciples** could only think of the emptiness of stomachs while He was concerned about the emptiness of souls. Their conversation should have been about the Pharisees and Sadducees, the growing opposition to the preaching of Jesus, the stubbornness of the critics’ hearts, and the danger that they posed to the easily swayed masses. The disciples’ preoccupation with earthly things had desensitized them regarding spiritual things.

2. (:8-11) Directed Focus to Spiritual Nourishment

a. (:8) Problem of Little Faith

“But Jesus, aware of this, said, ‘You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?’”

Donald Hagner: Jesus rebukes them for being so caught up with this problem, addressing them with the word ὀλιγόπιστοι, “*people of little faith*.” In every instance of the use of this word in Matthew, it is addressed to disciples in a context where the question concerns their ultimate welfare and the reality of God’s provision for them (cf. **6:30; 8:26; 14:31**). The implication here seems to be that the disciples can trust God’s provision for their physical need and that they ought not to be so distracted by the lack of bread that they miss altogether the point of an important spiritual warning Jesus gives them.

Grant Osborne: Jesus is clearly upset at the disciples’ lack of comprehension and their total concern with the mundane (who wouldn’t be!), and he cries out against their vapid dialogue. So here the lack of faith is connected to their failure to trust God’s provision for their physical needs. As **Brown** says, there are two areas where their misunderstanding and “little faith” overlapped: Jesus’ enigmatic saying, but even more the truth that Jesus had the ability to provide for their needs. So the reminder in vv. **9–10** of his previous displays of power to provide was to help them “understand the extent of Jesus’ authority.” . . .

The disciples were “little-faith ones” not because they had no faith but because their faith was obscured by self-interest and the priority of personal needs and wants, in this case, food. That characterizes all of us most of the time. We do not “have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (**Mark 8:33b**). We have not learned to “*set your minds on things*

above, not on earthly things” (Col 3:1–2). Our treasures are on earth rather than in heaven (Matt 6:19–21). Faith is not just the act of trusting God to do things for us. It is an attitude, a lifestyle of absolute God-dependence and reliance on Christ.

b. (:9-10) Previous Lessons Forgotten

1) (:9) Lesson from the Feeding of the 5,000

“Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up?”

2) (:10) Lesson from the Feeding of the 4,000

“Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?”

R. T. France: Not only have they failed to “remember” the two feeding miracles, but they have not yet “realized” what those miracles revealed about Jesus. At the lowest level they showed that he could miraculously supply food, so that the disciples had no need to worry. But they also added to the growing evidence for who Jesus was, for the source of his authority and the nature of his mission, and it will be their understanding of that more fundamental issue which will be probed in the next episode. We hear again here Jesus’ frustration at their slowness in understanding, as it was expressed in 15:16–17. It is time they had put two and two together.

Craig Blomberg: Incidental support appears here as well for viewing those two miracles as **distinct**. Interestingly, the difference between the words for baskets is preserved in vv. 9-10, confirming our hunch that these terms were significant pointers to **the one miracle as for Jews and the other for Gentiles**.

c. (:11) Perspective Clarified

1) Not Focusing on Physical Bread

“How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?”

2) Focusing on the Danger of False Teaching

“But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus’ warning about the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ leaven had nothing to do with food (v. 11). Rather, it had everything to do with their **doctrine**, or—more specifically—**their opinion of Him**. Like leaven, false doctrine can permeate and corrupt what is at first pure and wholesome (Wilkins 556). The doctrine of these two groups was actively corrupting all who allowed it to enter their hearts. The Twelve must not allow the Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ critical attitude toward Jesus and their call for a spectacular sign (v. 1) to corrupt and destroy their own faith.

C. (:12) Danger of False Teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees Perceived

“Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Donald Hagner: But if instead we look for a particular “teaching” held in common by the Pharisees and Sadducees, keeping in mind the immediately preceding passage (vv 1–4) and the unified front of the two groups against Jesus (cf. 22:34; Acts 5:17), it could be found in a

preconception of the nature of the Messiah and messianic fulfillment—a fulfillment that of necessity would include a **national-political dimension** [ED: and the immediate inception of that physical kingdom on earth] (cf. their inability to read the “*signs of the times*” [v 3]). The “*teaching*” would thus be that of the united front of Jewish leadership, which was also widely held by the masses (and even the disciples, hence the appropriateness of the warning here). It disqualified Jesus from any claim to being the agent of messianic fulfillment. This “teaching” was indeed like leaven in that it affected all else and would indeed ultimately bring Jesus to his death.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you tell when skeptics are asking questions from a motivation of trying to discredit Christianity?
- 2) What are some of the signs of the times today that point to the coming of the end of this age?
- 3) How could the false teaching of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day harm His disciples?
- 4) Why were the disciples so slow to perceive and apply the lessons from the two major feeding miracles where they had actually participated in the distribution of the food?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: As we saw in our discussion of **Matthew 14-15**, Matthew's unit of thought extends all the way from **13:53** through **16:12**. The chapter division would have been better placed between **16:12** and **16:13**.

I mention this to emphasize that one of the two or three most significant turning points in Matthew (many would say the most important) is in the middle of **chapter 16**.

- Through the first part of **Matthew 16**, the disciples had limited understanding of Jesus' identity and mission. From the latter part of **Matthew 16** forward, their understanding grew rapidly.
- Through the first part of **Matthew 16**, Jesus had generally avoided mentioning his death and resurrection, focusing instead on laying the foundation of his disciples' understanding. From the latter part of **Matthew 16** forward, Jesus spoke clearly and often of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection.
- Through the first part of **Matthew 16**, Jesus had spoken in general fashion about the kingdom he was advancing. From the latter part of **Matthew 16** on, he gave more specific instruction regarding the church he would build.
- Through **Matthew 16:20**, Jesus had been content to stay in the “backwater” around Galilee, far from the hotbed of religious hypocrisy in Jerusalem. Beginning with **16:21**, he took the road toward Jerusalem and the cross (see also **19:1; 20:17, 29; 21:1, 10**).

We will treat all of **Matthew 16** together in this commentary chapter to avoid confusion, but we must realize that the first twelve verses of the chapter are actually the conclusion of one large unit of Matthew's thought, whereas the rest of the chapter begins the next unit of thought.

Barnes: **Erroneous doctrines** are like leaven in the following respects:

1. They are at first slight and unimportant in appearance, just as leaven is small in quantity as compared with the mass that is to be leavened.
2. They are insinuated into the soul unawares and silently, and are difficult of detection.
3. They act gradually.
4. They act most certainly.
5. They will pervade all the soul, and bring all the faculties under their control.

J. Ligon Duncan: Now there are many **applications** of the truths set before us in these passages. But I would like to think with you about 2 or 3 things. First of all, note again that it is not the evidence that is keeping the Pharisees and the Sadducees from believing in Jesus as Messiah.

The evidence is crystal clear. The spiritual signs are as bright as day. **The problem is their hearts.** It is not the evidence that keeps people from Christ. It is our darkened hearts that keep us from wanting to bow the knee to His lordship. . .

These men were not fools in the sense of being ignorant or unlearned men. They were fools in another sense. In the sense that their hearts were hard towards the lord, and that they were walking in a way in a way of unwisdom. But **these men had great human wisdom**, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They had tremendous capacity for learning. They had wisdom about the natural order, but none of that necessarily transfers into the realm of the spiritual. A man may be brilliant in the things of this life, and absolutely blind with regard to spiritual things. A man may have great knowledge about a particular field, and yet He may be utterly hopeless in His knowledge of eternal things. And that is a very, very important thing for us to learn. . .

Jesus warns us to **be careful about the spiritual leaders that we choose to follow.** . . the idea of leaven indicates the **subtle nature of the false teaching** of the Sadducees and Pharisees. It was mixed with truth. It was disguised with outward piety. It was attractive when you heard it. And Jesus is saying, *“be careful about that teaching.”*

Note that Jesus insists that the disciples, even His disciples, must be discriminating about who they follow, who they admire, who they emulate. And if Jesus warns His disciples, the men upon whom He is going to found His worldwide mission, if He warns His disciples to be careful about who they listen to, and who they admire, and who they follow, how much more ought we to be on guard about who we listen to, who we learn from, and the doctrine that we take in.

Thomas Brooks addresses this problem in His book, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. He actually has a section at the end of that book called “seven marks of a false prophet.” And in that passage, he gives **character qualities** of those who are actually leading people astray from the truth. First of all, he notes that **they are menpleasers**. That is, they are very concerned to tell you what you want to hear, not necessarily what you need to hear. They want to say things that are pleasant to you. They never want to offend you, even if it's for your own good.

Secondly, he says that those who are false prophets will **reproach faithful ministers and ministries**. They will call into question the faithfulness of good ministers of the gospel. And they will bring reproach against their character and their name.

Thirdly, he goes on to say, that false prophets will **preach from their own imaginations**. They will always be coming up with some new idea that nobody else has ever discovered in the history of the world, although there is a whole generation of heretics for the last thousand years who has taught the same thing. They have got some new idea that will revolutionize everything in life, something that you've never heard of, and nobody's ever heard of in the evangelical church, either.

Fourthly, he goes on to say that they will **major on the minors**. Instead of focusing on the weighty matters of law and gospel, they will go to some peripheral issue, and they'll tie you up with verbiage and teaching about it until your head spins.

Fifthly, he goes on to say that, **they will cover their heresy with pleasing rhetoric**. That is, what they say will go down smoothly. It will go down like a spoonful of sugar. But it is poison that is being hidden by their words.

He goes on to say, sixthly, that **they care more about winning followers than they do seeing their followers grow in grace and righteousness**. They are more concerned to pad their own egos by getting many followers, than they are seeking after the spiritual good and interests of those who are following.

And finally, he says, they are those who **use their followers for financial gain**. He has an interesting phrase. He says, "they care more about their followers' goods than their good." In other words, they are not so much concerned about their follower's best interests as they are about their followers giving them money.

John MacArthur: Signs that Jesus will return abound in our day. No period of history has experienced more wars or been so preoccupied with the prospect of war as our own. With unprecedented surpluses of food in some parts of the world, other parts still experience devastating famines. Cults and false religions of every sort are proliferating even in countries that have been nominally Christian for hundreds of years. The spirit of lawlessness and self-will is rampant....**All of those signs that mark the end times are characteristic of our day. There can be no doubt that we live near the end of the age, and the concern of believers should be for what the Bible says rather than for what men say and for what God is doing rather than for what men are doing.**

TEXT: Matthew 16:13-20

TITLE: CONFESSION OF PETER REGARDING THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

BIG IDEA:

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH IS THE APOSTLES (AS REPRESENTED BY PETER) WHO EMBRACED THE TRUE IDENTITY OF JESUS AND WERE DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO ENFORCE HIS TEACHING

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: All of us have taken classes that have climaxed in a final exam. Quite often, that exam makes up the single most important grade in the course. Well-prepared exams help both the student and the teacher determine whether the teacher accomplished what he or she set out to teach and whether the student grasped the important points. It's not uncommon for the final exam to have only a few questions, but these questions are probing and strategic, addressing the core matters of the course.

Day after day for many months, Jesus had been training His disciples. Moment by moment they heard His teaching, observed His actions, witnessed His miracles, and got to know Him up close and personal. He invited them into His world, allowing them to observe his methods of ministry and, hopefully, to learn His ways. Finally, the day came for their final exam, which consisted of one crucial questions. In fact, it's life's ultimate question for all people. How we answer this question will have everything to do with our eternal destiny.

Stanley Saunders: The disciples have had the secrets of the kingdom revealed to them (13:10–17) and they have repeatedly witnessed God's power at work in Jesus, but they continue to demonstrate that their understanding is incomplete and their faith immature (cf., e.g., 15:33; 16:8–12). Jesus' question about who "*people*" say he is forms a bookend with John the Baptizer's question in 11:2 about whether Jesus is "*the one coming*." Peter's answer marks a **definitive turning point** in Matthew's Gospel, alongside Jesus' announcement of his impending death and resurrection in Jerusalem (16:21–28).

Stu Weber: This passage serves as a **transitional section** in Matthew's Gospel. Peter's confession summarized Jesus' ministry up to this point. And Jesus' announcement of the church began Jesus' preparation of the disciples for their leadership roles in his absence. Jesus' intention to build his church marks a major transition in God's pursuit of his great plan of the ages. The old wineskin of Israel had been set on the shelf temporarily, while the new wineskin of the church was introduced.

Grant Osborne: The single central idea is Christology, the messiahship of Jesus; Matthew contains by far the longest confession, as Peter links Jesus as "Messiah" with Jesus as "the Son of the living God." The second idea is discipleship, as Peter struggles with what that means. The third is blessing, as Jesus confers on Peter (and the church with which he is corporately identified) the authority of the kingdom power in Jesus.

Donald Hagner: The **climax** of the first main part of the Gospel is found in this resounding confession of Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*." It is this to which all (beginning

especially with 4:17) has led. It is this that must be established with all possible fixity before the narrative takes that startling turn that will dominate the second half of the Gospel and that seems almost to contradict the point just established. With this supremely important confession of Jesus as Messiah, confirmed by Jesus' declaration of the divinely certified truth of the confession (v. 17), it is not surprising that several other important ideas emerge, i.e., the church, the authority of Peter (and the other apostles), and inclusion or exclusion from the kingdom. For all of these—as indeed Christianity itself—are dependent on the identity of Jesus. It is because Jesus is who he is that Peter and the disciples can fulfill their calling and the church can be “built.”

(:13a) GEOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi,”

Richard Gardner: The northernmost boundary of ancient Israel. Known earlier as Paneas or Panion, the city of **Caesarea Philippi** was located at the foot of Mt. Hermon and had been rebuilt and renamed by Philip the Tetrarch (cf. **Luke 3:1**). The new name both honored the emperor, Caesar Augustus, and distinguished this Caesarea from the coastal city with the same name (cf. Acts 10:1).

Stanley Saunders: Matthew sets this story, significantly, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, where Herod the Great built a temple in honor of Caesar Augustus. Herod's son Philip later enlarged the city and renamed it Caesarea. Josephus reports that after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, Jewish prisoners were thrown to the beasts in Caesarea Philippi (Josephus, Jewish War, 7:2:1 § 23–24). The setting of this story thus provides a pointed reminder of the **conflict between God and the powers of this world**.

I. (:13b-16) FINAL EXAM – CONFESSING THE TRUE IDENTITY OF JESUS

A. (:13) Primary Issue = Identity of Jesus

“He began asking His disciples, saying, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’”

Donald Hagner: Jesus takes the initiative by directly asking the question that has been in the minds of the disciples (and the readers of the Gospel) from the beginning of his ministry. What were people saying about him? How did they classify him, having seen him heal and heard him teach?

John MacArthur: *“He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?’”* He uses the term **Son of man** to refer to Himself – it, by the way, is used 80 plus times in the New Testament, and so it is the Lord's most common designation of Himself, and although it is definitely a prophetic title of Messiah taken from **Daniel 7:13 and 14**, He uses it more as a sign of His humiliation, as a sign of His **identification with humanity**. . .

He wants the general opinions of men as they fall short of reality as a backdrop for the truth, which the disciples will give. And what He's really seeking is the confession that they ought to make with their lips from their heart after nearly two and a half years of being with Him. He's after a verdict. He's after a confidence statement, a supreme confession of who He is. It's time for that now, the lessons are over, the course has reached its climax, now is the test.

B. (:14) Popular Views of the Identity of Jesus

“And they said,”

Richard Gardner: When Jesus poses the first question, the disciples respond with a list of popular views. In each case, people are identifying Jesus with an earlier figure in Israel’s history who has supposedly returned to life or whose role is fulfilled anew in him. He could be John the Baptist (the view Herod espouses in **14:2**), or Elijah (whose return was promised in **Mai. 4:5-6**), or Jeremiah (who is depicted in 2 Macc. 15:13-16 as alive and active in heaven), or another such figure (cf. **Deut. 18:15-22**). Common to each of these popular views is the idea that Jesus is a prophet. While this is true in one sense, it is an insufficient view from the standpoint of the Gospels. It confines Jesus to the roles and possibilities of the old era.

J. Ligon Duncan: What’s the problem with each of these designations that are being given to Jesus by the crowd? Well, there are basically two problems with them. First of all, notice that each of these relate Jesus to some famous and respected figure in Israel’s past, but every single one of them fails to recognize **the uniqueness of Jesus Christ**. Yes, He may be like John or like Elijah or like Jeremiah or like one of the prophets, but He is far greater. In fact, He is unique. There is no one like Him. He is in a class by Himself. So every single one of these designations by the crowd—it’s not that they’re unflattering, it’s not that they’re mean spirited. I’m sure that these people meant to say these as compliments. But they fail to see the uniqueness of Christ.

And secondly, notice that every single one of these designations **mixes truth with error**. I mean it’s a truth that He was like Jeremiah or like Elijah or like John the Baptist, but the only truth is to say a half-truth, because it doesn’t tell the whole story. And as Patrick tells us, “A half-truth masquerading as a whole truth is a whole lie.” We don’t understand Christ if we only think that He was a great teacher, a great prophet, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He was much more than that. And so every single one of these designations falls short.

1. John the Baptist

“Some say John the Baptist;”

2. Elijah

“and others, Elijah;”

John MacArthur: By the way, if you were to go to a Jewish Passover today, you would see at the Jewish Passover table, an empty chair, and if you were to ask the host why there is an empty chair during the Passover in which no one sits, he would tell you it is the chair for Elijah, and they are waiting for Elijah to show up because when he takes his seat, the Messiah is not far behind. And that’s based on **Malachi 4**.

3. Jeremiah or One of the Prophets

“but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

R. T. France: One surprising element, which is peculiar to Matthew, is the singling out of Jeremiah as a model for understanding Jesus. Jeremiah was, of course a prominent OT prophet, but why choose him rather than, say, Isaiah, with whom Jesus has himself implicitly compared his own ministry in the quotation in **13:13–15**? The answer may be found in the peculiar nature of Jeremiah’s message, which has made his name proverbial as a prophet of doom, and in the sustained opposition he encountered among his own people. In particular, Jeremiah incurred

fierce hostility by predicting the downfall of Judah and the destruction of the temple, and a similar message will become an increasing feature of Jesus' ministry as Matthew relates it. The three parables directed against the current Jewish leadership in **21:28 – 22:14** will be followed by the denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in **ch. 23** with its warning of a climactic judgment to come, and the explicit prediction of the total destruction of the temple (**23:34 – 24:2**; note the echo of **Jer 22:5** in **23:38**). It will be as a threat to the temple that Jesus will be tried (**26:61**) and derided on the cross (**27:40**). While this remains in the future as far as the narrative sequence is concerned, we have already heard Jesus' cryptic comment that "*something greater than the temple is here*," (**12:6**) and his threat of judgment on Galilean towns in **11:20–24**. It is not very surprising that some people, whether in admiration or in disparagement, might have seen him already as a second Jeremiah; as the story continues the identification will become even more apt.

C. (:15-16) Preeminent Confession of the Identity of Jesus as the Messiah

"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

Richard Gardner: So it is that Jesus continues to probe with his second question: What do you my followers see as you behold me at work? The answer Peter gives as the disciples' spokesperson has already been anticipated in **14:33**. Here, however, as a direct response to Jesus' inquiry, the words take on added significance. More than a prophet, **Jesus is the Messiah**, one with authority to fulfill Israel's prophetic hope. Like the anointed kings who preceded him, therefore, he may be called **God's Son** (cf. **2 Sam. 7:14; Pss. 2:7; 89:26-27**), but with a status far exceeding theirs. His sonship is not merely one of adoption, the result of an act of coronation, but a sonship that comes from a unique and intimate relationship with God (cf. **11:27**). He is the **Son of the living God par excellence**, because the living and life-giving God has been present in his life from the very beginning (cf. **1:18-25**).

Charles Swindoll: Though Peter was in way over his head theologically, he didn't hesitate to state the truth. I'm not sure Peter was fully aware of what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah. Surely he understood its implications for Jesus' kingship in relation to being the descendant of David, but whether Peter knew that Jesus was also the anointed Prophet and the anointed, eternal High Priest, we can't be sure. And when Peter called Jesus the "*Son of the Living God*," did he have a full knowledge of Jesus' divine Sonship as the second person of the Trinity, co-eternal with the Father? Certainly Peter understood that Jesus was greater than any human he had ever met, that he had been sent by God, and that He was the Son of God in the sense that He was the descendant of David destined to be enthroned as the Messiah. But it may very well be that Peter spoke more than he knew when he confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Donald Hagner: This answer differs categorically from those offered by the people. That is, here Jesus is not identified as one of the figures involved in the coming of the end times, but as the coming one, the determinative person who brings with him the messianic age and the transformation of the present order.

John MacArthur: This isn't just Peter, this is Peter gathering up the **consensus** of the - of the disciples, speaking in their behalf. I like the fact that it calls him **Simon Peter**. It gives a very official character to the confession. This is a very official, formal confession. Simon Peter, his full name, says: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It's a formal confession, and it demands a formal designation, not an offhanded one. This is the consensus.

II. (:17-19) FUTURE VISION FOR THE UNSTOPPABLE BUILDING OF JESUS' CHURCH

“And Jesus answered and said to him,”

A. (:17) Beatitude – Spiritual Truth Depends on Revelation from the Father

“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Stu Weber: He immediately pronounced Peter **blessed**, meaning that Peter had been the recipient of God's favor or blessing in the form of truth revealed to Peter's mind. It was not man who revealed this to Peter. The truth of Jesus' identity is one of the “*secrets*” of **13:11**, easily understandable once it is revealed. But it is undiscoverable by natural, human means until God chooses to make it known. Only my Father in heaven was the source of such understanding about the Son. Here “*my Father*” took on extra significance in light of Peter's confession of Jesus as “*the Son of the living God.*”

Grant Osborne: In light of the insight God has granted to Simon, Jesus pronounces a beatitude (see on **5:3**), i.e., God's blessing, on him. As already noted in **5:3–12**, μακάριος is not human happiness but **divine favor**, though the joy and fortunate status of the individual is a by-product. It combines **religious ecstasy** and **human joy**.

B. (:18) Bedrock (Foundation) of the Unstoppable Church

1. Beginning of the Church

“And I also say to you that you are Peter,”

Stanley Saunders: In the Old Testament, both Abram and Jacob received new names, and both were associated with the birth of a new people (**Gen. 17; 32:22–32**). Peter now gets his name (cf. **4:18; 10:2**). It is a play on the words for a round stone (*petros*) and a rock (*petra*). Peter himself, not just his confession, is the round stone that will serve as the foundation stone for the building that is Jesus' assembly.

2. Foundation of the Church

“and upon this rock I will build My church;”

Evangelical Protestants have an innate reaction against seeing Jesus identifying Peter as the foundation of the church [even if you view Peter as representative of the body of apostles]. They want to guard against the errors of Catholicism and the arguments supporting the popery. But that is an overreaction to the natural exegesis of this passage.

Leon Morris: The big question is **the meaning of this rock**. Does it mean the man Peter? Or the faith Peter has just professed? Or is it the teaching of Jesus (as in **7:24**)? Or Jesus himself? Each of the views has been argued passionately by some exegetes, often maintaining at the same time that other views can be espoused only by people who refuse to accept the plain meaning of the Greek. Clearly this is a place where we must tread carefully and keep in mind the possibility of interpreting the passage in ways other than the one that appeals to us.

Stu Weber: Upon this statement the Roman Catholic church has based its doctrine of Peter being appointed the first in a long line of popes. Jesus' statements of Peter's authority in the next verse provide the basis for the Roman Catholic church's erroneous teachings regarding the authority of the papal office.

And, equally in error, many Protestants have reacted against the Roman Catholic interpretation by going to the other extreme, allowing the “*rock*” (*petra*) to mean anything but Peter himself.

Matthew's record of Jesus' wordplay on Peter's name is significant. *Petros* is a masculine singular noun. *Petra* is feminine. And while clearly related, they represent a distinction. The masculine singular form refers to Peter as one singular rock. The feminine form may be understood to represent **bedrock** or a rock quarry. It is reasonable to understand Jesus' statement to mean that Peter was **one rock among a rock quarry (the disciples)**. It was upon this quarry of disciples (cf. “*living stones*,” **1 Pet. 2:5**) and their understanding of Peter's confession that Jesus would build his church. . .

It is critical to understand that the words **church** and **kingdom** are two different words referring to two different realities. They are not synonymous or interchangeable. And the one (*church*) does not replace the other (*kingdom*). “*Church*” refers to a people; “*kingdom*” refers to a reign. Furthermore, the church does not subsume the kingdom, although it is part of it. Nor does the church replace the nation of Israel in the unfolding of the kingdom. Any attempt to make it so must require major allegorizing of the covenants (rather than interpreting them consistently and literally), which results in significant doctrinal error.

The church does not render God's covenant with David (**2 Sam. 7**) and David's kingdom obsolete. The Son of David will rule from David's throne (Israel) over the earth, and the church (the king's bride) will share in it, but the church cannot replace it. “*God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*” (**Rom. 11:25-29**). A study of the usages of the words *basileia* (*kingdom*) and *ekklesia* (*church*) will demonstrate a **great difference between the two**.

William Barclay: Jesus did not mean that the Church depended on Peter, as it depended on Himself, and on God the Rock, alone. He did mean that the Church began with Peter; in that sense Peter is the foundation of the Church.

R. T. France: Here, as we have noted, Peter is acting as spokesman for the whole group. Yet it is Peter, not the Twelve, who is declared to be the foundation rock. So how does this corporate apostolic foundation relate to a specific foundational role for Peter alone? Matthew has made it clear in **10:2** that Peter comes “first” among the Twelve. Throughout the gospel he is mentioned far more often than any other disciple, and regularly takes the lead. In the early chapters of Acts it is Peter who leads the disciple group in Jerusalem, and it is he who takes the initiative in the key developments which will constitute the church as a new, international body of the people of God through faith in Jesus: note especially his role in the bringing in of Samaritans (**Acts 8:14–25**) and Gentiles (**Acts 10:1 – 11:18; 15:7–11**). By the time James takes over as president of the Jerusalem church, the foundation has been laid. In principle all the apostles constituted the foundation, with Jesus as the cornerstone, but as a matter of historical fact it was on Peter's leadership that the earliest phase of the church's development would depend, and that personal role, fulfilling his name “*Rock*,” is appropriately celebrated by Jesus' words here.

Donald Hagner: The rock imagery implies both **stability** and **endurance** (cf. **7:24–25**), even before the gates of Hades (see below). . . “*Rock*” of course refers here not to Peter’s character, as will become clear later in the narrative, but to his office and function (see too **France**) as leader of the apostles.

John MacArthur: this is a message of **great hope** that the beleaguered, persecuted, martyred, rejected, maligned, poor, ignoble people of God are still going to go on, and when they look like losers, you just aren’t looking close enough. **There’s victory at the end.**

- the certainty of Jesus building His church
- the intimacy of Jesus building His church
- the identity of the church Jesus will build – my assembled, redeemed people – speaks to the continuity of the people of God

3. Destiny of the Church

“and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”

Richard Gardner: The promise Jesus gives in **verse 18** is to build a durable community which he calls my church (cf. **18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 9:31**). The Greek word for church is *ekklēsia*, the same word used for the assembly of Israel in the LXX (cf. **Deut. 31:30; Judg. 20:2; 1 Kings 8:14**). What Jesus promises, then, is to **reconstruct the people of God**, to fashion a **messianic community of faith** with its own foundation and destiny. And Peter is somehow related to this building project. As the NRSV and NIV footnotes indicate, verse 18 begins with a provocative play on words: You are Peter (Petros), Jesus says, and on this rock (petra) I will build my church. Petros is a masculine noun meaning stone or rock, and so usable as a male name; petra is a feminine noun conveying the idea of a rock foundation (as in 7:24).

The key question here is whether the rock foundation of the church is Peter himself, or something to be distinguished from Peter. If the latter, Jesus could be speaking of Peter’s faith, or of the revelation Peter received. It is more likely, however, that the rock on which Jesus promises to build the church is in fact Peter himself, Peter the first disciple (cf. **4:18; 10:2**), who **represents the whole group of disciples** from which the church will be formed. At least four considerations support this view:

- (1) When a person in the biblical story receives a new name, the name points to a new identity or role for that person (cf. **Gen. 17:5-6, 15-16; 32:27-28**). It is thus natural to relate the name Peter receives to a **role he will have in the founding of the church**.
- (2) The Aramaic saying which likely lies behind the Greek text here would have used one and the same word for both Peter and rock (the word *kepha*), thus identifying the two. (It is from the Aramaic word that the name Cephas is derived, the name Paul uses for Peter in his letters; cf. **1 Cor. 1:12; Gal. 1:18**.)
- (3) The view that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles is found elsewhere in the NT (**Eph. 2:20**). Further, there is evidence that Peter was revered as one of the pillars of the church among believers in Judea (cf. **Gal. 2:9**).
- (4) The OT speaks of Abraham as the rock from which Israel was hewn (**Isa. 51:1-2**), and it is fitting that the first disciple to respond to Jesus should be identified in the same manner. **Like Abraham, Peter signifies the origin of a special people, a people through whom God will bless all the nations. . .**

As a metaphor, therefore, **the gates of Hades** represent the **threat of destruction**, in the face of which one seeks a secure place (cf. **Isa. 28:14-22**; 1QH 6:23-27; IQS 8:7). According to Jesus, the community he builds is such a place, **capable of withstanding destruction**. However fierce the floodwaters that beat against the church, its foundation is **secure**, and it will not be overwhelmed.

Leon Morris: Jesus is giving his followers the assurance that nothing in this world or the next can overthrow the church.

C. (:19) Bestowing of Authority

1. Investiture of Authority – Keys to the Kingdom

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;”

Richard Gardner: To understand the text correctly, we need to recall Peter’s function throughout **16:13-20**. He serves as the **representative of the disciples as a group**. When Peter, therefore, receives the keys and the power to bind and loose, he does so on behalf of the church. To put it another way, the saying in **verse 19** does not grant Peter special authority in the church, but **grants the church special authority within history**.

Charles Swindoll: referring primarily to Peter’s authority on earth to open up membership in the physical, visible, earthly community that would become known as the church, in keeping with God’s heavenly initiative. Let me explain. The “*doors*” of the church would be unlocked when Peter invited believing, repentant Jews into the fold on Pentecost – **Acts 2:38-41**.

Next, Peter would unlock the “*doors*” of the church for the Samaritans, a group of people descended from the mixture of Israelites and Gentiles following the Exile. Philip had preached the gospel in Samaria, and many had believed and were baptized. The book of Acts records Peter’s involvement from that point – **Acts 8:14-17**.

Finally, Peter would unlock the “*doors*” of the church to the Gentiles when he ordered the Roman centurion Cornelius and other Gentile believers in Jesus to be baptized – **Acts 10:46-48**.

2. Implementation of Authority – Binding and Loosing

a. In Terms of Binding

“and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,”

Grant Osborne: Probably the best interpretation is to bring together this image of evangelism with that of discipleship, i.e., the **authority** of Peter and the church to declare the kingdom truths as they interpret and proclaim Jesus’ teaching, guiding the new community regarding what is forbidden and what is permitted in both doctrine and conduct (thus including discipline in the church, cf. **18:18**).

Van Parunak: Now we turn to the unusual tense of the Greek verbs. They are not simple futures, but **future perfects**, “*shall have been*.” The simple future would suggest that Peter (and in ch. 18, the other disciples) have the power to make something permitted or forbidden. But the future perfect shows that they are binding things that have already been bound in heaven, and loosing things that heaven has already loosed. Their authority is not to create new rules, but (like stewards) to grant access to the contents of the heavenly storehouse.

b. In Terms of Loosing

“and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Richard Gardner: The metaphor of binding and loosing sometimes refers to casting out demons, but here reflects a usage that comes out of the synagogue. In this context, binding and loosing could refer either to

- (1) the forbidding and permitting of certain actions, or
- (2) the imposing and lifting of a sentence of excommunication.

In short, the authority to bind and loose is the authority of a community to **establish and enforce norms for its life**. According to Matthew, Jesus gives the church this kind of authority, authority ratified in heaven itself. As a result, the church can interpret Scripture and make community decisions without looking to the synagogue.

Leon Morris: Jesus meant that the new community would exercise divinely given authority both in regulating its internal affairs and in deciding who would be admitted to and who excluded from its membership.

(:20) EPILOGUE – INJUNCTION TO SILENCE REGARDING THE IDENTITY OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH

“Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.”

Richard Gardner: Only after the cross will the true nature of Jesus’ messiahship be understood. Until that time, the political connotations of the title Messiah could arouse false expectations and hinder Jesus from fulfilling his mission.

Stu Weber: He wanted people to come to a knowledge of his identity based on the right motive— personal repentance rather than political zeal. Furthermore, while Jesus was headed for Jerusalem and the cross, he may have been guarding against the possibility of uninformed enthusiasm on the part of the multitudes interfering with his intentions.

Leon Morris: Matthew rounds off the episode, as do Mark and Luke, with Jesus giving the disciples firm instruction to tell nobody that he was the Messiah. Matthew’s favorite *Then* (see on 2:7) moves on to the next point. Jesus gave the Twelve firm instruction that they were not to disclose the conversation. There is some emphasis on *he* in the expression that *he was the Messiah: he* and no other *was the Messiah*. This was a fact, and he had admitted it among the disciples. But the term could all too easily be misinterpreted and understood, for example, in political terms. If the disciples had gone out proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, both they and their hearers would have thought of a glorious, conquering Messiah. They would have looked for armies and bloodshed and victories. To know that Jesus was the Messiah was one thing; to understand what messiahship really meant was quite another. **To have proclaimed Jesus’ messiahship would have been to invite misunderstanding.** Better by far for Jesus to get on with the completion of his mission and to keep the knowledge that he was the Messiah within the inner circle. The disciples are to follow the same path as the Master: he knew he was the Messiah, but he did not proclaim it publicly; they are to take up the same position.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the **popular views** today regarding the **identity of Jesus** and His global significance?
- 2) What is the significance to you of Jesus being *the Messiah, the Son of the living God*?
- 3) How would you refute the Catholic doctrine of the papacy as being derived from this passage?
- 4) How does the church exercise today the functions of the *keys of the kingdom of heaven* and of *loosing* and binding?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: When did the Church begin?

Theologians have answered the question “When did the church begin?” in a number of ways. Some have suggested that the church consists of all the people of God from Adam to the end of time. Others see the church as beginning with the call of Abraham, because he was the first recipient of the unique covenant promises that became the root of all future covenants.

However, based on **Matthew 16:18** and a few other New Testament passages, it seems best to see the church as beginning at **Pentecost** with the promised **baptism of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18**, “*I will build My church.*” The verb meaning “*to build,*” *oikodomeo*, is in the future tense, pointing to an activity that Christ had not yet begun at the time He was speaking to Peter. In **Ephesians 2:20**, Paul says that the church is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.*” The verb is the same – a form of *oikodomeo*. But here Paul uses the aurist tense, indicating something that occurred in the past. This suggests that sometime between Jesus’ ministry and Paul’s ministry the church was established.

This leaves us with really only one option for the timing of the founding of the church. Jesus said in **Acts 1:5** that the disciples would be “*baptized with the Holy Spirit*” shortly after His ascension. This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the means by which believers are incorporated into the body of Christ (**1 Cor. 12:12-13**). And because this baptism of the Spirit didn’t occur until Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-4**), we can mark Pentecost as the point when Christ began to fulfill His promise to Peter that “*I will build My church*” (**Matt. 16:18**).

From Pentecost onward, the forces of wickedness have been trying to destroy the church and its proclamation of the truth. Whether by attacks from outside in the form of persecution or attacks from within in the form of destructive false teaching by heretics, Satan has tried with all his might to tear down Christ’s building project or to destroy its foundation. However, after two millennia, Christ’s promise still stands: “*The gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (**16:18**).

Van Parunak: We have seen all three titles of our Lord—Son of Man, Christ, and Son of God—here within the span of three verses. All three recur throughout the gospel (Son of Man 32x,

Christ 17x, Son of God 9x), but there is only one other chapter in Matthew where the three come together, and that is when our Lord is on trial before the Jews, after his arrest (chart). **Mat 26:63**

And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

John MacArthur: Now, the Lord is going to build His church on a rock. The question we have is **what is that rock**, right? Now, the normal language appears to say, "You are Peter," and Peter translated means stone, rock, "and upon this rock, I'll build my church." And so the very normal and first impression as you look at it is "You're Peter. I'm going to build my church on you, Peter." And at that point, some of us who are Protestants get a little bit anxious because we say, "Now, that's what the Catholics say."

And that's what they say, to be sure. They say that this verse means the church is built on Peter. and therefore it establishes Peter as the first pope, the first head of the church. For example, Catholic theology says the pope is crowned with a triple crown, king of heaven, king of earth, and king of hell. He wields two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. The Lord conferred on Saint Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of His whole church, and that same spiritual authority has always resided in the popes and bishops of Rome as being the successors of Saint Peter.

Consequently, says the Catholic theology, to be true followers of Christ, all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the pope of Rome where Peter still rules in the person of his successor.

Now, that's Catholic theology, that Peter here is given the papacy and that he established papal succession, and that every pope that's come out of the Roman system and sat in Rome - and it gets confusing sometimes because there were as many as three at one time competing with each other - but supposedly has passed on Petrine authority, so that now when there is a pope there, he is a pope, as it were, who is from the loins of Peter and bears his same authority; therefore, he speaks authoritatively the truth of God, and when he speaks ex cathedra, it is as binding as the Bible. Now, that's the papal system, and they get that out of this passage.

Now, frankly, I really don't want to spend a lot of time arguing against that because it only comes out of the white spaces, not from the words here. Because it doesn't say anything about that, not anything at all, and you almost don't even want to dignify such stuff by commenting on it out of this passage, lest you should be at all thought - else you should think at all that there's any hint of it here. There isn't.

Peter can't be the head of the church, Christ is. And Peter - no Peter, no earthly individual on his own can hold up the whole church by his authority. So Protestants very often approach this text, and the one thing they want to do is make sure that we get rid of the thought that the church is built on Peter, right? So what they'll say, and this is a very common interpretation, "*Thou art Peter,*" *petros*, it's a masculine form of the word, "*and upon this rock,*" *petra* different word, different form of the same root, "*I will build my church.*"

And so the traditional interpretation then has been, “You are petros,” which means stone, “but upon this *petra*” - and **Liddell and Scott**, for example, who give us Greek meanings, say it means a rock bed or a rocky mountain or a rocky peak. In other words, “You’re a stone, but upon a rocky peak or a rocky mountain, I’m going to build my church,” so that the statement is a contrast. “You’re a little rock. I’m going to build my church on a big rock.”

And then they go back to the antecedent in verse 16, the confession of Peter, and they say that is the rock bed, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” And so the Lord is saying, “You’re a little rock. Upon that rock bed confession of the reality of my deity, I’m going to build my church.”

Now, that’s fair to do that with the text because there is a difference in those two words. And I really don’t have a problem with that viewpoint. If you want to hold that viewpoint, that’s fine. In fact, I think at one time or other in my life, I’ve probably held that viewpoint, too. But as I’ve been studying it lately, I’ve kind of been thinking along another direction. And I’ll show you what sort of shook me up. In **Ephesians 2:20**, as I began to think this through, we have a very interesting statement.

It says here that the household of God - or the temple of God or the church of Christ, whatever you want to call it - **verse 20 of Ephesians 2** - is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Now, follow my thinking.

In **Ephesians 2:20**, it says the church is built upon the foundation of whom? The apostles. It says there, then, the very thing we’re trying to make it not say in Matthew 16. You understand that? You say, “Well, now wait a minute, in **Matthew 16** it just says Peter.” Yes, but what have we been saying all along in this passage as we looked at it? When Peter spoke, he spoke on behalf of the whole group, did he not? And Peter spoke the consensus of the group, and when Christ replied to Peter, in a very real sense, He replied to **the group**. And so I really don’t feel that uncomfortable if you just say, “You’re Peter, and upon this rock, I’ll build my church.”

You say, “Well, then how do you account for the *petra/petros* difference?” Well, *petros* has to be used in the case of Peter because it’s a masculine form and he’s a man. And so linguistically, we won’t have a problem saying, “*You’re a rock, and upon that rock, I’ll build my church.*” Now, if we accept that, all we’re saying, then, there is the very same thing it says in **Ephesians 2:20**, very same thing, that **the church is built on the foundation of the apostles, Peter being representative of them**. And Peter was sort of a major representative, wouldn’t you agree?

I mean, for example, when you go into the book of Acts, you’ll find his name mentioned 50 times in the first twelve chapters of Acts - 50 times. And you will find that the sermon he preached on the day of Pentecost was not just Peter but it was Peter speaking on behalf of all those who believed, wasn’t it? For they all held to that same message and as a result three thousand were converted. It was again through the testimony of Peter in John, chiefly of Peter, that two thousand more were added later to the church in **chapter 4**.

It was through the testimony and ministry of Peter that the lame man was healed. It was through Peter’s leadership that the election of Matthias took place to replace Judas. It was the heroic message of Peter before the Sanhedrin. And so, you see, Peter was a key person and was acting as a representative of the ministry of all of them. So I don’t really have a problem with the Lord

saying - so I could take either view, the Lord saying to Peter, “*You’re the rock and on that rock I’ll build my church.*” And then saying the same thing essentially as we saw in **Ephesians 2:20**.

And now comes the key question, but in what sense is the church built on the apostles, Peter being the leader of them? The Roman Catholics say it is built on his rank, or his elevation to authority, or his elevation to office, or his elevation to worthiness, or his elevation to some high-level position. But the Bible doesn’t say that. If it was built on the apostles, it was **not built on their persons** - not built on their persons, but built on their what? Teaching, right?

That’s why when the early church came together, they did not worship the apostles, **Acts 2:42**, they studied the apostles’ what? **Doctrine and teaching**. So that what He is really saying is, “You’re Peter and I can build my church on you as one of the foundation stones because you have affirmed ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ and you didn’t get it,” **verse 17** says, “from flesh and blood, you got it from my Father who is in heaven. And since you are the vehicle through whom the Father is revealing His truth, I can build my church on that.”

So, the church is built. And it’s built on those apostles initially who affirmed the divine revelation coming from God and thus laid the foundation that is spoken of in Ephesians 2:20. So when we look at **Ephesians 2:20** and we see the foundation of the church being the apostles and prophets, it isn’t their rank and it isn’t their office and it isn’t their title, it is the fact that they laid that foundation because they proclaimed the Word of God, so much so that they themselves were in many ways inseparable from their very message.

I think **Martin Luther** said it well. He said, “All who agree with the confession of Peter are Peters themselves, setting a sure foundation.” And I believe that the Lord is still building His church and putting up those living stones that Peter talks about, He’s still building His church on those people who affirm the revelation of God about Christ to be true.

To look at it another way, a group of people who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God have no place where Christ can build His church. And so it’s a moot point. If you want to take the view you are a little stone and I’ll build it on the rock of your confession, or if you want to say you’re one with your confession, and you, Peter, can become a foundation because of your confession, because you’re living by the revelation of God, because you’re affirming the truth that the Father reveals to you, you are laying that foundation.

Either way, you come up with the same thing. And so the foundation of the church is the revelation of God as given to us through the apostles. And today we lay down that foundation by establishing God’s Word, we keep it there.

In **1 Corinthians 3**, Paul approaches it from a little different angle when he says, “*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Christ Jesus.*” That’s not - that appears initially to be a direct contradiction to **Ephesians 2:20**. Here you have the apostles’ and prophets’ foundation, here you have Christ the foundation. There’s no contradiction at all. The only reason the apostles and prophets were allowed to be the foundation stones was because **they affirmed the reality of Christ as the true foundation**.

So I believe the Lord is collecting all of those disciples into that confession and He says you’ve said it, Peter, and it’s upon that affirmation of divine revelation about who I am as the Son of the living God that I can build my church. What is this saying in a sense? It’s saying that the Lord

builds His church on His truth, but always has chosen to reveal His truth through His people so that **they become inseparable from that truth**. His people are one with Christ. **The apostles were so intimately attached to Jesus Christ that in one place Christ is the foundation and in another place, they're the foundation.**

They were so intimately attached with and so true to His Word that in one place His Word is a sure foundation, in another place, the apostles are the foundation. But whether it's Christ or the apostles or the Word, it's all saying the same thing because all were inseparably linked. Do you understand? And the Lord is still building His church on people who confess His Word, who confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the deity of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. **He's still building the church on the foundation of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the apostles.**

TEXT: Matthew 16:21-28

TITLE: THE PASSION OF THE MESSIAH AND THE PRICE OF DISCIPLESHIP

BIG IDEA:

THERE IS NO AVOIDING THE CROSS – EITHER FOR JESUS OR FOR HIS DISCIPLES

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: With “*from that time on*” (v. 21) we begin the second half of this narrative section (13:54 – 17:27), indeed, the second half of Matthew’s gospel. Immediately after Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah, Jesus starts to prepare the disciples for the true meaning of that confession. The announcement of the passion had to await the realization on the part of the disciples that he is the Messiah, for the passion defines his messianic office. So now the movement of the narrative is downward, and the discipleship sayings that follow (vv. 24–28) flow out of the announcement, defining the true followers as those who “take up their cross” in imitation of the Messiah.

R. T. France: The Galilean period of Jesus’ ministry has reached its climax at the most northerly point of his travels. This substantial central section of the narrative, which essentially parallels that in **Mark 8:31 – 10:52**, now bridges the gap between north and south, bringing Jesus and his disciples out of their home territory in the north and, for the first time in the Synoptic plan, into **Judea in the south**, where they are in “foreign” territory and where they will confront the hostile power of the religious authorities of Israel.

This geographical transition coincides with a significant change in the pattern of Jesus’ activity and teaching, signaled by the formula “*From that time Jesus began ...*” (16:21; see on 4:17). The declaration that he is the Messiah (16:16) leads him immediately to **clarify what his messianic mission must involve**, and the plain declaration in 16:21 that he must suffer, die and be raised again will be repeated in 17:22–23 and with added emphasis in 20:18–19. The **shadow of the cross** thus falls across this whole southward journey, as Jesus tries to get his disciples to understand the paradoxical and unwelcome nature of his mission.

William Hendriksen: Previously, in veiled utterances, Jesus had predicted his death (9:15), and even his death and resurrection (12:39, 40; 16:4). Now there was going to be a change. We see the Anointed One, as our chief Prophet, in plain unfigurative language foretelling his own demise; as our merciful High Priest, preparing to lay down his life, that he might “*take away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29); and throughout it all, as our eternal King, being in complete control of every situation, so that the plan of God Triune, made before the foundation of the world, was being carried out in every detail, yet in such a manner that the human agents who took part in carrying out this plan – elders, chief priests, scribes, the common people, the soldiers, the presiding judge, the betrayer, etc. – were fully responsible for their actions (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23).

Leon Morris: For the Jews in general, and presumably for the Twelve up to this point, being Messiah meant unadulterated glory. The Messiah might encounter opposition and even hardship, but this kind of thing was no more than an unpleasantness that must be passed through on the

way to majesty and splendor. For Jesus suffering was the essence of messiahship, and from this point on he brings it out again and again (cf. 17:9, 12, 22-23; 20:18-19, 28; 21:38-39; 26:2). Learning this was a lesson the disciples found very hard indeed.

David Thompson: JESUS CHRIST TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT THE SUFFERINGS HE MUST ENDURE AS SAVIOR AND ABOUT THE LIFESTYLE THE DISCIPLES MUST ENDURE AS HIS SERVANTS.

I. (:21-23) THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CLEARLY REVEALED

A. (:21) God's Plan of Redemption – Revealed by Jesus

“From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples”

Grant Osborne: *“From that time on he began”* (ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο) also began 4:17 at the start of Jesus' Galilean ministry, so this introductory formula frames the two parts of Matthew's narrative, the movement upward to the Caesarea Philippi confession, and the movement downward to the cross. The use of *“to show”* (δεικνύειν, present tense here for the ongoing nature of the demonstration) is also strong (Mark 8:31 has *“teach”*), connoting a **visualization** of the message and meaning he wants to make things crystal clear to the disciples.

D. A. Carson: This is not the first time he alludes to his death (cf. 9:15; 10:38; 12:40; cf. also Jn 2:19; 3:14), but it is the first time he **discusses it openly** with his disciples. The time for symbols and veiled language was largely over, now that they had recognized him as Messiah. That is probably the significance of the change from Mark's *didaskō* (*“I teach”*) to Matthew's *deiknyō* (*“I point out,” “I show”*—not, as in the NIV, *“I explain”*). Jesus had taught the passion earlier but in symbolic language. Now he **shows these things to his disciples clearly**. Matthew's verb (*deiknyō*) is equivalent to Mark's clause: *“He spoke plainly about this”* (Mk 8:32).

Donald Hagner: It is thus the compulsion of God's will that lies behind the following four infinitives, which are together syntactically governed by δεῖ.

Daniel Doriani: His death and resurrection are essential to God's design from all eternity. At the empty tomb, an angel reminded the disciples of Jesus' words, that he *“must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again”* (Luke 24:7). This *“must”* reflects the eternal plan of the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father planned, the Son achieved, and the Spirit empowered Jesus.

1. Destination for Passion and Resurrection = Jerusalem *“that He must go to Jerusalem,”*

John MacArthur: it is a *must* that is bigger than the moment in which we see it. It is a *must* that is older than the circumstances in which we hear it. It is a *must* that comes thundering out of eternity. It is not the *must* of human devotion to an ideal, it is the *must* of a divine imperative. It is an ageless *must*. It comes with the force of eternity. This is the plan of God, set in motion before the foundation of the world.

Four things made it necessary.

1. First, human sin. He had to die because men are sinners and they must have their sin paid for.

2. Secondly, because of the divine requirement, without the shedding of blood, there could be no remission, and so men needed a death and God required a death.
3. And then you can add to that the divine decree, God by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge brought it to pass.
4. And then you could even add the prophetic promise, the prophets had said the Messiah would die. It's Matthew who records His death so beautifully, as the other gospel writers, but it's the psalmist who describes centuries before.

2. Degradation of Suffering at the Hands of Jewish Religious Leaders

“and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes,”

John MacArthur: The holy city is not holy. And the leaders of it are not holy, either.

Grant Osborne: a general summary of all the indignities and torment at the hands of the authorities. These are spelled out in more detail in the third prediction (**20:19**) and encompass all of the events from the arrest to the crucifixion. The three groups mentioned here are governed by a single article and so together constitute the Jewish leadership.

3. Destiny of Crucifixion and Resurrection

a. Crucifixion

“and be killed,”

Stu Weber: At the heart of the plan, Jesus must be killed—as the sacrificial lamb, the Son of Abraham, for the sake of Israel and all nations (**Gen. 12:3; Matt. 1:2, 17**). By this means he would redeem a sinful people. But he would be raised as the triumphant lion of Judah (**Gen. 49:9**), the sovereign Son of David (**Gen. 49:10; Matt. 1:6, 17**). Thus, he would restore his entire kingdom to its proper place, under his authority.

b. Resurrection

“and be raised up on the third day.”

Grant Osborne: The “*third day*” theme is connected to the “*three days and three nights*” of **12:40** and will be found again at **17:23; 20:19; 27:63**. It became a major creedal affirmation in the early church, and **1 Cor 15:4** (cf. **John 2:19**) records that Jesus was “*raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*”; this is often linked with **Hos 6:2** (“*on the third day he will restore us,*” cf. also **2 Kgs 20:5; Jonah 1:17**) but is probably even broader, to the whole OT tradition of a third-day deliverance. Jesus was placed in the grave Friday afternoon and raised Sunday morning and by Jewish reckoning was in the grave “*three days and three nights*” inclusively.

B. (:22-23) Peter’s Resistance – Peter and Jesus Rebuke Each Other

1. (:22) Peter Rebukes the Lord – Crucifixion and Messiahship Are Not Compatible

“And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying,

‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’”

D. A. Carson: How much of Jesus’ sayings about his death did the disciples understand before the events? The gospel evidence points in two complementary directions. On the one hand, the disciples understand perfectly well; otherwise, for instance, Peter could not possibly have rebuked Jesus (**v.22**). On the other hand, they cannot believe that Messiah will really be killed because their conceptions of the Messiah do not allow for a Suffering Servant. Therefore, Peter

dares to rebuke Jesus, and the disciples begin to think that Jesus' predictions of his sufferings must be in some way nonliteral (**Mk 9:10; Lk 9:45**). . .

Peter's strong will and warm heart linked to his ignorance produce a shocking bit of arrogance. He confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and then speaks in a way that implies he knows more of God's will than the Messiah himself.

R. T. France: that Jesus "*was raised*" by the power of God is not to be set over against his "*rising*" victorious. But the **passive formulation** perhaps encourages us to see in this event **God's vindication** of his faithful Messiah. Jesus' resurrection is predicted not only in the three passion predictions but also in **17:9; 26:32**, in both of which it is not so much announced as taken for granted. His expectation of personal resurrection is not explicitly derived from the OT, but may have owed something to the influence of passages like **Isa 52:13–15; 53:10–12; Ps 16:10–11; 118:17–18, 22**, which link rejection, suffering and death with subsequent vindication. But despite these predictions the disciples still seem to have been **unprepared for the event**, perhaps because the idea of the personal return to life of the Messiah (or indeed of any other person except by temporary resuscitation as in **9:25; 10:8; 11:5**) was so foreign to their world-view that they instinctively heard the words as a metaphor for future vindication rather than as a literal prediction. It was the suffering and death that stayed in their minds rather than the resurrection.

Leon Morris: Peter has just given expression to the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah and has been praised by Jesus for this. He has seen something of Jesus' greatness, and because he has seen that greatness it is inconceivable to him that Jesus would undergo the humiliation of which he has just spoken. For Peter it is unthinkable that the one he has just pronounced "*the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" should be rejected and killed. How could the Jewish nation reject the Jewish Messiah? So he says forthrightly, "this will never happen to you"; his double negative is very **emphatic** (and with the future indicative rather than the aorist subjunctive even more so).

2. (:23) The Lord Rebukes Peter – The Cross Cannot Be Avoided

"But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"

Grant Osborne: Peter's mind-set is not framed by God's perspective but by the purely human expectations of Israel's messianic hopes.

The two sources of spiritual failure (Satan and self) are both emphasized here. Jesus' statement here has long been recognized as the heart of true discipleship in the sense of focusing on heavenly rather than earthly concerns and is closely linked in thrust with **6:19–21**, which teaches us to seek treasure in heaven rather than treasure on earth.

D. A. Carson: A few moments earlier, Jesus had called Peter a **rock**. Now he calls him a different kind of "*rock*," a *skandalon* ("*a stumbling block*"). This is one of several striking parallels between **vv.13–20** and **vv.21–23**. As Satan offered Jesus kingship without suffering (**4:8–9**), so Peter does the same, adopting current expectations of victorious messianic conquest (Pss. Sol. 17; cf. **Schürer**, *History of the Jewish People*, 2:517–25, and bibliography, 488–92). Jesus recognizes the **same diabolical source** behind the same temptation. For him to acquiesce would be to rebel against the will of his Father. The notion of a suffering Messiah,

misunderstood by Peter so that he became a stumbling block to Jesus, itself becomes, after the resurrection, a stumbling block to other Jews (**1Co 1:23**).

R. T. France: Jesus' counter-rebuke of Peter is remarkably **severe**. Even the body-language adds to the effect: whereas Peter had confidentially "*taken Jesus aside*," Jesus now "*turns on him*" to issue a public reprimand. The opening words directly recall the dismissal of Satan in **4:10**, here strengthened by the addition of the words "*behind me*," to emphasize Jesus' dissociation of himself from Peter's ideology. But whereas in **4:10** the "*Enemy*" (which is what "*Satan*" means) was the chief demon himself, here it is Jesus' loyal follower. For Peter to be addressed by this obnoxious name must have been deeply wounding, especially after the accolade in **vv. 17–19**. There is no parallel to such an address to a human being. But this is not merely extravagant abuse; the choice of this epithet suggests rather that behind the "*human thoughts*" of Peter Jesus discerns an attempt to divert him from his chosen course similar to that which Satan himself had made in **4:1–11**. The same Peter who had just spoken what God had revealed to him (**v. 17**) is now speaking for Satan. Just as the third temptation in **4:8–9** had been to achieve worldly power by accommodating himself to Satan rather than attacking him, so now Peter's vision of Messiahship represents the easier way to power and authority, the gains without the pains. As long as he holds such a view, the "*rock*" on which the church is to be built proves instead to be a **stumbling-block**. The image goes neatly with the demand "*get behind me*:" as long as Peter stands in front of Jesus he is in his way, stopping him getting on with his mission. He gets in the way of God's purpose for Jesus by his unthinking acceptance of "*human thoughts*." Peter has expressed only what comes naturally to the human mind when presented with the idea of power and authority which the title "*Messiah*" suggests. But human thoughts are not God's thoughts (**Isa 55:8–9**), and if they are not questioned they can stand in the way of God's purpose and derail it. In much of the rest of this section of the gospel Jesus will be seen persistently trying to undermine the "*human thoughts*" of the disciples so as to get them to see things from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven (note especially **19:23–30; 20:20–28**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Now it seems to me that we have an application of this in all of the many activities which in the local church impinge upon the priority of the word of God. It is possible for individuals who love the Lord to make diabolically hellish suggestions concerning the ministry of the local church. It's sad but true. And often they are made out of the best human intentions. Peter's human intentions were good. He didn't like the concept of Jesus being slain by the rulers in Jerusalem. That was something that was very bad for him. And so he acted out of that human love for Jesus Christ, but it was not divine. It was not understanding. It was not enlightened activity. It was actually diabolical. And there are many things that happen in the local church in which substitutions are made for the primacy of the word of God.

John MacArthur: So we see the plan of God, presumption of Peter, protest of Christ, lastly, the principle for us. What does this say to us? Now listen very carefully. This is the point of all of this. The end of **verse 23**, here's the principle, and He generalizes now out of the specific incident and He puts Peter's action in a category that all of us are in from time to time. . . "For you are thinking along not the lines of God but the lines of men." You are reasoning from the standpoint of humanness, not deity. You're thinking the things of men, you're not thinking the things of God. . .

What is the lesson for us? Two lessons, just two and I want you to remember.

- Lesson number one, the Savior, the Messiah, the Son of God **may not fit men's definitions**, but He is no less the fulfillment of God's plan.

- There's a second lesson, and that considers itself with not Christ but us. And it is that we must learn that for us there is **pain in the refining process**.

II. (:24-26) THE PRICE OF DISCIPLESHIP INCLUDES THE CROSS

John MacArthur: WINNING BY LOSING: THE PARADOX OF DISCIPLESHIP

There are some things that our Lord specially taught, some specially loved truths, which He went back to again and again and again. We see them over and over in the Scripture. And we will never understand salvation and we will never understand discipleship unless we understand this principle, so oft repeated. **The principle is winning by losing.** . .

God says the gain comes through the pain and the glory comes through the suffering. It has to. There's no other way because you cannot put God, whether incarnate in the Son or alive in the hearts of His people, in the midst of an anti-God society without there being some suffering, without a reproach, without hostility. That's why **2 Timothy 3:12** says, "*All that will live godly in this present age shall suffer persecution.*" And He says to Peter, "You don't understand God's thinking. You put holiness in the midst of an unholy society, and there has to be a reaction."

A. (:24) Challenge to Embrace Self-Denial and Suffering

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me,'"

Leon Morris: *Coming after me* could mean simply walking behind Jesus as he moved along the road, but in a context like this there is no doubt that it means "be a disciple," "be a committed follower." Such a person must deny himself. The natural tendency of the race is to affirm oneself, to concentrate on what serves one's own interests, to make oneself as prosperous as one can. Jesus calls on all his true followers to renounce such self-interest (NEB, "leave self behind"). It is not easy to understand that we must concentrate on meeting the needs of others rather than promoting ourselves (which is why people make utterances like the one Peter had just made).

Jesus brings out the truth that he is looking for the utmost in self-denial by saying that the disciple must *take up his cross*. We minimize the force of this with sayings like "We all have our cross to bear." Jesus was not talking about minor discomforts. Those who heard him utter these words knew what taking up a cross meant; they knew that it was the **prelude to that person's crucifixion**. Jesus was speaking about a death to a whole way of life; he was talking about the utmost in self-sacrifice, a very death to selfishness and all forms of self-seeking. We should not miss the force of his cross: there is a cross for every servant of God. And when we come to follow, we should not miss the present imperative: "*let him keep on following me.*" Jesus is talking about a discipleship that is a whole way of life.

3 Essential Aspects of Discipleship:

1. Self-Denial

"let him deny himself,"

William Barclay: To *deny oneself* means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. To deny oneself means finally, once and for all to dethrone self and to enthrone God. To deny oneself means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the

ruling principle – more, the ruling passion – of life. The life of constant self-denial is the life of constant assent to God.

D. A. Carson: Death to self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it.

Craig Blomberg: Self-denial does not imply self-abuse or lack of self-esteem. As Jesus' disciples believers should have a better self-image than any other people, but it should be based on God's grace and not their merit. Self-denial does, however, mean **putting God and his kingdom priorities first**. This should have a visible impact on the nature of one's financial commitments and service to church and world and should lead to the rejection of self-centered arrogance and pride. According to **Allison and Davies**, “Discipleship is a doing of what is right, no matter how irksome the privations, no matter how great the dangers.” The Beatitudes (**5:3-12**) provide as good a commentary as any on the concept expressed more concisely here.

John MacArthur: And when you lovingly and patiently bear any disgrace, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face to face with folly and extravagance and spiritual insensitivity and endure it as Jesus did, that is dying to self. When you are content with any food, any money, any clothing, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. And when you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works, or itch after commendation from others, and when you truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self.

2. Cross Bearing

“and take up his cross,”

John MacArthur: It is the willingness to endure persecution, rejection, reproach, shame, suffering, even martyrdom, for His sake. That's all.

Grant Osborne: “*Take up their cross*” (ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, see also on **10:38**) is an incredibly powerful metaphor in a world where rebels and malcontents could regularly be seen dying on crosses. The disciples had to know, with all the opposition to Jesus by the officials, that this was a real possibility for them. In the Roman world it was common for the condemned criminal to carry his own cross to the place of execution, so this is an apt analogy. It is likely that there is a twofold thrust: cross-bearing as a symbol of the total denial of self, and a willingness to die for Christ if necessary. Again Jesus is the supreme model who has done both.

Application: Make certain your true followers understand the God-given path for your ministry. Jesus' entire ploy at Caesarea Philippi was to confront the disciples with his messianic reality and to correct any misunderstanding they had. The true test was about to occur as they moved along the road of destiny and faced many obstacles, moving ever closer to Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus wanted them on the same wavelength as much as possible as they faced the certain dread of that destiny. Such communication of purpose is essential for a united movement. . .

The Path of Self-Denial and Suffering:

Jesus could not be more clear on this. To follow the human rather than the divine way is antithetical to discipleship. God demands that we seek the things that are above, not the things on earth (**Col 3:1-2**). This means a **radical surrender** and a radical abrogation of the world's ways and priorities. To “*gain/find*” the one, we must “*lose/forfeit*” the other. This involves living for

the eternal future reality, not the temporary present desires. This distinctly involves wealth, possessions, and status (“*gain the whole world*”), a major concern of all three Synoptics but especially Luke (**Luke 1:51–53; 3:7–14; 4:18–19; 6:20–26**; etc.). Every Christian must come to grips with **worldly possessions vs. serving God**.

3. Following Jesus

“and follow Me.”

John MacArthur: The third ingredient in the principle of discipleship is **loyal obedience**. “*And follow me.*” “*And follow me.*” The text literally says, “*Let him be following me.*” It’s a way of life. It’s a submissiveness to the Lordship of Christ that becomes a pattern of living. It can even relate to the word “to imitate.” If we say we belong to Jesus, **1 John 2:6**, we ought to walk as He walked, putting our feet in His footprints, loyal to the divine will.

B. (:25) Cost of Discipleship Gains Everything

*“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it;
but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”*

R. T. France: the willingness to risk one’s own life. It means putting loyalty to Jesus before self-preservation. . . Loss of life as such is no gain; it is life lost out of loyalty to Jesus which ensures that true life is gained.

William Barclay: In our day and generation, it is not likely to be a question of martyrdom, but it still remains a fact that if we meet life in the constant search for safety, security, ease and comfort, if every decision is taken from worldly-wise and prudential motives, we are losing all that makes life worthwhile. Life becomes a soft and flabby thing when it might have been an adventure. Life becomes a selfish thing when it might have been radiant with service. Life becomes an earthbound thing when it might have been reaching for the stars. Someone once wrote a bitter epitaph on a man: ‘He was born a man and died a grocer.’ Any trade or profession might be substituted for the word grocer. Those who play for safety cease to be truly human, for human beings are made in the image of God.

People who risk all for Christ – and maybe look as if they had lost all – find life. It is the simple lesson of history that it has always been the adventurous men and women, bidding farewell to security and safety, who wrote their names on history and greatly assisted human progress.

C. (:26) Calculation of Discipleship Prioritizes Eternal Destiny

*“For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?
Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus’ argument with His disciples is that those who do not deny themselves temporally, deny themselves eternally. If you will not deny yourself now, you have by that very choice denied yourself for eternity. Selfishness causes the soul to contract. But love makes it expand, enriches it, fills it to overflowing with assurance in peace and joy. That’s why men like **Jim Elliott** could repeat that ancient quote, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Do we truly value the soul in that way? Do we truly believe that the rewards that are worth having are the rewards to come? Or, are we satisfied with the trinkets of this age? That is the question that Jesus is pressing. Not just to His original disciples, but to you and me. How does it make a difference? Because if you really believe that the rewards that

Christ promises are eternal, and if you really believe that those rewards are only experienced in relationship with him and will in some cases have to await the future manifestation of the kingdom, it changes the whole way you approach the things and the blessings of this life.

Charles Swindoll: 3 “nevers” we must never forget:

- 1) (:21) **We must never think that just because something is unexpected, it’s unacceptable.**
- 2) (22-23) **We must never think that the Lord should alter His plan to fit our preferences.**
- 3) (:24-26) **We must never think that being a close follower of Jesus can happen without self-denial.**

Jesus encouraged them that though the demand for discipleship was high, the rewards were inestimable. Yes, those who gripped their lives with white knuckles would lose them in the end. And if they didn’t surrender their souls to Christ, everything they held onto would be lost forever. But those who let go in self-denial and opened themselves up to whatever God had for them would be rewarded beyond imagination (16:25). This reward wouldn’t necessarily come in this life, however. A person could gain the “whole world” yet forfeit his or her soul. What person, when faced with an eternity of damnation, would not wish to have given up everything previously held dear on earth for the joys of heaven? That’s the argument Jesus was making as He urged the disciples to a life of total abandon when it came to following Him.

III. (:27-28) THE PAROUSIA OF THE SON OF MAN BRINGS GLORY, REWARD AND DOMINION

A. (:27) Promise of End Time Second Coming with Judgment, Glory and Reward

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.”

John MacArthur: And that leads us to the *parousia*, that’s the word for “coming.” We use it speak of the second coming, and that’s what **verse 27** talks about. “*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and then He shall render to every man according to his works.*” And what He’s saying is, “Look, you better decide what decision you’re going to make because there is a day of accounting coming. There’s a day when the Judge is going to come.” And do you remember **John 5** says that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son and He is coming to judge, and He will be coming in the full radiant glory of God the Father, manifesting and revealing that ultimate glory, along with angels who are the instruments of judgment. And then He will render to every man according to his works.

Leon Morris: Jesus makes it clear that there will be a final reckoning and that those who have exchanged their essential being, their “life,” for ephemeral profit or pleasure will receive the recompense that is due. In the end there will be a righting of all wrongs.

David Turner: Disciples today likewise often do not grasp that their present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to future glory (16:27; cf. **Rom. 8:18; 2 Tim. 2:11–13**). Those who seek to follow Jesus still need periodic reorientation to kingdom values (cf. **Matt. 20:20–28**). Glory and rewards await faithful disciples (19:27–29), but these come only after a life of self-denying service that follows in the steps of Jesus to the cross, as 16:24–28 shows.

B. (:28) Promise of Preview Experience of Kingdom Majesty, Victory and Dominion

“Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

John MacArthur: And may I suggest to you an interesting thought? This same promise, “*Some of you are not standing,*” and so forth – “*Some of you standing will not see death,*” appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And in all three cases where it appears, it is immediately followed, every single time, by the **same incident** so that what the Lord is simply doing is interpreting what He just said by what happens. “Some of you standing here shall not die till you see the Son of Man in regal splendor.” You know what they were about to get? **A personal, private preview of second coming glory.** It’s exactly what they were going to get.

Do you want to get in on it? Verse 1, “*After six days, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John his brother*” – that’s it, just those three; that’s the “*some*” who didn’t die till they saw Him in regal splendor. The rest died, folks, before they saw Him in regal splendor, because they haven’t – He hasn’t come in regal splendor yet.

But these three weren’t going to die until they saw this. And it only came six days later; brought them into a high mountain privately. “*And He was transfigured before them; and His face did shine like the sun, and His garment*” – or raiment – “*was as white as the light.*” You know what happened? God flipped the switch and turned on deity on the inside. And the blazing light came from the inside out. And then to add to this, there appeared Moses and Elijah talking with Him. Now, **this was an overwhelming scene.**

Leon Morris: In his commentary on the equivalent passage in Luke **Alfred Plummer** lists seven principal ways of understanding the passage that have been put forward:

- (1) the transfiguration,
- (2) the resurrection and ascension,
- (3) Pentecost,
- (4) the spread of Christianity,
- (5) the internal development of the gospel,
- (6) the destruction of Jerusalem, and
- (7) the second advent.

[Alternative Views]

D. A. Carson: It seems best to take **v.28** as having a more **general reference**—namely, not referring simply to the resurrection, to Pentecost, or the like, but to the **manifestation of Christ’s kingly reign** exhibited after the resurrection in a host of ways, not the least of them being the rapid multiplication of disciples and the mission to the Gentiles. Some of those standing there would live to see Jesus’ gospel proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire and a rich “*harvest*” (cf. **9:37–38**) of converts reaped for Jesus Messiah. This best suits the flexibility of the “*kingdom*” concept in the Synoptic Gospels and the present context. Thus, **v.28** does not refer to the same thing as **10:23**. . .

it is likely that Matthew (and Mark and Luke, who use the same awkward phrase about “*some of those standing here*” and equally closely link that saying with the following account of the Transfiguration) saw in this vision at least a proleptic fulfillment of Jesus’ solemn words in **v. 28**,

even though the truth of Jesus' kingship was to be more concretely embodied in later events following his resurrection.

William Barclay: There are two quite distinct sayings here.

(1) The first is a warning, the warning of **inevitable judgment**. Life is going somewhere – and life is going to judgment. In any sphere of life, there inevitably comes the **day of reckoning**. There is no escape from the fact that Christianity teaches that after life there comes the judgment; and when we take this passage in conjunction with the passage which goes before, we see at once what the standard of judgment is. People who selfishly hug life to themselves, people whose first concern is their own safety, their own security and their own comfort, are in heaven's eyes the failures, however rich and successful and prosperous they may seem to be. Those who spend themselves for others, and who live life as a gallant adventure, are the men and women who receive heaven's praise and God's reward.

(2) The second is a promise. As Matthew records this phrase, it reads as if Jesus spoke as if he expected his own visible return in the lifetime of some of those who were listening to him. If Jesus said that, he was mistaken. But we see the real meaning of what Jesus said when we turn to Mark's record of it. Mark has: "*And he said to them: 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power'*" (**Mark 9:1**).

It is of the **mighty working of his kingdom** that Jesus is speaking; and what he said came most divinely true. There were those standing there who saw the coming of Jesus in the coming of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost. There were those who were to see Gentiles and Jews swept into the kingdom; they were to see the tide of the Christian message sweep across Asia Minor and cover Europe until it reached Rome. Well within the lifetime of those who heard Jesus speak, the kingdom came with power.

Again, this is to be taken closely with what goes before. Jesus warned his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and that there he must suffer many things and die. That was the shame; but the shame was not the end. After the cross there came the resurrection. The cross was not to be the end; it was to be the beginning of the unleashing of that power which was to surge throughout the whole world. This is a promise to the disciples of Jesus Christ that no human action can hinder the expansion of the kingdom of God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does my view of Christian discipleship focus on suffering and self-denial because of identification with Jesus Christ or on living a happy and enjoyable life in the present?
- 2) Where do my interests and agenda align more with Satan than with my Lord Jesus?
- 3) In what specific ways have you denied yourself and taken up your cross and followed Jesus?
- 4) Am I investing my life in the eternal values and purposes of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: Why **Jerusalem**? The book of Revelation says this world opposes God’s people in three ways. The foes of God have three styles and each has its city. The cities are Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. We see them together in **Revelation 11:8**, which declares that God’s witnesses will be killed: “*Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*” Each city has a symbolic meaning:

- Sodom represents sensuality, wantonness, and perverse self-indulgence.
- Egypt represents enslavement, oppression, and injustice, especially toward Israel.
- The “*great city*,” where the Lord was crucified, is Jerusalem. It represents external religion that masks moral and spiritual decay.

Today, some of the greatest dangers to believers still come from **Jerusalem**—from dead religion. We know we must shun the teaching of other religions, but believers must also beware of false teaching within the church, in all its branches. Both Protestant and Catholic churches can lead us astray.

D. A. Carson: This pericope contains an important chiasm:

- v.24: challenge to take up the cross and follow Christ in the immediate future
- v.25: incentive reward and punishment at the Parousia
- v.26: **central weighing of values**
- v.27: incentive reward and punishment at the Parousia
- v.28: promise of witnessing the kingdom power of Jesus in the immediate future

Warren Wiersbe: He presented to the disciples two approaches to life:

deny yourself	live for yourself
take up your cross	ignore the cross
follow Christ	follow the world
lose your life for His sake	save your life for your own sake
forsake the world	gain the world
keep your soul	lose your soul
share His reward and glory	lose His reward and glory

Stanley Saunders: The death of Jesus brings judgment on the worlds that humans construct in the shadow of death. The empires of this world offer the promise of salvation in many differing forms: security, pleasure, self-fulfillment, health, material possessions, constant distraction and isolation from the world around us. But this “salvation” is illusory. To “*gain the world*” this way requires, in fact, the loss of all life. In our denial that the living God is the source of all life, we fall prey to alienation, exploitation, violence, and the destruction of community and creation. We end up existing—not living—at odds with the world God created for us to live in. There is no solution to this but the conquest of death itself.

The cross of Jesus Christ bears ultimate witness to who God is—neither the god of the Jewish leaders demanding sacrifice nor the god of Caesar demanding order. The Romans see the cross as a public ritual that restores order. The religious leaders trust that the cross will remove a threat. But the cross turns out to be the perfect expression of God’s own power to save and redeem. It is necessary for Jesus to suffer and die at human hands in order to demonstrate the depth of God’s forgiveness, mercy, and love.

J. Ligon Duncan: We must understand the necessity of the cross if we are to understand Christianity.

Christianity makes no sense apart from the cross. And this is one of the prime points that Jesus is driving home. . . . And as soon as He sees that the disciples have grasped that He is both the long expected Messiah and the very Son of God, He knows that time has come to teach them a more unsettling aspect to the good news. Now, He must teach them that Messiah must die. . . . We cannot possibly overestimate the force and shock of that statement to the disciples. The disciples are utterly unprepared for the message that Messiah must die. We’re going to see in this very passage in their reaction the fact that this takes them utterly by surprise. The prophesy about the fulfillings, about the sufferings and the eventual murder of the Messiah of God that Jesus is giving to the disciples here, is utterly disturbing and surprising and troubling to the disciples in every detail.

And Jesus is here saying, “Jerusalem is going to kill Me. I’m going to suffer in Jerusalem. I’m not going to reign in the fashion that you expect Me to reign in Jerusalem. I’m going to be killed in Jerusalem.”

Notice, also, who He says is going to administer these sufferings. He says to the disciples that the chief priests and the scribes and the elders are going to be the ones who administer the suffering and who ultimately kill Him. Now, this is utterly shocking to the disciples. We, when we see chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Sadducees, we immediately see people with black hats, and we see the disciples as the people with the white hats on. Pharisees are bad. Disciples are good. The disciples couldn’t quite see it that way. These were the men who had instructed them in the faith from their youth, and they had a tremendous veneration for these chief priests and scribes and Pharisees, and we see it throughout the gospel. We’ve seen it here in Matthew. And now Jesus is saying to them, ‘And by the way, these men will kill Me.’ The leaders of Israel, these people taken together, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, you know what they make up? They make up the highest religious tribunal in Israel. They are the very apex of the establishment of religious righteousness in the land and the Lord Jesus is saying, ‘Yes, they will kill Messiah. The cream of the spiritual crop of Israel, they will kill Messiah.’ **William Hendriksen** says this, “What Jesus is saying is this, that Israel’s very leaders who should have been foremost to honor and worship the Christ were going to afflict Him and put Him to death.” Jesus also mentions in passing the nature of His sufferings here. He says He “*must suffer many things, and He must be killed.*”

This one event of the cross of Christ is the final revelation of the consequence and character of sin, and the wonder and sacrifice of divine love. **Martin Luther** says, “There is not a word in the Bible that can be understood apart from the cross.” And Jesus is saying right here that His cross is at the center of the proclamation which His disciples must proclaim, because the cross is at the center of God’s strategy of redemption, His plan of redemption. And so He begins to teach the disciples about it here.

TEXT: Matthew 17:1-13

TITLE: THE TRANSFIGURATION – SUFFERING IS THE PATH TO GLORY

BIG IDEA:

THE TRANSFIGURATION UNCOVERED THE GLORY OF MESSIAH TO PROVIDE A PREVIEW OF THE COMING KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: This is an **epiphany story** in which the divinity of Jesus breaks through and “manifests” itself, with Matthew highlighting that glory in the details added. Matthew builds on **Mark 9:2–8** with a few important **differences**, such as adding “*his face shone like the sun*” (v. **2b**), “*Lord*” rather than “*rabbi*” (v. **4**), a “*bright*” cloud (v. **5**), adding vv. **6–7** on the disciples’ terror, and putting the messianic secret command into direct speech (v. **9**). There is a slight **antithetical structure** as the story is framed by ascending and descending the mountain (vv. **1, 9**) and by Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah (v. **4**) then alone with the disciples (v. **8**), with the **climax of the story** being God’s voice from the Shekinah cloud (v. **5**).

John MacArthur: And as I said, it comes at a marvelously important time, because it comes at a time when they needed **balance**. They had just heard about suffering. They had learned that Jesus was a suffering Savior, and now they needed to see a glimpse of Him as a glorious King. They had been reminded that His followers would share His sorrows, and they needed also to know that His followers could share His glory as well. They knew that as a suffering Savior, He called them to self-denial cross bearing, and loyal obedience at any price – even their life. They needed also to know that as a King, He offered them a King’s reward. . .

Now, there’s another thought that I would just add as a footnote here. In my understanding of the Old Testament, it was not uncommon for a prophet, when He made a prediction about a far-distant event and said something was going to happen in the distant future - the coming of the Messiah – to also make a prediction about something going to happen in the near future. . .

And so, I think, in a very real sense, Jesus is accrediting Himself as a true and trustworthy prophet by saying, “Yes, I will come in the future, and the last day, and the great second coming. And to prove it, I predict that some of you won’t die until you see Me in My regal majesty.” And when the near event came to pass, they knew He spoke as a trustworthy prophet and could trust Him as well for the future event.

Charles Swindoll: Too much casual familiarity with the things of God can cause us to lose our awe of Him.

Stu Weber: Jesus had just finished a sobering and motivational discussion with his disciples. They were aware of his upcoming suffering and death. They had been made to realize that suffering and pain was also part of their calling as his disciples. They were probably **puzzled** and **disillusioned**. Jesus indicated that at least some of them would not experience death before they saw him in his power and kingdom. What did Jesus mean? **Matthew 17** is our answer.

Six days after making the statement that some of them would “*see*” the kingdom, Jesus took his inner group of three disciples—Peter, James, and John—up on a mountain. There they were amazed by what they witnessed. As overwhelmed as they were, what they saw was **only a glimpse of the kingdom**. The Old Testament saints represented by Moses and Elijah were there. The New Testament saints were represented by the three disciples. And, most significantly, the Son of Man was transfigured in a demonstration of his awesome glory.

One purpose of Jesus' transfiguration (17:1-8) was to give these three disciples an **encouraging glimpse of eternal reality**. This experience had an unforgettable impact on Peter (2 Pet. 1:16-18) as well as James and John.

S. Lewis Johnson: Commentators have troubled over the statement in **chapter 16 verse 28**: “*Verily I say unto you there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they seen the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*” It’s amusing to read the varying interpretations that have been placed upon this. Some have said the kingdom came in his life. Some have said the kingdom comes in the death of the believer. Some have said the kingdom comes at his resurrection. Some have said the kingdom comes at Pentecost. All of these explanations cannot account for one little word in that 28th verse, which incidentally is included in each of the other two accounts: “*There be some standing here.*” *Some.*

You see, the Lord Jesus speaks of the special privilege of some as over against all. All the apostles saw the resurrection. All the apostles were at Pentecost. All the apostles experienced these other things. But there are some standing here, he said. Well now the very next text says that *he took Peter, James, and John and went up into the mountain*. That seems like such an obvious interpretation that we wonder that men have not hit upon it. The early church fathers believed this. They believed that the **transfiguration was an anticipation of the kingdom of God upon the earth, that in the glorification of the Son we have that which anticipates the Messianic kingdom on the earth.**

Richard Gardner: The revelation given achieves three things:

- (1) It confirms the uniqueness of Jesus as God’s Son.
- (2) It offers a glimpse of the glory of Jesus’ reign.
- (3) It reiterates the fact that Jesus first must suffer, just as Elijah had to suffer before him.

At each point, this disclosure recalls and builds upon issues raised in **chapter 16** (cf. 16:15-16, 21, 27-28).

J. Ligon Duncan: we also learn in this passage that Jesus’ cross and Jesus’ glory cannot be separated. They go together. The way to glory is the way to the cross, and therefore no disciple can enjoy the presence of Christ’s glory apart from grasping it.

I. (:1-3) THE VISION – THE TRANSFIGURATION EVENT – WHAT DID THEY SEE?

R. T. France: Three aspects of the incident contribute to its christological force:

- (1) the visible alteration of Jesus demonstrates that he is more than a merely human teacher;
- (2) his association with Moses and Elijah demonstrates his messianic role;
- (3) the voice from heaven declares his identity as the Son of God.

It is clear that Jesus took them up the mountain in order for them to have this experience, which he intends them to remember for future reference (v. 9). If what happened there provided Jesus himself with reassurance for his coming mission, we are told nothing of this; it is the disciples' christological understanding which is being enhanced, and the discussion as they return down the mountain (vv. 10–13) similarly focuses entirely on their grasp of the eschatological timetable. This is, then, an experience of the disciples rather than (as in 3:16–17) an experience of Jesus. The reflection on it in 2 Peter 1:16–18 will stress the privilege (and therefore the reliability) of the disciples as “eyewitnesses of his majesty” who also heard for themselves the voice from heaven.

A. (:1) The Target Witnesses

“And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves.”

Grant Osborne: Though it is possible that the “six days” is nothing more than a temporal note, it is better to see it as reflecting a **Sinai motif**, reflecting **Exod 24:15–16**, where the Shekinah cloud covered the mountain for six days and then Moses entered and heard the voice of God speaking. Jesus is the new, glorified Moses. Moreover, he takes his inner core of disciples, as Moses took Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (**Exod 24:1, 9**). These three disciples were especially close to Jesus (cf. **26:37; Mark 5:37; 13:3** [with Andrew]).

S. Lewis Johnson: In the quietness of Caesarea Philippi and under the shadow of snow-crested Mount Hermon, Peter's confession, *thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*, had signaled the end of the ministry of the Lord Jesus to the crowds. From now on, while it's true that he does speak to the crowds, his ministry has taken a new slant, and he begins to speak about his death that he should accomplish at Jerusalem, and he devotes most of his time to the **preparation of the apostles** for the days when he would no longer be here in the flesh. . .

What did he pray? Well, of course, we cannot say with dogmatism what he prayed because the Scriptures do not reveal that. But in the light of the fact that he has just announced his passion, I think it's a safe guess to suggest that he was praying in view of the passion, which has now become one of the major themes of his thought and of his teaching. And I think that what we have on the Mount of Transfiguration is the beginning of the prayer life emphasis of our Lord, which will finally reach its climax in Gethsemane when he shall pray, “*O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me.*” So it is **prayer in view of the passion**.

John MacArthur: Now, we ask ourselves, at this point, “Why does Jesus do this? Why does He take Peter, James, and John?”

Let me suggest some reasons. First of all, to be **witnesses**. He needed to have witnesses to see His glory. Now, **Deuteronomy 19:15** laid down and established a principle that any testimony was confirmed in the mouth of how many? Two or three witnesses. And so, the Lord, going to display His glory, wants it confirmed in the mouth of three witnesses - trustworthy witnesses.

And so, they are taken to be those three witnesses. Secondly, they're taking because they were the **intimates** of the Savior. They were the closest to Him. They were around Him the most. And very frequently, perhaps, accompanied Him into intimate times of prayer. . .

And thirdly, I think another reason He took them was because they were acknowledged, **trustworthy leaders**. They were men of great spiritual report and leadership. And when it came time to articulate what happened, they would be trusted. They would be the most believed. They could convince and influence the rest.

William Barclay: **Hermon** was fourteen miles from Caesarea Philippi. Hermon is 9,400 feet high, 11,000 feet above the level of the Jordan valley – so high that it can actually be seen from the Dead Sea, at the other end of Palestine, more than 100 miles away.

It cannot have been on the very summit of the mountain that this happened. The mountain is too high for that. . .

It was somewhere on the slopes of the beautiful and stately Mount Hermon that the transfiguration happened. It must have happened in the night. Luke tells us that the disciples were weighed down with sleep (**Luke 9:32**). It was the next day when Jesus and his disciples came back to the plain to find the father of the epileptic boy waiting for them (**Luke 9:37**). It was some time in the sunset, or the late evening, or the night, that this amazing vision took place.

B. (:2) The Transformation of Jesus

1. Uncovering of Divine Glory

“And He was transfigured before them;”

Grant Osborne: μεταμορφόω means literally to “transform, change in form” and connotes not just a change externally visible but one that proceeds from inside and changes the whole person. Moses reflected the glory of God in his “*radiance*” when he descended the mountain (**Exod 34:29, 33–35**), but here Jesus’ true **preincarnate glory** shines through his humanity. The disciples were the intended recipients of this glorious event (“*in front of them*” [ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν]).

Charles Swindoll: Although before the Incarnation God the Son existed in resplendence and magnificence “*in the form of God,*” He “*emptied Himself*” of that manifestation of heavenly glory. He took “*the form of a bond-servant*” and appeared “*in the likeness of men*” such that all those around Him found Him “*in appearance as a man.*” Though Jesus displayed His authority and power through teaching and miracles, He continued to cloak His visible glory from others throughout His earthly ministry . . . until that day on the mountain. That event proved to Peter, James, and John that during every moment of Jesus’ human life, He was simultaneously fully divine. That truth of the Incarnation would become the backbone of a body of doctrine related to the person and work of Christ.

D. A. Carson: That Jesus was transfigured “*before them*” implies that it was largely for their sakes. Whatever confirmation the experience may have given Jesus, for the disciples it was revelatory. As they would come to realize, they were being privileged to glimpse something of his preincarnate glory (**Jn 1:14; 17:5; Php 2:6–7**) and anticipate his coming exaltation (**2Pe 1:16–18; Rev 1:16**). Their confession of Jesus as Messiah and his insistence that he would be a suffering Messiah (**16:13–21; 17:9**) were confirmed. Therefore, they had reason to hope that they would yet see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (**16:28**). The contrast between what Jesus had just predicted would be his fate (**16:21**) and this glorious sight would one day prompt

Jesus' disciples to marvel at the self-humiliation that brought him to the cross and to glimpse a little of the height to which he had been raised by his vindicating resurrection and ascension.

2. Countenance of Divine Brilliance

“and His face shone like the sun,”

John MacArthur: And this, beloved, is the greatest testimony to Jesus Christ, I think, of any passage in the Bible. If you really want to know who Jesus is, here it is. The glory is radiating from the inside out. You can only understand it if you can understand the some kind of supernaturally infinite light bulb. The light coming within spreads out, and Jesus is aglow like a divine light bulb. And His brilliance is as the sun. The glow right through His garments sends its beams of light. . .

When Jesus came into the world, He is God, but He took that veil of humanity and clothed the glory. But here He gave a glimpse. **This is God.** Don't let anybody come and tell you Jesus isn't God. The glory came from within. And so, His deity, His majestic kingship, His regal majesty, His royalty as the Son of God the Anointed One of the Father, is seen by the transformation of the Son.

Leon Morris: The shining of the face indicates **unusual radiance**. It is perhaps curious that his clothing became white as the light, for we do not normally regard light as being white (though we can use the expression “white light”). The meaning appears to be that even Jesus' clothing became splendid in appearance. **J. Behm** understands this as the “transformation from an earthly form into a supraterrrestrial,” and he explains further, “Before the eyes of His most intimate disciples the human appearance of Jesus was for a moment changed into that of a heavenly being in the transfigured world.”

3. Clothing of Divine Brightness

“and His garments became as white as light.”

David Turner: Perhaps Jesus' s transfiguration is intended to anticipate the eschatological radiance of God's people (cf. **Matt. 13:43; Rev. 3:4–5; 7:9; Dan. 12:3**; 1 En. 38.4; 104.2; 2 Bar. 51.1–3, 10, 12; 2 Esd. [4 Ezra] 7:97).

John Schultz: The difficulty, as always, is that it is impossible to find the right expressions to describe what heavenly glory is like. Our planet is full of images that foreshadow heaven, but the **reality is so much more glorious than the picture**. As Ezekiel and John prove to us, everyone who has seen God's glory knows that it is **indescribable**. When the Apostle Paul was caught up to paradise, he writes that *“he heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”*

C. (:3) The Testimony of Moses and Elijah

“And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.”

Grant Osborne: Scholars debate whether Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets or whether they appear as the forerunners of the Messiah (**Deut 18:18; Mal 4:5–6**). Yet surely these are not antithetical but supplemental. They were the two great miracle-working prophets, and the two witnesses of **Rev 11:3–6** are modeled after them, where the first two miracles of **11:5–6a** (fire from heaven, the drought) replicate Elijah, and the second two of **11:6b** (water into

blood, plagues) replicate Moses. It is also possible that Moses and Elijah prefigure Jesus' rejection by the nation and vindication by God. Only **Luke 9:30–31** gives a hint of the content behind their conversation ("*spoke about his departure [exodos]*"), but the **eschatological flavor** is dominant here as well.

John MacArthur: So, Moses gave the law - its great giver. Elijah - its great guardian. And what do they represent? The law and the prophets. And what is the law and the prophets? It's the Old Testament. And why are they there? They are there as the Old Testament saying, "This is the one of whom we spoke." It is the affirmation of the law and the prophets. A tremendous scene. It is **Old Testament verification**. It is all that Jesus said when He said, "I have come to fulfill the law and the prophets," coming and gathering around Him, standing in His glory and saying, "Yea, it is He." It is the affirmation. . .

So, what is going on here is a tremendous testimony from the Old Testament saying, "This is indeed the King, and He is indeed on schedule, and death is a part of the plan." In spite of what some people have tried to do with the life of Jesus Christ, He didn't die as a well-meaning patriot who got in over His head; He died as the one ordained to die from before the foundation of the world, and His death was as much a part of the plan as His second coming will be. And it's so important for the disciples to know that.

Daniel Doriani: These men represent three things.

- They represent the law and the prophets. Both the law and the prophets predict the coming of the Deliverer.
- Both labored to deliver God's people. Moses led Israel out of Egypt, and Elijah fought to deliver them from the terrible, alien grip of Baal, the god who promised them prosperity. So both foreshadowed the work of Jesus.
- Both had an unusual departure or exodus from this world. Moses died alone with God on a mountain, and God took Elijah to heaven on a chariot of fire.

II. (:4-9) THE VOICE – THE TESTIMONY OF THE FATHER – WHAT DID THEY HEAR?

A. (:4) Clumsy Suggestion of Peter

"And Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'"

Grant Osborne: Peter begins on a clumsy note, as "*good*" (*καλόν*) means "pleasant, profitable, desirable" and fits more a nice stroll in the park than a theophany. . . "*three tabernacles*" -- this relates to the **Feast of Tabernacles**, when people built "*booths*" of branches and straw, then lived in these shelters throughout the seven-day festival. This festival celebrated the Exodus but also had eschatological connotations (**Zech 14:16–20**). So Peter wants to prolong the event and be part of what he interprets a sign of the last days.

John MacArthur: Now, it's interesting. What was wrong with what Peter said? Was it wrong? No, his heart wasn't wrong, I don't think. But there was something **foolish** about it, and I guess it was this; he didn't understand two things. One, he didn't understand that this was **only a preview**, and he had to go back to the valley and go through the suffering, and the hardships, and

the cross bearing, and the self-denial, and all that stuff. And the Messiah still had to suffer and die.

And the second thing he didn't understand was you can't put Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in **equal places**. You see, Luke says that when Peter said this, Moses and Elijah were moving away. Moses and Elijah came in a very temporary fashion, and their purpose was to salute their divine successor, the one who fulfilled the law and the prophets. That was their purpose. And then to leave Him alone in the glory of unchallenged supremacy, and to fade away so that the sole remaining object of the adoration of the disciples and the adoration of the Father was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. . .

Down in Jerusalem, you see, right at this time, they were likely celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. What does the Feast of Tabernacles commemorate? Well, it commemorates the wandering in the wilderness. God delivers His people; they wander in the wilderness, and, during that time, they lived in tabernacles. They lived in booths. And then God led them into the Promised Land. It is a memorial to God, preserving His redeemed people. He redeems them, and He preserves them to take them into the land of promise." And so, the Feast of Tabernacles was a very important feast. But Peter wasn't there, and James wasn't there, and John wasn't there, and Jesus wasn't there. And so, it's just very likely that Peter was thinking about the Feast of Tabernacles, and thinking about the Feast of Booths and realizing how important it was to have such a thing. He has that in his mind.

Now, he knew it was something you had to go to; all male Jews were required to go every year to the Feast of Tabernacles, and he wasn't there. And James wasn't there. And John wasn't there. And the Lord wasn't there. And maybe he sort of felt, well, we just really need to have our own Feast of Tabernacles. . .

And there's a final thought. Turn in your Bible to the next to the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Zechariah. Most interesting, **Zechariah 14:16**, it tells us about the kingdom, when Jesus returns. And, of course, in **verse 9**, it gives us our point of reference. **Zechariah 14:9**, "*The Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one.*" So, there's the Lord in His kingdom reigning – millennial kingdom, glory kingdom, second coming majesty.

And in the middle of that, **verse 16** says, "*It comes to pass that everyone that is left of all the nations which came to Jerusalem shall go up from year to year*" – and how many years are there in the millennial kingdom? A thousand. So, a thousand times they'll do this. And they go – "to worship the Lord, and to keep the Feast of" – what? – "Tabernacles" – or booths.

At the end of **verse 18**, it says, "*The Lord will smite the nations that don't keep the Feast of the Tabernacles. And there will be punishment of Egypt and punishment of all nations*" – **verse 19** says – "*that come not up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*"

Now listen. There's only one of the Jewish, traditional, week-long feasts that's supposed to be kept in the kingdom, and that's it. That's the only one. The Passover will be remembered. The Communion Table will be remembered, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Why? Because it, too, is a picture of redemption, of the leading out of bondage and into the promise. And so, it will be there, too.

And that just feeds more into Peter, because here **Peter thinks he's in the kingdom anyway**. Right? And he knows because he knows the Word of God. And believe me; he would know the passage of Zechariah. Here we are in the kingdom, the King in His glory, Moses and Elijah are here. It's the same time of year they were supposed to be having the Feast of the Tabernacles. **This has got to be the millennium**, because in the millennium, we're supposed to keep this. So, he's going to build the booths to have the feast. Since it's a Feast of Booths, let's get the booths up, and let's commemorate the marvelous deliverance and preservation of God. So, all of this certainly came together in Peter's mind and just sort of made him say, "This has got to be it."

B. (:5) Clarion Approval of the Father

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying,

'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'"

"**Clarion**" = loud and clear

David Turner: The coming of the voice from the bright cloud is similar to revelations to Israel from clouds in Moses's day (**Exod. 34:29–35; 40:34–38**; cf. **2 Macc. 2:8; 2 Cor. 3:7–18**). The cloud's brightness seems oxymoronic, but it suggests the Shechinah, or visible manifestation of God's glory (**Exod. 24:16–17**; cf. **Ezek. 1:4; 10:4**). It also anticipates the accompanying clouds at Jesus's return (**Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 26:64**).

Craig Blomberg: The heavenly voice repeats verbatim the words of **Matt 3:17** from Jesus' baptism. Just as God publicly endorsed Jesus as the royal Messiah and Suffering Servant prior to the beginning of the main stage of his ministry, now at the beginning of the road to the cross he repeats his endorsement even more dramatically, though much less publicly. God's confirmation proves even more crucial because the notion of a suffering Messiah seemed so incongruous. The heavenly voice adds the words, "*Listen to him!*" Jesus must still be followed and obeyed, even as he heads off to die. The words echo the language of **Deut 18:15b** on heeding the prophet like Moses who would arise in later days.

Donald Hagner: The present-day church needs once again to discover the absolute authority of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus, as our passage shows, stands in **continuity** with the revelation of the OT, symbolized by Moses and Elijah, but because of who he is and what he brings (i.e., the kingdom of God, the climax of salvation history), his utterances have a final and incomparable authority. The transfiguration dramatically underlines that fact.

Michael Wilkins: The bright cloud is reminiscent of the way God often appeared in the Old Testament—to Moses on Mount Sinai (**Ex. 34:29–35**); God's Shekinah glory filling the tabernacle (**40:34–35**); the cloud guiding the Israelites during their wandering in the desert (**13:21–22; 40:36–38**); the cloud of the glory of the Lord filling Solomon's temple (**1 Kings 8:10–13**); and the Branch of the Lord bringing restoration to Jerusalem, as the cloud of the glory of the Lord shelters Zion (**Isa. 4:1–6**). Jewish literature recognized the cloud of God's glory as the time when the Lord would gather his people and reveal the location of the ark of the covenant (**2 Macc. 2:4–8**).

C. (:6-8) Cowering Fear of the Disciples

1. (:6) Falling Down on Their Faces

*“And when the disciples heard this,
they fell on their faces and were much afraid.”*

John MacArthur: Why are people so afraid in the presence of God? What scares them so much? Well, you see, God is infinitely holy, and men are hopelessly sinful. And you just, all of a sudden, feel naked, don't you? You feel exposed. Adam and Eve sinned. What's the first thing they said – the Bible says about it? “And they saw that they were” – what? – “naked.” And they made aprons to cover themselves, and they ran off to try to hide, and God comes through the garden and says, “*Adam, where are you?*”

2. (:7) Comforting Touch of Jesus

*“And Jesus came to them and touched them and said,
‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’”*

3. (:8) Focusing Eyes on Jesus

“And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone.”

D. (:9) Cryptic Prohibition Issued by Jesus

*“And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying,
‘Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.’”*

Grant Osborne: This is the last of the “messianic secret” passages in Matthew (see **8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20**), and it highlights the fact that the true significance of Jesus can only be understood in light of the cross and the resurrection. The transfiguration is at one and the same time a glimpse of his preincarnate glory and a harbinger of the passion events. The two are interdependent. It is like the two sides of his nature—the divine and the human. He is the God-man, and the two aspects cannot be separated from one another. Thus it is impossible for anyone to understand the transfiguration without the cross and the empty tomb.

R. T. France: Jesus had deliberately taken only three of his disciples up the mountain to experience this vision, and now he reinforces that selective intention by telling them not to divulge what they have seen, even to their fellow-disciples. Their natural tendency to talk (and boast?) about their experience must be curbed. But here, unlike in the command to be silent about his Messiahship, there is a time limit. After his death (which is presupposed) and resurrection they may talk about it. This suggests, as we have seen also with regard to **16:20**, that the reason for the injunction is primarily to avoid popular misunderstanding, or indeed in this case also misunderstanding by the remaining disciples. As long as his mission of suffering, death and resurrection remains to be accomplished, he does not want people distracted by an account of his heavenly glory which, even if it did not in itself encourage nationalistic hopes of a political Messiah, would be likely to turn their thoughts away from the cross to the glory. After the event, no such distraction would be possible, and Jesus would no longer be there to be a potential political leader. In the light of their Easter experience, and only then, the disciples may be expected to have a clear enough grasp of what it all means to be able to talk responsibly about what they have just seen.

**III. (:10-13) THE VISITATION –
WHOM WERE THEY EXPECTING?**

A. (:10) Confusion of the Disciples Regarding Eschatological Role of Elijah

*“And His disciples asked Him, saying,
‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’”*

Grant Osborne: In **Mal 4:5** Elijah would inaugurate “*that great and dreadful day of the LORD,*” and in their query the disciples assume this is a divine “*must*” (δεῖ). The disciples have interpreted the transfiguration as the inauguration of that day and wonder how the Malachi prophecy fits into the equation. Jesus has already told them that the Baptist fulfills the Malachi expectation (**11:14**), but their question is not “*who*” but “*how*” it will come to pass.

Leon Morris: It is interesting that they refer to the teaching of the scribes when they might well have referred to the prophecy of **Malachi 4:5** that was the origin of the teaching of the scribes. But since these men were the religious experts, their teaching about important religious matters would be respected by people like the disciples. Their word *must* indicates a **compelling divine necessity**; in the view of the learned scribes it was in the divine will that Elijah would precede the Messiah. In view of the prophecy this required no profound insight, but perhaps the disciples want to reinforce their own position by reference to accepted authorities. They do not say who Elijah is to precede, but the prophet speaks of “*the great and dreadful day of the Lord*” and this is easily understood of the coming of the Messiah. After Peter’s confession narrated in the preceding chapter and now the splendid vision on the mountain, none of them would have had any doubts but that Jesus was the Messiah. **But where was Elijah?** The scribal interpretation of the prophecy was clearly widely known, but these disciples had not seen a fulfilment. Had Elijah come unnoticed? Were the scribes wrong? They ask Jesus to clear up the point for them.

B. (:11-12) Clarification of Jesus Regarding the Fulfillment of Prophecy

1. (:11) Future Final Fulfillment Still Valid

“And He answered and said, ‘Elijah is coming and will restore all things;’”

David Turner: Jesus’s complex answer has three elements.

- First, he alludes to a yet future coming of Elijah, who will restore all things (**17:11**; cf. **11:14**; **19:28**; **Acts 1:6**; **3:21**; **Mal. 3:22–23 LXX [4:5–6 Eng.]**). It is not completely clear whether Jesus is simply acknowledging the scribal teaching before he corrects it in Matt. 17:12[10] or whether he affirms a past coming of Elijah as John as well as a future glorious coming of Elijah (**Gundry 1994:347**).
- Second, Jesus reiterates (cf. **11:14**) the difficult linkage between John the Baptist and Elijah (**17:12a**).
- Third, he connects the maltreatment of John with his own coming suffering in Jerusalem (**17:12b**). The gist of this is that the disciples should focus on John’s past Elijah-like ministry, not the recent appearance of Elijah at Jesus’s transfiguration. If they do this, they will understand that John’s death foreshadowed the death of Jesus.

2. (:12a) Present Partial Fulfillment in Contingency Mode

*“but I say to you, that Elijah already came,
and they did not recognize him,
but did to him whatever they wished.”*

John MacArthur: He is not Elijah, but he was one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. But because they rejected him, he couldn’t be the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophesy; he couldn’t be the Elijah before the kingdom. So, there yet will be another who will come in the spirit and

power of Elijah who will be that Elijah fulfilling that prophesy before the coming glorious kingdom. You got it? Some of you look painfully distressed.

The prophet said this, "*Elijah will come.*" What he meant was one in the spirit and power of Elijah. An Elijah-like prophet. If they had received John the Baptist, if they had believed his message, if they had received the Messiah, if the Messiah had set up His kingdom, John the Baptist would have fulfilled that prophecy. He would have been that Elijah-like prophet to restore all things for the kingdom. But when they did to him whatever they desired – and what did they do to him? They cut off his head. They refused him. They didn't allow him to restore.

Then they did – look at **verse 12** at the end – "*Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer at their hands.*" They wiped out the Elijah-like preparer of the Messiah. They killed the Messiah. And so, consequently, they rejected the restoration, and they rejected the kingdom. So, Elijah couldn't then be that – or rather John the Baptist couldn't then be that Elijah to fulfill that.

So, we believe that in the future, before Jesus comes again, another great prophet will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to set things right. And he will restore all things. And they won't do to him what they did to John the Baptist. And they won't miss who he is. And following him will come the King in His royal majesty and glory.

In **Matthew 11** it says – John says – listen to this – "*All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*" Now listen to this. "*And if you will receive him, this is Elijah.*" You see the point? **Matthew 11:14**. If they had taken John's message and received him and received the Christ, he would have been that Elijah fulfillment. But because they killed him and killed the Messiah, there has yet to come another one like Elijah. John would have been it – the one.

That's why **Luke 1:17** says, "*He came in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers*" - and so forth – "*to make ready a people for the Lord.*" He was to be the fulfillment if they had believed, but they didn't.

Now, what does this mean as far as the deity of Christ? Just this: the Old Testament said that before the Christ comes, there will one like Elijah. One like Elijah did come. Right? And just because the world rejected him doesn't mean he wasn't that fulfilling Elijah.

So, while the Jews would step in and say, "This can't be the Messiah because there's been no Elijah."

Jesus says, "Indeed there was an Elijah, and if you'd listened to him and believed him, he would have fulfilled that Elijah prophecy." That's the fifth and final evidence that Jesus is truly the regal, glorious, Christ of God, the Son, the King. Because **there was an Elijah** who came before Him. The only reason he couldn't fully fulfill it was because they killed him along with the Messiah. And when He comes again, He will be preceded by another in that same mode.

Michael Wilkins: John the Baptist was a **partial fulfillment** of Malachi's Elijah prophecy. He came "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (**Luke 1:17**), but he was not a reincarnated Elijah, as some of the religious leaders may have expected (**John 1:19–27**). John prepared the way for Jesus Messiah (**Matt. 3:1–3**), and if the people and religious leadership would have repented fully and accepted Jesus' message of the gospel of the kingdom, John would have been the complete fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (**11:14**). But since the people rejected John and he

was executed, and will reject Jesus, who will also be executed, another Elijah-type figure will yet have to come in the future (17:11), again preparing the way—but then for the final consummation of the wrathful Day of the Lord prophesied in **Malachi**.

3. (:12b) Correspondence between the Rejection and Execution of Jesus and of John the Baptist

“So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

C. (:13) Connection Made between Elijah and John the Baptist

“Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.”

John Schultz: We may draw the general conclusion from these verses that the events of that moment were not the final act in world history. **As the first coming of Jesus in this world is not the only one, so Elijah’s coming was a multiple event.** We read in Revelation that God’s two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, will appear again at the **end of time**.

S. Lewis Johnson: So we conclude, then, that John is Elijah in the sense that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and was a figure to which Israel was responsible to respond. They did not respond. And so Elijah **in personal identity** shall come again preceding the second advent of the Lord Jesus.

But I want to say this, that **contingency** in John the Baptist’s coming is a contingency that lies only in the human sphere, not in the divine. God who knows the end from the beginning knew exactly what would happen when John the Baptist came. He knew that Israel would not respond. He knew that the people would not respond to the king himself. He knew that the Son must die. In fact, the Scriptures say he planned it all. It all took place according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge. So the contingency lies only in the human sphere, not in the divine.

There can never be any offer of a kingdom, incidentally, apart from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible does not teach that there is a kingdom apart from a cross. It doesn’t teach that there is a cross and no kingdom. It proclaims a coming kingdom through the sufferings of the cross and the redemption accomplished thereby. Well now, the disciples, who do not understand yet all that our Lord is saying, understood that he spoke to them about John the Baptist when he spoke about the fact that Elijah is come already and therefore they understood at that point that **in some sense Elijah had come then**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did the disciples need this encouraging preview of the coming glorious messianic kingdom?
- 2) In what sense is the messianic age here already and in what sense is the messianic kingdom still future?
- 3) What impact did the testimony of the Father have on the disciples?
- 4) Was John the Baptist the fulfillment of the promised role of Elijah?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: The transfiguration is part of a chain of **salvation-historical events** linked theologically, and it is impossible to restrict it to any one.

1. Exodus imagery predominates here; Jesus fulfills the exodus event, which was the basis for Israel's concept of deliverance/salvation, and instigates a new exodus.
2. Incarnation theology is seen in the preexistence motif in the story (i.e., in the supernatural glory manifest); more than a proleptic promise of glory to come, it is the divine essence that was always there suddenly radiating forth (note Matthew's special stress on the divine radiance).
3. Jesus' baptism is paralleled by the presence and message of the divine voice that inaugurated the first half of Jesus' ministry and now instigates the second half.
4. In Luke the prophets speak to Jesus regarding his passion (exodus, "*departure*"), and the placement of this with the Caesarea Philippi incident points to the true significance of the suffering Messiah theme.
5. The resurrection and ascension, of course, are part of the passion but should be mentioned separately, for they vindicate the passion; the glory of the transfiguration was the earnest of the exaltation in the resurrection/ascension.
6. The transfiguration also anticipated the glory of the *parousia* and final kingdom (cf. **16:28**); Peter's reminiscence in **2 Pet 1:16–18** also looks to the final glory prefigured here.

David Turner: The amazing transfiguration of Jesus should not be totally unexpected by Matthew's readers. Jesus was born miraculously and his ministry began with the Father's endorsement. Jesus has performed compassionate works and has definitively and authoritatively taught the Torah. He has supernaturally calmed storms and fed thousands of people with a few loaves of bread. He has promised to return in glory, to judge all humankind, and to reign righteously on the earth. After his resurrection he will receive universal authority, and his presence will accompany his disciples as they disciple all nations until the end of the present age (**Matt. 28:18–20**). Thus, from the standpoint of Matthew as a whole, the transfiguration fits Jesus's status as the Son of God, his fulfillment of biblical patterns and predictions, and his promise of a future kingdom. The transfiguration is an integral part of Matthew's Son of God Christology and his apocalyptic eschatology. It authenticates Jesus's identity and anticipates his future rule over the world. In the transfiguration the disciples glimpse who Jesus is and what he will do. The worthies Moses and Elijah are only supporting actors in the drama of redemption. As the curtain falls, they have exited and Jesus alone stands at the center of the stage. The heavenly voice's "*listen to him*" prepares the disciples to hear Jesus "*teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.*"

William Barclay: The minds of the disciples must still have been hurt and bewildered by the insistence of Jesus that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. It must have looked to them as if there was nothing but black shame ahead. But from start to finish, the whole atmosphere of

the Mountain of Trans-figuration is **glory**. Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his garments glistened and gleamed like the light.

The Jews knew well the promise of God to the victorious righteous: *'Their face is to shine like the sun'* (**4 Ezra [2 Esdras] 7:97**). No Jew could ever have seen that luminous cloud without thinking of the **shechinah**, the glory of God resting upon his people. . .

Here surely was something which would lift up the hearts of the disciples and enable them to see the glory through the shame; the triumph through the humiliation; the crown beyond the cross. It is obvious that they still did not understand; but it must surely have given them some little glimmering that the cross was not all humiliation, that somehow it was tinged with glory, that somehow glory was the very atmosphere of the exodus to Jerusalem and to death.

Daniel Doriani: When Moses saw God, it changed him. Today, when we behold Jesus, it changes us. Paul says that when we behold "*the glory of the Lord*" we "*are being transformed into the same image*" (**2 Cor. 3:18** ESV). As we hear God's truth, we see his mind, and we are transformed by the renewal of our mind (**Rom. 12:2**). Similarly, John says that when Christ returns "*we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*" (**1 John 3:2**). Just as time spent in God's presence changed Moses, so time in the presence of Jesus changes us.

David Thompson: As we come to **Matthew 17**, we come to one of the most significant moments in the life of Jesus Christ and certainly in the lives of the disciples who witnessed this—Christ's transfiguration. In fact, the Apostle Peter never forgot this episode and actually specifically referred to this event some 35 years later (**II Pet. 1:16-18**). It is interesting and important to observe that the transfiguration of Jesus Christ is recorded in all of the Gospels but one. This event shows up in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but not John. The question is why? Why doesn't this event show up in John? Well the answer to this question is significant. John is focused on presenting Jesus Christ as Savior of the world that whoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Matthew, Mark, and Luke present Jesus Christ as the King who was prepared to establish a kingdom for Israel and this transfiguration is about Christ being seen as King, who can establish a kingdom on earth.

JESUS CHRIST WAS TRANSFORMED BEFORE THE EYES OF THREE DISCIPLES TO SHOW THAT HE IS THE KING WHO WILL, IN THE FUTURE, ESTABLISH HIS GLORIOUS KINGDOM ON EARTH.

TEXT: Matthew 17:14-21

TITLE: *REBUKING THE DISCIPLES FOR THEIR “LITTLE FAITH”–
EXORCISM OF THE EPILEPTIC CHILD*

BIG IDEA:
DON'T QUIT ON TRUSTING GOD TO PERFORM THE IMPOSSIBLE

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The disciples have a smattering of understanding (**17:13**) but a real deficiency of faith (**17:20a**) and need the presence of Jesus more than ever. In fact, the incredible contrast between Jesus' preincarnate glory (**v. 2**) and the disciples' unbelief (**v. 17a**) shows the sad state of affairs. . . this becomes a lesson on the **danger of unbelief** and the **power of faith to accomplish great things**.

D. A. Carson: The contrast between the glory of the transfiguration and Jesus' disciples' tawdry unbelief (see **v.17**) is part of the **mounting tension** that magnifies Jesus' uniqueness as he moves closer to his passion and resurrection.

Warren Wiersbe: We move from the mountain of glory to the valley of need. The sudden appearance of Jesus and the three disciples startled the multitudes (**Mark 9:15**). The distraught father had brought his demonized son to the nine disciples, begging them to deliver him, but they could not. The scribes had noticed their failure and were using it as a reason for argument. And while the disciples were defending themselves, and the scribes were accusing them, the demon was all but killing the helpless boy.

When we compare the gospel accounts of this dramatic scene, we discover that this only son was indeed in great trouble and danger. Matthew recorded that the boy was an epileptic (lunatic), very ill, and suicidal, falling into the fire and the water. Mark described him as a mute, who often fell to the ground foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth. After this display, the boy would go into a kind of *rigor mortis*. Dr. Luke said that the boy was an only son and that he would scream as he went into these convulsions. While some of these symptoms can have natural causes, this boy was at the mercy of a demon. The disciples had been helpless to do anything. No wonder the father rushed to Jesus' feet.

Our Lord's first response was one of sorrow. As He beheld the embarrassed disciples, the arguing scribes, and the needy father and son, He groaned inwardly and said, "*How long shall I be with you and put up with you?*" (**Luke 9:41** NASB). Their unbelief and spiritual perversity were a burden to Him. What must our Lord feel as he looks at powerless believers today?

John Walvoord: The lessons of this incident are obvious. It is not the greatness of the problem that is the difficulty; it is the lack of faith on the part of believers. How quickly Jesus responded to the simple and sincere cry of the father of the child, "*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*" (**Mk 9:24**).

Stanley Saunders: Matthew's portrayal of the disciples in this section of the Gospel is both sobering and hopeful: sobering because of their painful incapacity to discern and fully embrace

the power of God, not only at work in Jesus but available to them as well, and hope-filled not because of any innate capacity on the part of the disciples themselves, but because Jesus keeps affirming just how much power is available, even to those with mustard-seed faith. Within this tension we can easily see ourselves.

Stu Weber: True dependence on God's power will give the kingdom citizen all he or she needs to do the kingdom work successfully. The failure of the nine disciples, who had remained below at the foot of the mountain, happened as the glory and authority of Jesus was being revealed on the mountain. In spite of the power available to them (**17:2-5**; also **10:1, 8**) and in spite of the truth about Jesus that they had confessed (**16:16**), their understanding and faith were still limited.

Daniel Doriani: These then are the marks of the faith that moves mountains.

- First, it progresses, even if slowly.
- Second, it is genuine: it does not trust in past successes or in techniques, but in the Lord himself.
- Third, it engages the whole person, mind and emotions.
- Fourth, it takes action when it is time to act.
- Fifth, it rests in our great God, who can do what seems to be impossible for us when we trust in him.

I. (:14-16) INDICTMENT OF THE DISCIPLES FOR THEIR POWER FAILURE

A power failure is a serious problem. You are counting on that power to perform a certain task reliably and when that power fails, there can be drastic consequences. Here we have a failure on the part of the disciples to exercise faith in the healing power of Jesus to meet the desperate need of this man whose son is plagued by a destructive demon. The disciples could not get the job done.

A. (:14) Persistence of the Pleader

“And when they came to the multitude, a man came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying,”

William Barclay: We cannot but be moved by the faith of the boy's father. Even though the disciples had been given power to cast out devils (**Matthew 10:1**), here was a case in which they had very obviously and publicly failed. And yet in spite of the failure of the disciples, the father **never doubted the power of Jesus**. It is as if he said: “Only let me get at Jesus himself, and my problems will be solved and my need will be met.”

B. (:15) Severity of the Suffering

“Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water.”

Robert Gundry: The two instances of “often” tell how badly the man's son suffers.

William Hendriksen: It was the pity or compassion of the Lord to which the tempest-tossed father appealed. He did not doubt the fact that Jesus was indeed filled with mercy and kindness. That is why he pleaded, “Lord, take pity on my son.” On the other hand, the man's faith in Christ's power needed strengthening (**Mark 9:22-24**).

Charles Swindoll: The symptoms were complex:

- He was mute but able to scream (**Mark 9:17; Luke 9:39**).
- He was being slammed to the ground and would become stiff (**Mark 9:18; Luke 9:42**).
- He would foam at the mouth and grind his teeth (**Mark 9:18, 20; Luke 9:39**).
- He would convulse and roll on the ground (**Mark 9:20; Luke 9:39, 42**).
- He was being thrown into fire and water (**Matt. 17:15; Mark 9:22**).
- He was being physically injured after each attack (**Luke 9:39**).

I can't imagine how much that boy's family suffered! Somehow, the father had learned that Jesus of Nazareth was in town and that He had a reputation for working miracles.

J. Ligon Duncan: In Mark, chapter 9, **verse 25**, we're told that this young man was also unable to speak, and he was unable to hear. So in addition to being grievously vexed with this malady of epilepsy, he was deaf and dumb, and then, of course, Matthew and Mark make it very clear that this child is demon-possessed. Three maladies vex this boy. The exact relation between his demon-possession and the other diseases is not specified. Was Satan given the power to bring about these physical symptoms, or did Satan take opportunity with these biblical symptoms to afflict this boy? We are not told in full, but Satan's hand is in it, the supernatural is in it. But, also, this child is afflicted physically.

C. (:16) Failure of the Faith Healers

"And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."

II. (:17) INDICTMENT OF THE DISCIPLES FOR THEIR LACK OF FAITH

A. Frustration of Jesus with His Disciples

"And Jesus answered and said, 'O unbelieving and perverted generation,'"

Grant Osborne: It is debated whether the "*depraved generation*" is mainly the crowds (seen in the second person plurals and in "*generation*" [γενεά], referring to the continued rejection by the crowds) or the disciples, the nearest antecedent and the focus of this pericope. However, it is best to see this as a both-and situation, since both groups are in the immediate context. In their failure, the disciples have joined the rest of the Jewish people in their unbelief and perversity. . .

The two-part rebuke centers first on his **continual presence with them** ("*I will be*" [ἔσομαι]) and then on his **endurance of them** ("*I will put up with*" [ἀνέξομαι]). Implicit in both is his **imminent departure** from this earthly sphere. Jesus' followers do not have long to get their act together! In light of this persistent failure, Jesus takes the matter in his own hands and commands that the boy be brought to him.

Stu Weber: Jesus' harsh rebuke was **directed toward the disciples**. It was not surprising to hear him call them **unbelieving**, for he had already confronted their lack of faith many times. But for Jesus to address the disciples as part of an unbelieving and perverted generation was to lump them together with obstinate Israel and its hypocritical leaders (cf. **11:16; 12:39; 16:4**).

R. T. France: The key, as has been so often stated in previous accounts of miracles, lies in faith (**8:10, 13, 26; 9:2, 22, 28–29; 14:31; 15:28**), but in this case the faith that is missing is not that

of the one seeking help but that of the would-be miracle-workers themselves. The sovereign authority of Jesus the Messiah in healing and exorcism is unique; his disciples can draw on it only by faith, and that is what in this case they have failed to do. . .

The **frustration** Jesus expresses here stands out as unusual in this gospel just as does his exultation in God's revelation in **11:25–26**; the two outbursts express the opposite poles of his paradoxical mission. It has added force at this point in the narrative just as Jesus and the three other disciples are returning from their "mountain-top experience," and it is possible that the echo of Moses' complaint reflects the recent meeting with Moses and Elijah, each of whom equally found the people of their day extremely trying (see e.g. **Exod 17:4**; **1 Kgs 19:10**). Jesus has accepted that he will be rejected by the official leadership of Israel (**16:21**), but to find himself let down even by his own disciples evokes a rare moment of human emotion on the part of the Son of God. Cf. the "*How long?*" laments of the psalms (**Ps 4:2**; **13:1–2** etc.) and prophets (**Jer 4:14, 21**; **12:4** etc.).

Robert Gundry: Unbelief amounts to a perversion of discipleship. "O" lends gravity to Jesus' exasperated questions. "*How long shall I be with you?*" alludes to Jesus as "*God with us*" (**1:23**). In **28:20** he'll answer his own question of how long: "*And behold, I am with you all the days till the consummation of the age.*" The command to bring the son to Jesus shows Jesus' **determination to expose the baselessness of unbelief.**

B. Lament of Jesus over the Dullness of His Disciples

"how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

C. Compassion of Jesus for the Suffering

"Bring him here to Me."

III. (:18) GOD SPECIALIZES IN DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

A. Rebuking the Demon = Successful Spiritual Exorcism

*"And Jesus rebuked him,
and the demon came out of him,"*

J. Ligon Duncan: And then, Jesus displays His power. He demands the demon to leave with a sharp rebuke, and that displays His love and His concern, His compassion in this time of need and malady and sickness and supernatural possession. But it also displays His power, and we see in this passage the **connection between unbelief and perversity**. It is hardened unbelief that has led the scribes to become so perverse as to take delight in seeing ministers not be able to minister to the people that they are attempting to minister unto. Only perversity can look at this situation and feel that way. And yet, these religious leaders felt that way. Why? Because of unbelief. Hardened unbelief is now keeping them from having normal human compassion.

B. Restoring the Boy to Full Health = Instant Physical Cure

"and the boy was cured at once."

Donald Hagner: This verse is remarkable for its **directness** and the conciseness of its three main clauses, each with a different subject: ὁ Ἰησοῦς, "*Jesus*," τὸ δαιμόνιον, "*the demon*," and ὁ παῖς, "*the child*."

IV. (:19-21) LESSON OF THE MUSTARD SEED = KEEP TRUSTING . . . KEEP PRAYING . . . EXPECT GOD TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

A. (:19) Defeated Disciples Look to Jesus for Answers

“Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’”

Daniel Doriani: The father viewed Jesus’ disciples as his representatives. In the absence of the master, trained deputies should be able to perform the master’s work. Indeed, in the past Jesus had empowered the disciples to heal disease and cast out demons and they had succeeded (**Matt. 10:8; Luke 9:6; 10:17**). The father asked the disciples to heal his boy. They tried and failed. The demon who stood behind the disease had resisted.

This failure is puzzling since Jesus had bestowed the power to exorcise demons, and the disciples had already exercised it. A little later, the disciples raised this very issue: *“Why couldn’t we drive it out?”* (**Matt. 17:19**). Jesus replied, *“Because you have so little faith”* (**17:20**). The disciples’ surprise at their failure suggests that they assumed they could solve this problem. Why? Because they began to trust in themselves, in their gifts, their skills, rather than trusting the Lord. They apparently thought they had the gifts, the training, and the experience to make this work.

R. T. France: Perhaps they had become **over-confident** in the authority Jesus had given them, so that they assumed they could carry out an exorcism as a matter of course; the added comment in **Mark 9:29** that *“this kind will not come out except through prayer [and fasting]”* implies that they had not prayed for God’s power over the demon. Or perhaps the problem was the opposite, that in the absence of Jesus and the leading disciples up the mountain the remaining disciples did not have the faith to draw on God’s power for themselves, despite Jesus’ authorization, and so their attempt had **lacked conviction**. At any rate the *“little faith”* with which Jesus has several times charged his disciples (**6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8**) has now proved to have serious consequences. For another failed attempt at exorcism see **Acts 19:13–17**.

William Hendriksen: They had not sufficiently taken to heart the comfort they should have derived from the assurances which their Lord had given them (**7:7-10; 10:8**), and had not **persisted in prayer**. When the demon did not immediately leave they should not have stopped praying. . . A mustard seed, though at first very small, yet, because of its uninterrupted and vital contact with its nourishing environment, grows and grows until it becomes a tree so tall that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches. Accordingly, *“faith as a mustard seed”* is the kind of trust in God which does not immediately give up in despair when its efforts do not meet with immediate success. It maintains its **uninterrupted and vital contact with God** and therefore continues to pray fervently, knowing that God at his own time and in his own way will bestow the blessing. Such faith links its possessor with the inexhaustible and infinite resources of God’s power, wisdom and love. It operates in harmony with God’s revelation in his Word. Consequently, its prayers are not motivated by sinful desires, and it does not tempt God. It is therefore able to **remove mountains**.

B. (:20-21) Lesson of the Mustard Seed: When Faith Is Little, It Must Grow and Persevere to See God Accomplish the Impossible

1. (:20a) Their Faith Was Little

“And He said to them, ‘Because of the littleness of your faith;’”

Grant Osborne: The disciples have frequently been chided for their “*little faith*” (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In those passages we decided this does not refer to total disbelief but rather to a **vacillating, struggling faith**. Moreover, “*faith*” does not simply mean certitude that God will grant the request but rather a **total dependence** on the God who watches after his children. That is the case here. They likely believed their newfound power over illness and the demonic realm gave them status, and they may have been **showing off** rather than centering on the God who alone has true power. **Such self-centeredness guarantees failure.**

Charles Swindoll: Jesus was undoubtedly using hyperbole to drive home His point of the **importance and power of faith**. He used one of the smallest things in the world—a mustard seed—to condemn the relatively tiny faith of the disciples. If such small faith had the potential to move Mount Hermon—the biggest thing on the horizon—then the disciples’ faith must have been microscopic! Far from comforting, this scolding would have discouraged and shamed the disciples even more.

D. A. Carson: In Mark, Jesus tells them that this case requires prayer—not a form or an approved rite, but an entire life bathed in prayer and its concomitant faith. In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that what they need is not giant faith (tiny faith will do) but true faith—faith that, out of a deep, personal trust, expects God to work.

2. (:20b) Their Faith Needed to Grow and Persevere as a Mustard Seed

“for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

Warren Wiersbe: “*Faith as a grain of mustard seed*” suggests not only **size** (God will honor even a little faith), but also *life* and *growth*. Faith like a mustard seed is *living* faith that is nurtured and caused to grow. Faith must be cultivated so that it grows and does even greater exploits for God (1 Thess. 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:3). Had the nine disciples been praying, disciplining themselves, and meditating on the Word, they would have been able to cast out the demon and rescue the boy.

Stu Weber: Many people misinterpret the promise, “*nothing will be impossible for you,*” and similar statements in the New Testament (e.g., John 14:13-14). This is not a blanket coverage of any desire we might express to God in prayer. Biblical faith taps into God's power and authority, but it can be exercised only **in accordance with God's will** (cf. 1 John 5:14). Biblical faith assumes not only a belief in God's power, but also a **heart after God's own heart**, which desires and asks for the things of God—not personal “wants.” This is an important caution in light of the erroneous “name it and claim it” theology we hear so often today.

Leon Morris: He is saying that there are infinite resources open to the believer, and he is calling on those who follow him to exercise the faith they have.

Craig Blomberg: Much is not accomplished for the kingdom because we simply do not believe God will adequately empower us or else because we undertake various activities in our own strength rather than God's.

Robert Gundry: The great depth of the bases of the mountains made the mountains a natural symbol of stability. In this conceptual framework you could hardly think of a more hyperbolic figure of power than that of moving a mountain. “*If you have faith like a grain of mustard*”

indicates what could be. “*It will move away; and nothing will be impossible for you*” indicates what would be if the “could” turned into an actuality. “*Amen I tell you*” adds assurance. And the introductory “*For*” makes the whole statement an explanation of “*Because of the littleness of your faith.*”

We tend to gloss over the truth that our **God can do the impossible**:

*Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible
He can do just what no other can do.*

*He is able to deliver thee,
He is able to deliver thee;
Though by sin oppressed, go to Him for rest;
“Our God is able to deliver thee.”*

3. (:21) [Verse omitted from best manuscripts]
[“*But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*”]

D. A. Carson: [This verse is] omitted by a powerful combination of witnesses. It is obviously an assimilation to the synoptic parallel in **Mark 9:29**. There is no obvious reason why, if original, it should have been omitted.

R.V.G. Tasker: These last words, which constitute **verse 21** in AV, should almost certainly be omitted from the text of Matthew (as in RV and RSV) on the authority of Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and the ancient Syriac and Egyptian versions. They would seem to have been imported from **Mark ix. 29** in the interest of harmonization.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what specific areas have you given up praying and trusting God to perform for you what seems to be impossible?
- 2) Why did the disciples fail to perform this healing?
- 3) What caused Jesus the greatest frustration with His disciples?
- 4) How can Jesus both criticize the disciples for having “*little faith*” and then commend to them the analogy of the mustard seed to show the potential power of such little faith?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Wilkins: Faith is either existent or nonexistent, but it can also either function effectively or be defective. Jesus says that even the littlest faith (like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds) can move a mountain. It is not the amount of faith that is in question, but rather the focus of faith. Faith is not a particular substance, so that the more we have of it the more we can accomplish. Rather, faith is confidence that God will do through us what he calls us to do—“taking God at his word.” Jesus’ point is that anyone with any amount of faith can do the most unthinkable things if that is what God has called him or her to do. Therefore, we should not place confidence in what we have, but rather have confidence that if God calls us to do something, we can do it in his strength, even the most absurdly impossible sounding things from the world’s point of view.

David Turner: The issue here is not the intensity or amount of faith but the extent of their ability to perceive the object of faith. The power of faith is in the person to whom it is directed. Jesus’s disciples were unable to heal the epileptic boy because they had taken their eyes off Jesus and looked at the obstacles, just as Peter did during the storm when he began to sink (14:30). Faith is not believing that God will do whatever disciples demand but whatever is best for them. God will not perform the disciples’ selfish bidding but will empower them to extend his kingdom through word and deed.

Richard Gardner: The story in which this dilemma is portrayed once again comes from Mark (cf. **Mark 9:14-29**). Matthew, in typical fashion, **greatly abridges** Mark’s account. Among the items omitted are the vivid description and illustration of the child’s condition, the reference to an argument between the scribes and the disciples, and a classic dialogue on faith between Jesus and the child’s father. In the process of condensation, the story acquires a new form and focus. No longer is it primarily a miracle story, concentrating on the plight of the boy and his father. Instead, the **emphasis falls on the plight of the disciples and their need for greater faith**. And the text that results can be described as a piece of instruction for disciples (cf. the conversation in **vv. 19-20**). . .

The scene in the text **depicts the world which faith must inhabit and challenge**, a world where crowds clamor, where skepticism reigns, and where deliverance is needed. How do we fare in that kind of world? According to one writer, the text warns us that “the church is always in danger of reverting to the unbelieving mentality of a secular-minded generation” (**Sand: 360**). The text also contains a word of promise, however: **If we dare to trust God in the midst of unbelief, we will find the power needed to act in Jesus’ name.**

S. Lewis Johnson: I tend to look at the disciples as illustrative of the power of the church. We often think when we think about a church, well now, we’ll judge a church by its ministry, by the men who minister the word of God – It’s a great church if it has a great preacher. It’s not necessarily a great church at all. As a matter of fact, we shouldn’t ever estimate the power of a church by its ministers. We shouldn’t estimate the power of a church by the ordinance that it observes. We shouldn’t estimate the power of a church by its members. **The power of a church is ultimately dependent upon the Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit.** We estimate the power of a church by the degree to which that church is under the control of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God who is the head of the church.

John MacArthur: The Power of Faith

You have throughout holy Scripture the testimony to the life of faith, to **the power of faith**.

Now, in our text – and we can look at our text more closely now – Jesus makes one of the great statements in all of the Bible relative to faith when He says that **faith moves mountains**, and that it makes nothing impossible. The point of the whole passage, in many ways, is a summary of the whole testimony of the people of God through all of history: that **God moves powerfully when we believe**. The power of faith. . .

Four key elements in this narrative text.

I. The pleading of the father.

The father is in deep agony. He is pleading for his son.

II. The powerlessness of the followers.

III. The perversion of the faithless in verse 17.

IV. The power of faith.

It's now teaching time, folks. And we're going to find out what all this is meant to teach. I mean if we just stop here and go home, we really wouldn't know.

You know, if they had one problem, what was it? **Little faith**. Have you heard that before? "*O ye of*" – what? – "*little faith*." Remember I told you that was the subtitle for the disciples? The O Ye of Little Faith Association. They always were indicted for that. Four times Jesus says to them, "*O ye of little faith*."

- 1) **Matt. 6:30** – Anxiety regarding provision of clothing and necessities of life
- 2) **Matt. 8:26** – Scared in the boat caught in the storm at sea
- 3) **Matt. 14:31** – Peter walking on water and then falling
- 4) **Matt. 16:8** – No bread to feed the multitudes

Little faith is the kind of faith that believes in God **when you have something in your hand**. Got it? "Oh, yes, I believe God. Oh, yes, the Lord provides; here it is, and I'm hanging onto it." That's little faith. But little faith can't believe God when it doesn't have in hand its resource. That's little faith.

Great faith says, "I believe God **without anything in my hand**. I believe God in the middle of the storm. I believe God though the wind is howling. I believe God though there's nothing on the cupboard. I believe God though I don't have any clothing. I believe God." That's great faith.

Little faith, most of us are really good at little faith. We believe God because we can see what He's done; it's right here.

Now, in all these four incidents of little faith, the **Lord was present**. Right? In each time He took care of it, provided for them, gave them what they needed, met their need, took them at the point of their little faith and did what they couldn't do. But **this time, He was away**. And they couldn't do it, and He wasn't there. And this is **a new test** for them, you see? Oh, this is a brand new test for them. Usually He was with them, and when they couldn't do it, or when they couldn't believe, He'd step right in and take over. But now He left them on their own, and He's giving them a sample – listen – of the way it is going to be pretty soon when He's gone. And the way it is for you and me.

He's **starting to cut the cord**, see? He's starting to turn them loose, to leave them on their own. And now watch. As He begins to let them go on their own, He starts to teach them a profound lesson. That everything you want, everything you need isn't necessarily going to come the first time you ask God. Did you get that? Did you get that? That's the lesson. . .

Now, the Lord was available to these nine disciples, but He was testing, "**How long will you persist in prayer?**" This is a marvelously comforting truth, beloved. Listen to it. Even these apostles, with their apostolic uniqueness and their gifts of miraculous healing, casting out of demons, were **dependent on the prayer of faith to see the power work**. And though we do not have apostolic gifts in terms of miracles and healing, we are too dependent on the power of faith.

You go to the Lord with a problem two or three times, **nothing happens. You give up**. Other people say, "You know, I've been praying for so-and-so to come to the Lord for two months." Two months? The test is how long are you going to stay there? And let God strengthen your faith.

You see – follow now in the text and look what happens, **verse 20**, "*You couldn't do this because of your little faith.*" And then He says, "*If you*" – and He says it seriously – "*Verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to a mountain, 'Move,' and the mountain would move.*"

And, you know, you read that, and you say, "Now, wait a minute. You just said we had little faith, and now you tell us if we had faith as little as a grain of mustard seed, and that's the littlest seed that was known in that part of the world. What are you saying? You just said we had little faith, and that's why we couldn't do it. Now you tell us if we had a little faith we could do it."

No, most people misinterpret that mustard seed. The principle of the mustard seed is not that it's little, no. **The principle of the mustard seed is that it is little, and it does what? It grows.** Do you remember that principle? It's in **Matthew 13**. Sure, you remember it, **verse 31**, "*Another parable He put forth unto them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds. But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becomes a tree so the birds of air come and lodge in the branches of it.'*" And what you've got in the mustard seed is something that **starts very, very small and grows very large**.

Now, what is our Lord saying? Watch, "If you had the faith that is illustrated in a mustard seed, you would start out small, but your faith would" – do what? – "it would grow and increase." And that's an indictment portfolio them. **They started out with a little bit of faith, and they just bailed out.**

Beloved, I believe there are many things that God desires for you to experience in your life that God desires to accomplish in your life that are available to you through the exercise of His divine power. But that power will never be tapped until you have the faith that starts small, and when it meets with resistance, and when you don't see it happen, the faith doesn't die small; it gets larger and larger and larger. And you continue persistently in prayer. (cf. **Luke 11:5ff; Luke 18**)

What the disciples should have done, when they didn't heal the man in the first, second, or third time was to **keep on praying, and keep on trusting**, and keep on believing God till their

persistent prayer broke through and reached its point where God wanted them to learn, and then God would have responded. It isn't that they had to batter down heaven to get his attention; it is that God knew exactly what he was going to do, but He withheld it in order that they might continue to stretch their faith. It's a great lesson.

The principle is clear. The disciples couldn't heal, even though they had a promise. They couldn't heal even though they had available power, because they weren't persistent in prayer. And the lesson for us is, beloved, God is giving us promises. Oh, my. Promise for wisdom; promise to meet all our needs; promise for comfort, peace, joy, virtue, strength, safety, protection, deliverance, fruit. The promise of guidance, promise of forgiveness, promise of freedom, promises, promises. And He's given us power in the Spirit of God. And yet, very often we don't experience the fulfillment of the promise in God's power because **we don't know the persistence of prayer that keeps on praying until God responds.**

TEXT: Matthew 17:22-23

TITLE: JESUS'S SECOND PROPHECY OF HIS PASSION AND RESURRECTION

BIG IDEA:

REPEATING THE PROPHECY OF HIS CENTRAL MISSION STILL DOES NOT COMPUTE WITH JESUS' SAD DISCIPLES

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Jesus and His disciples were inseparable. This became all the more obvious as Jesus entered the final six months of His public ministry. As the Cross loomed larger on the horizon, He spent less time with the multitudes and more time with those who were dedicated to following Him —the men and women who were His faithful disciples —and especially with the Twelve who had received the special calling, and even more particularly, with the three who had been privy to certain astonishing miracles.

However, what He often wanted to talk to them about was not what they wanted to hear. As conflict with critics intensified and the disciples could sense increasing unrest among the crowds, they likely envisioned an ultimate showdown between the hypocritical teachers and crooked rulers on one side and the Son of God in the flesh and His wonder-working disciples on the other. Yet Jesus kept on talking about His arrest, suffering, and death. The last thing the disciples wanted to think about was His dying and leaving them to carry on without Him. In their minds, that scenario didn't make any sense.

Biblical Illustrator: In rapid succession the Saviour brings before His disciples the great facts in His history as the Mediator-facts which have the most direct bearing on man's redemption and spiritual recovery. His complete knowledge of His future, and the calm magnanimity with which He talked about these stupendous events, demonstrate Him to be superhuman.

Bethany Bible Church: Our Lord stressed the same basic details that we find in this morning's passage over and over to His disciples during the final portion of His earthly ministry—that He was going to be delivered into the hands of men, that they would kill Him, and that He would then be raised from the dead.

And I'm suggesting, dear brothers and sisters, that there is tremendous significance to the repetition. Jesus clearly shows us that this was a story that is worth repeating over and over.

1. IT'S A STORY THAT IS FOUNDATIONAL TO SAVING FAITH.
2. IT'S A STORY THAT REVEALS THE DEPTHS OF DIVINE LOVE.
3. IT'S A STORY THAT AFFIRMS HOPE IN THE FACE OF LOSS.
4. IT'S A STORY THAT MUST BE PERSONALIZED TO BE GRASPED.

The story of who Jesus is and what He has done—the very story He expressed in our passage this morning—is a story that must be personalized to us before it can be grasped by us and declared

by us. It must first be known by us 'experientially'—through a personal relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ by faith—before it can be the story that leads to our salvation.

<https://bethanybible.org/archive/2007/090207.htm>

Coffman: From Mark, it is known that Christ at that time had returned to Galilee and was in retirement there, using every possible means to instruct and prepare the apostles for the awful events looming so near in the future. The fact that they were "exceeding sorry" shows what enormous difficulty attended this revelation for them. It was, in fact, incomprehensible; and most of the things Christ taught them on that subject were to remain unrealized by them until after the events. Looming nearer and nearer were the dark scenes of Calvary, blotting out their view of the oft-repeated promises of his resurrection. The ability of finite men to understand so gargantuan a fact as God in Christ dying for the sins of the whole world was strained to the breaking point. Never was there a better example of the weakness of the flesh (all flesh) than in the shocked and perplexed attitude of the Twelve. They had been given all the facts, but full realization would come afterwards.

(:22A) PROLOGUE – OCCASION FOR THE SECOND PASSION PROPHECY

“And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them,”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus was back in **Galilee** when He gave this second of four notices of His upcoming death (but see **17:12**). The first announcement had been in Caesarea Philippi (**16:21**). Others would follow (**20:18-19; 26:2**). **Mark 9:30-31** says that Jesus and His disciples were alone because Jesus was teaching them.

Robert Gundry: The disciples are assembling in Galilee for a **pilgrimage to Jerusalem**, where they’ll celebrate the Passover festival. The pilgrimage will start soon (see **19:1**). To prepare the disciples for what will happen to him in Jerusalem, Jesus predicts again his passion and resurrection there. This second such prediction fulfills the implication in **16:21**: *“From then on Jesus began showing his disciples”*

Charles Swindoll: Having spent over a week in the region of Caesarea Philippi in the shadows of Mount Hermon, Jesus and the disciples again made their way back to Galilee. In that familiar territory and with familiar faces in the crowds—both friends and foes—they no doubt began to feel the increasing tension of scowling critics and scoffing skeptics. In this atmosphere, Jesus spoke directly concerning His coming passion.

I. (:22b) BETRAYAL – APPLICATION: AM I LOYAL TO THE LORD JESUS?

“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men;”

Robert Gundry: *“Is going to be given over”* connotes **certainty**. *“To be given over”* predicts for the first time Judas Iscariot’s giving Jesus over to the Jewish authorities (**20:18; 26:15–16**) and their giving him over to Pilate and the Gentiles (**20:19; 27:2, 18** [compare **26:45**]). *“Into the hands of men”* connotes an exercise of power over Jesus (compare **Genesis 31:29**: *“It’s in the power of my hand”*; see also **2 Samuel 24:14** for the connotation of violent treatment).

Charles Swindoll: The Greek word translated “*delivered*” is *paradidōmi* [3860], which means to “hand over, turn over, give up a person.” Had the disciples put some thought into the statement at the time, immediately the question would have come up —“By whom is the Son of Man going to be handed over?” Clearly, He would be handed over to those who would torture and kill Him, but who would betray Him in such a way? Perhaps they would have recognized that Jesus was revealing for the first time an “inside job,” in which one of their own would betray Him.

But they didn’t think that deeply. In fact, it doesn’t seem that they paid attention to anything but “*they will kill Him*” (17:23). Their response seemed to dwell strictly on the fact of Jesus’ death, because “*they were deeply grieved.*” Often when strong emotions overtake us, it’s hard to hear correctly or to think clearly. The disciples didn’t ask about the treachery involved in His arrest, or the miracle involved in His being “*raised on the third day.*”

Gill: [quoting Jewish canon law] "It is forbidden to betray an Israelite into the hands of the Gentiles, whether in his body or in his substance; and though he may be a wicked man, and a ringleader in sin, and though he may have oppressed and afflicted him; and everyone that betrays an Israelite into the hands of the Gentiles, whether in his body, or in his substance, has no part in the world to come."

Leon Morris: He began with *the Son of man*, his normal way of referring to himself in the fulfilment of his messianic vocation. The Son of man, then, *will be delivered*, where **will be** is not the simple future but the compound used in **verse 12**, which is often used to denote “an action that necessarily follows a divine decree is destined, must, will certainly.” The passive is often taken as “the divine passive,” signifying that **it is really God who delivers him up**, a truth that Paul brings out (**Rom. 8:32**). This delivering up will be into the hands of men, where the verb perhaps is used in the more or less technical sense of handing over to the courts. The arresting officers are not defined and the whole prediction is left very general. But it is plain enough that Jesus says that he will be given over into the power of those who are no more than men (and **evil men** at that!).

John Schultz: We wonder how Judas felt, hearing this. Jesus’ mention of betrayal constituted a warning to him. It is likely that, at this point, Judas did not know yet that he would betray Jesus.

Donald Hagner: A divine *handing over* of Jesus is reminiscent of the δεῖ, “*it is necessary*,” in **16:21**. The verb reminds the reader that the disciples have been warned of a day when they will be “*handed over*” (cf. **10:17–22; 24:9–10**).

Walter Wilson: The apposition of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων creates a wordplay, one that enshrines a tragic paradox. Humanity is about to betray and kill its own “*son*,” essentially becoming its own enemy.

Matthew Henry: He tells them that he should be betrayed into the hands of men. Men to whom he was allied by nature, and from whom therefore he might expect pity and tenderness; these are his persecutors and murderers.

II. (:23a) EXECUTION –

APPLICATION: DO I APPRECIATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBSTITUTIONARY DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST FOR MY SINS?

“and they will kill Him,”

Donald Hagner: The verb ἀποκτενοῦσιν, “will kill,” is also used in the first passion prediction (16:21; only in the third prediction is σταυροῦν, “crucify,” used).

Matthew Henry: If he is a Sacrifice of atonement, he must be killed; without blood no remission.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr.: One could never say that death took Jesus by surprise. He was in control of His life and no one took it from Him (John 10:11, 15, 17-18).

III. (:23b) RESURRECTION –

APPLICATION: AM I LIVING NOW IN THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST?

“and He will be raised on the third day.”

Richard Gardner: Ultimately, it is God who both delivers Jesus to death and raises Jesus from death (cf. Rom. 4:25).

Gill: it is observable, that when Christ speaks of his rising again, he makes mention of the exact time, the third day, on which he should rise, according to the types and prophecies of the Old Testament.

William Hendriksen: They understood neither the necessity and certainty of the passion nor the announcement of the resurrection on the third day, Cf. Mark 9:32a: “*But they did not understand the saying.*”

(:23c) EPILOGUE – REACTION OF THE DISCIPLES

“And they were deeply grieved.”

Matthew Henry: In this appeared their love for their Master’s person, but with all their ignorance and misunderstanding concerning his undertaking.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The disciples reacted with much sadness (cf. 26:22). They were very sad (Greek *lupeō sphodra*). (See this same expression in 26:22.) Though they had many questions they were afraid to ask for an explanation (Mk. 9:32; Lk. 9:45).

David Turner: Another new feature is the mention of the disciples’ **deep grief**, which anticipates their grief at the Last Supper and Jesus’s grief at Gethsemane (26:22, 37). They are finally accepting the stark reality of the impending events in Jerusalem, and they do not seek to dissuade Jesus as Peter did in 16:22. But this deep grief implies that they have not yet grasped the full significance of Jesus’s resurrection (Hill 1972: 271).

Charles Swindoll: Luke’s Gospel fills in a little more detail about the disciples’ state of mind: “*They did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement*” (Luke 9:45). Jesus didn’t dwell on the subject. He had said all He wanted to say at that moment. He was planting seeds for later, allowing the words to sink in.

R. T. France: The fact that their dismay follows immediately upon the prediction of Jesus' resurrection underlines the point we noted above (especially on **16:21**), that the repeated inclusion of the resurrection as the conclusion of Jesus' destiny in Jerusalem seems to have gone completely over the disciples' heads; the prediction of his rejection, suffering and death so dominated their thinking that they could not see beyond the death to the vindication and glory.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What additional details or points of emphasis do you see in this second passion prophecy?
- 2) Why the need for so much repetition . . . and still the disciples can't comprehend fully?
- 3) How are the necessity of this path of suffering and death and the divine orchestration of these dramatic events taught in this passage?
- 4) Do you find it remarkable that Jesus could be focusing on preparing the understanding and the emotions of His disciples at such a time when His own agony was drawing near?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: As the end of His earthly ministry approached, Jesus predicted His own suffering, death, and resurrection more frequently. In the following list, note the **increasing clarity** of His statements:

- *“He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (10:38)*
- *“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” (16:21)*
- *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.’” (16:24)*
- *“But I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” (17:12)*
- *“And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.’” (17:22-23)*
- *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the*

Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.” (20:18-19)

- “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (20:28)*
- “*But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” (21:38-39)*
- “*You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion.” (26:2)*
- “*Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. . . . For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.” (26:10, 12)*

R. T. France: This is the first hint of Jesus’ betrayal by Judas (apart from the editorial comment in **10:4**), though as yet no indication is given to the disciples of who will do it. *Paradidōmi* does not in itself mean “betray;” sometimes it has a totally positive sense (as in “*entrust*,” **11:27; 25:14, 20, 22**), and where it is related to imprisonment and death it can be used without any sense of betrayal (**4:12; 5:25; 10:17, 19; 18:34; 27:2, 26**). But often the hostile motivation of the agent is understood (**10:21; 24:9, 10; 27:18**), and *paradidōmi* (rather than the more specific term *prodidōmi*) quickly became the standard term for Judas’ “betrayal”. In view of that general usage it seems likely that the “*handing over*” predicted here is not simply Jesus’ arrest and the process of his trials and condemnation to death, but more specifically the role of Judas. It is also possible to find here an echo of the OT phrase “*give in to the hands of*” denoting God’s determining the result of human conflict (**Exod 23:31; Num 21:2, 34** etc), and such a divine passive would suit the NT insistence that what was done to Jesus was done by the will of God; but the prominent use of *paradidōmi* in the gospels in relation to Judas’ treachery suggests that that is the more immediate focus here. The “*people*” to whom Jesus will be handed over are not specified here, though the reader who knows the story will have no difficulty in identifying them. But the description of them as *anthrōpoi*, “*human beings*,” not only produces an effective word-play (the *Son of anthrōpos* in the hands of *anthrōpoi*) but also draws a telling and paradoxical contrast between the Son of Man (the figure of future glory and authority, **16:27–28**) and those to whose will he is to be subjected.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Cross Reiterated

Here Jesus repeats and elaborates on His clear statement to the disciples about His impending doom, His trials, His sufferings, His death, His burial, and His resurrection. He had already spoken to them of this truth in **Matthew 16**. He will speak to them of it again in **Matthew 20**. . .

I. We ought to remember Christ's humiliation for us.

Why? Why does He keep repeating this particular message to the disciples? Other than the fact that they were hard-headed like we are, there are many good answers to that question. One of them is offered to us by **Calvin** who says, “The nearer the time of His death, the more often Christ warned His disciples, lest that particular sorrow should undermine their faith.” In other words, Jesus knew that the greatest testing, the greatest trial of faith that His disciples would go through during the time of His earthly ministry, would in fact come at the end of His earthly

ministry in His suffering, His death, His burial, and His resurrection. In those hours and in those days, His disciples would almost despair of the hope that He had implanted in them.

And so, everything that He does from this point on in His ministry, in addition to being designed to equip them for their future ministry of the gospel, was designed to enable them to endure the trial that they were going through. Is it not precious that at a time when the Lord would have been perfectly justified to concentrate on preparing Himself for the most awesome task ever undertaken in the history of this universe, yet He turned His attention to ministering to His disciples so that they could endure a trial not half so great as the trial that He would endure, but a trial greater than they had ever been called upon to face? And so, the expectations of the disciples about this kingdom that they were going to enter into in triumph, in victory and reign with Christ on earth had led them to be unprepared for the kind of trial that they were going to face in the coming days. And Jesus knew that that kind of triumphalism needed to be corrected. They needed to be faced with the stark realities of what it meant to follow the humiliated and exalted Lord. And so He continues, over and over, to prepare them. . .

Judas will deliver Him into the hands of wicked men. The scribes, the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees will deliver Him into the hands of wicked men. The civil leaders of Israel will deliver Him into the hands of wicked men. The Roman rulers will finally hand Him into the custody of armed soldiers who will then inflict the final punishment. Jesus delivered under the control and jurisdiction of wicked men. . .

You see, Matthew wants you to see not only the necessity of Jesus' suffering and the certainty of Jesus' suffering, but he wants you to see that that suffering was the very plan of God for your sake. It was not merely an accident or a tragedy. It was not merely an affront to justice put into place by the hands of wicked men. It was the Father's plan to redeem you from your sins. And so, when you come to the Lord's Table you remember that that humiliation was the plan, the loving plan of the Father for you. And that humiliation was willingly taken up by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that that humiliation was not endured because Jesus deserved it, but because you deserved it and He endured it in your place.

II. We ought to reflect on His death, its meaning and significance.

Do you realize the significance of that death? Every time we come to this table, we need to meditate on the power of that saving death. It was a perfect, divine substitutionary sacrifice. Nothing less than the blood atonement of Jesus Christ was necessary to satisfy the wrath and the justice of God. Do you remember those solemn words of **Hebrews 9:22**: *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* The author of Hebrews has already told us that the blood of bulls and goats will not avail, only the blood of the Son of Man and Son of God will avail to stand us before God in righteousness. Do we see the Savior's love in this? Do we realize that Jesus perfectly knew what He had been born into the world to do, and yet He willingly chose it for you? Do you see the Savior's love in that? Do you realize that His knowledge all His life, all His life, that He was born to die for you, was like living a life experiencing the passion of the cross before it ever came? Can you imagine living your life knowing that your job was, at the age of 33, to die for all your people? And more than that, to lose the experience of the Father's presence on behalf of your people. And He chose that for you. How much must your Savior love you? **John Owens** said so many years ago, “There is no death of sin without the death of Christ. But because of Christ's death, death has died for god's people.” Do we realize the significance of His death when we come to the table?

III. We ought to strengthen our hope in His resurrection.

They misunderstand His message. Being plunged into grief at the prospect of their own forthcoming personal bereavement, the disciples derive no comfort from Jesus' words that He will be raised on the third day. Why? Again, there are many reasons for that. But **William Hendriksen** says this, "Since they did not know what was meant by being raised up, this part of the prediction was not able to turn their sorrow into joy."

Now that's a question for us too, isn't it? If we don't know what it means to be raised up, then there is nothing to turn our sorrow to joy. It is our business to know the resurrection. It is our business to believe and embrace the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and it is our business to know that we are raised up in Him, says the Apostle Paul. That is our hope. It's at the bedrock, the very foundation of our hope for future glory. . .

Your resurrection is as good as done because you have been raised in newness of life in His resurrection and that resurrection is already been accomplished. It is a pledge of the resurrection that you and I will experience.

Van Parunak: Prophecies of the Lord's Passion

16:21-22	17:22-23	20:17-20	26:1-2
21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,	22 And while they abode in Galilee , Jesus said unto them,	17 And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,	1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,
how that he must go unto Jerusalem ,		18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ;	2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover,
and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes ,	The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:	and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes , and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles	and the Son of man is betrayed
and be killed ,	23 And they shall kill him,	to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him:	to be crucified .
and be raised again the third day.	and the third day he shall be raised again.	and the third day he shall rise again.	
22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, ...	And they were exceeding sorry.	20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, ...	(Anointing in the house of Simon the Leper)

TEXT: Matthew 17:24-27

TITLE: ACCOMMODATION TO AVOID OFFENSE

BIG IDEA:

JESUS PAID THE TEMPLE SUPPORT TAX TO AVOID OFFENSE DESPITE BEING THE LEGITIMATE FOCUS OF TEMPLE WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

David Thompson: To understand this passage, we must understand the **Jewish background**. It **took a lot of money to run the temple** in Jerusalem and God made provisions for this in the O.T. Law. . .

At the temple there were daily morning and evening sacrifices which included a year-old lamb at every sacrifice. There were wine, flour and oil offerings. The incense which was burned and the oil to operate the lighting system took a lot of money. One writer observed just the robe of the High Priest would have cost a “king’s ransom” (**Barclay**, p. 168). God knew it would take a lot of money to run His temple so He made abundant provisions for it. In **Ex. 30:13-14**, it was required that every Jew over age twenty must pay an annual temple tax of one-half shekel. **Barclay** observed “In the days of Nehemiah, when the people were poor, it was one-third of a shekel” (Vol. 2, p. 168). One-half shekel was equal to two Greek drachmas. That is precisely what is referred to in this passage. This tax was equivalent to about two days’ pay. **So every year, every male over twenty was required to bring two days’ pay to the temple to maintain its operations.** This was in addition to the regular offerings. Now the method of collection was very systematic. On the first of the month, Adar, which is our March, it was announced that the tax was to be paid. On the 15th day of March, booths were set up in every town and village where the taxes were collected. If the tax was not paid by the 25th, it had to be paid directly to the temple. This scene takes place in March. What we have are temple authorities going to Peter to ask whether or not Jesus would pay this tax. There is an important lesson to see from this passage.

JESUS CHRIST PAYS A TEMPLE TAX SO THAT HE AND HIS DISCIPLES WOULD NOT BE OFFENSIVE.

Truth is this whole scene is offensive to Him. It occurs after His transfiguration. Had Israel come to terms with Jesus Christ, they would have been bringing Him everything rather than asking Him for a tax. The temple was His temple and His Father’s temple. He said that when He was 12 (**Luke 2:49**). He is the focal point of everything in the temple. They should have given Him all of their wealth, but instead they want Him to give them some money.

Stu Weber: Even though the king's death exempts his servants from obligations under the old covenant, we must be willing to give up our privileges for the ministry of the kingdom in the lives of others. . .

Jesus was not teaching a lesson about **civil taxes**. Rather, he was paralleling the temple tax with the civil tax. The kings of the earth are parallel to God, and the sons represent true believers and children of God (**5:9, 45**). The customs or poll tax paralleled the temple tax. Jesus left the

implications for members of God's family unstated, but it is clearly implied: **God's royal children are free from old covenant obligations that have been nullified by the new covenant.**

Charles Swindoll: As the saying goes, two things in life are certain: death and taxes. Jesus had just prophesied that He would die, which confused and disturbed the disciples (**17:23**). Now the question of paying taxes came up. . . **William Barclay** notes, “There is little doubt that the question was asked with malicious intent and that the hope was that Jesus would refuse to pay; for, if he refused, the orthodox would have grounds for making an accusation against him.” Here we see the opponents of Jesus trying to snare Him any way they could. If outright, face-to-face confrontation simply ended in embarrassment, they would try to take Jesus down through less direct means.

The problem was that at the time the temple tax wasn't actually obligatory, either by Roman law or by a literal reading of the Law of Moses. It was merely customary and voluntary. At the time of Jesus, the temple tax was more a **test of one's loyalty to the temple in Jerusalem and of patriotism toward Israel**. As such, this wasn't a test of Jesus' fidelity to the Law of Moses but to the religious and political culture of the time. **Would Jesus conform to cultural expectations?** Or would He defy the man-made social rules and take a path of independence? . . .

By conforming to the cultural expectation and simply paying the minimum tax, Jesus was demonstrating to His followers that they needed to **pick their battles wisely**. On the one hand, there was nothing sinful about paying a temple tax. On the other hand, it wasn't actually obligatory. Because it was neutral, the righteous should prudently weigh the benefits of paying the tax vs. the negative impact of not paying it. Nothing could be gained for the proclamation of the kingdom of God by thumbing noses at the temple-tax collectors. And by simply paying the tax, they would **avoid placing a pointless obstacle in the path of outsiders**.

Grant Osborne: The application of this passage to the life of the church depends on whether one sees it restricted to the temple tax, thus having primarily a christological significance (so **Carson, Luz**), or sees both the temple tax and the civil tax included, thus seeing it as the precursor to “submission to the government” passages (**France, Davies and Allison**). In light of the presence of both in the text (the temple tax the basis of the story, the civil tax noted in Jesus' metaphorical question), I believe **both aspects** are intended here.

R. T. France: This apparently rather trivial exchange in fact has **significant implications** for the reader's understanding of the status and mission of Jesus. The half-shekel temple tax was an annual levy on adult Jewish males, and one which unlike Roman taxes might be expected to be paid as a patriotic duty, but the Sadducees disapproved of it as a relatively recent Pharisaic institution and the members of the Qumran community on principle paid it only once in a lifetime. This approach from the tax-collectors suggests a suspicion that Jesus also might not accept this as an obligation.

I. (:24-25a) THE ISSUE OF PAYING THE TEMPLE TAX

A. (:24) Complicated Issue of the Temple Tax Raised by Local Jewish Collectors

“And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, ‘Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?’”

- Why was this question posed to Peter instead of directly to Jesus?
- What was so complicated about this issue of payment of the annual temple taxes?

Grant Osborne: During the period covered by this narrative section (**13:54 – 17:27**), Jesus and the disciples have crossed the lake to the area of the Decapolis and returned (**ch. 14**), then traveled northwest to Tyre and Sidon and east to Gentile territory along the Sea of Galilee (**ch. 15**). Since then they have remained in the area of the lake, first at Magadan near Tiberias (**15:39**) and then twenty miles north of Galilee to the region of Caesarea Philippi (**16:13 – 17:23**) and now back to Jesus' and Peter's hometown of Capernaum. . .

The half-shekel tax (= two drachmas) stemmed from the tax imposed in **Neh 10:32–33** (where it was one-third of a shekel) and was to be paid by every Jewish male over twenty years old (m. Šeqal. 1:3–4). Yet the practice was apparently late in the Second Temple period, and there was considerable debate over it. Qumran understood **Exod 30:11–16** as requiring one payment in a lifetime (4Q159:6–7), and the Sadducees believed it was to be paid voluntarily. This was the lone exception to the Roman rule that foreign temples could not collect taxes from their people. After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, the Romans required the temple tax to be given to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

Thus, these were likely **local Jewish collectors** who visited the residents of Capernaum (like Peter and Jesus) and then sent the money to Jerusalem. The collection was taken in the month of Adar (February-March) and sent to Jerusalem in time for Passover. So much money was collected that the temple authorities had to find ways to use it, “eventually constructing a massive golden vine (cf. **Josephus**, War 5.210).”

R. T. France: If, as tradition holds, it was in Peter's house that they lived while in Capernaum, the tax-collectors naturally approach Peter as the householder and therefore as responsible for those living with him. Jesus, though not the householder, is recognized as “*your teacher*,” the leader of the disciple group, and it is his attitude to the tax which is in question.

B. (:25a) Simplistic Automatic Response of Peter

“*He said, ‘Yes.’*”

Walter Wilson: Peter responds, rather impulsively it seems, in the affirmative (**17:25a**), his failure to consult first with Jesus reflecting a failure to grasp the significance of the matter at hand. Later, after Peter has entered “*the house*” (cf. **13:36**), Jesus forestalls the disciple's question with one of his own, a parabolic query that posits an analogy between the way in which human kings act toward their “*sons*” and the way in which God acts toward God's children (cf. **18:23; 22:2**). Implied in the comparison is the assumption that even if it is administered by human agents, the temple tax is ultimately imposed by God's very self. Given the recent emphasis on Jesus's identity as God's Son (**16:16; 17:5**), it is also fair to assume that “*sons*” in the similitude refers to Jesus himself and his spiritual siblings, that is, to those who do the will of his heavenly Father (cf. **12:46 - 13:1**, also set in “*the house*”), as opposed to non-followers, here characterized as “*others*” (ἀλλότριοι). Just as members of the royal family are obviously exempt from taxes of all kinds, the members of the family of God are “*free*” (ἐλεύθεροι), the unqualified declaration in **17:26b** suggesting that they are not only exempt from the temple tax but also liberated in a more general sense as well.

II. (:25b-26) THE EXEMPTION DUE TO JESUS' SPECIAL STATUS

A. (:25b) The Analogy from Civil Taxes

“And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?’”

Grant Osborne: Jesus' point is that kings never raise revenue from their own family but only from the rest of the people.

R. T. France: All rulers, it is taken for granted, need to **raise revenue**; the question is **from whom** do they raise it. The specific reference of “*sons*” and “*strangers*” will depend on which governing authority is in view: for the Roman poll tax the crucial division was between Romans and subject foreigners (a possible meaning of *allogenes*, “*stranger*”), but not all rulers rule over foreigners, and where they are taxing their own people the “*sons*” who are exempt are more likely to be their own family members as opposed to the wider populace. But whatever the exact reference, the principle assumed by Jesus' question and Peter's response is that **rulers exempt those closest to them from taxation**. Whatever our modern democratic ideals may suggest, that seems a valid observation of the natural human tendency as it would have been experienced in the first century.

Leon Morris: Many translations have something like “*The citizens of the country or the foreigners?*” and record Peter's answer as “*The foreigners*” (so GNB). But this is not really the alternative, and it does not correspond to reality. Conquerors, of course, have always shamelessly plundered conquered peoples, and some of them may perhaps have been able to make do with this source of revenue, but the kings of the earth in general certainly have always **taxed their own people** and have never been in the luxurious position of being able to finance their activities solely from taxes levied on foreigners. Such translations do not pay enough attention to the language Jesus uses. He speaks of their sons, which draws attention to the male members of the royal households (and would probably include all in those households): the contrast is not between citizens and foreigners, but **between those of the royal household and those outside. Kings regularly tax their citizens, not their families.**

B. (:26) The Application to Jesus' Situation

“And upon his saying, ‘From strangers,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Consequently the sons are exempt.’”

Walter Wilson: Specifically, the relationship that his followers have with God through Jesus relativizes all other ways of knowing and honoring God, even those associated with God's temple, the piety of the temple being essentially transcended by the piety of God's fatherhood. That such an experience could be depicted with the language of freedom is evidenced also by **John 8:35–36**, which employs the imagery of “*the house*” as well: “*The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*” (cf. **Heb 3:5–6**).

III. (:27) THE ACCOMMODATION AND DIVINE PROVISION

A. The Accommodation

“But, lest we give them offense,”

Walter Wilson: As the final verse of the pericope shows, however, **freedom must be tempered by responsibility (17:27)**. As sons of God, Jesus and his followers must avoid “*giving offense*” to others (i.e., doing anything that might impede them from coming to faith), a theme to which the ensuing discourse will return (18:6–9). But rather than paying the tax themselves, Jesus informs Peter that their need will be met by a miracle of divine provision, the form of which corresponds to the view of God set forth in 17:25–26. God does not exact payment from the “sons” but on the contrary provides for them, as a father provides for his children (cf. 6:31–33). In this regard, it is important to note that Jesus foresees but does not enact the miracle. Rather it is something (we are led to presume) that God will do for Jesus and Peter, just as the heavenly Father gives what is good to all his children (7:9–11).

Grant Osborne: Jesus does not wish to give the impression that he is rejecting the temple or the Jewish people. This is a similar principle to Paul’s in 1 Cor 9:22b, “*I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some*” (cf. 1 Cor 8:13; 9:3–23). All decisions are made on the basis of what enhances the gospel, and Christ’s ambassadors are to surrender their “rights” for its sake.

R. T. France: The implication of the dialogue with Peter seems to be then that since Jesus has the status of a “son” in relation to God, he is “free” and so should be exempt from paying the tax (though the last step of the argument is left unstated). If he nonetheless does pay it, therefore, it is as a matter of **accommodation**, to avoid giving offense (which is what the verb “*cause to stumble*” probably means in this context), rather than of obligation. . . Is there a parallel here with his baptism, which, according to 3:14–15, was undertaken not because he personally required it, but to identify with repentant Israel and so to “*fulfill all that is required of us*”? The Jesus of Matthew’s gospel is not one to stand on his personal dignity, nor to dig his heels in on matters of secondary importance. His followers have not always been so perceptive in differentiating between matters of principle and *adiaphora*.

Leon Morris: If Jesus paid the tax he would be putting himself in the same position as others; he would be classing himself as an “outsider,” not as a “Son,” and that impression should be avoided. If he refused to pay the tax, he would give the impression that he rejected the temple and all that it stood for, whereas the Gospels make it clear that he did no such thing. Moreover, there were the people entrusted with the obligation to collect the taxes to consider. Had Jesus insisted on his rights, those men would not have been able to collect the tax from him. Jesus did not intend to be a snare to them, to lead them into sin in some way, though it is not clear precisely how a refusal to pay would cause the collectors to sin. . .

B. The Divine Provision

*“go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up;
and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater.
Take that and give it to them for you and Me.”*

Grant Osborne: Jesus’ command would be quite appealing to Simon, a professional fisherman. The reason for a “*fishhook*” rather than a net is the intention to catch just a single fish. The image of the fish “*coming up*” is part of the miracle; the fish, having swallowed a shiny coin on the bottom, arises from the depths and takes the hook. The coin is probably Tyrian silver, the exact amount for paying the temple tax for Jesus and Peter (“*on behalf of me as well as you,*” two shekels or drachmas each).

Michael Wilkins: The fish known popularly, but probably inaccurately, as “Saint Peter’s Fish” is the musht. The reason why it probably is not the type of fish Peter caught is that it feeds only on plankton and is not attracted by bait on a hook. More likely Peter caught the **barbel**, a voracious predator of the carp family that feeds on small fry like sardines, but also on mollusks and snails at the lake bottom. Peter may have baited the hook with a sardine, the most numerous fish in the Sea of Galilee, to which the barbel would have readily been attracted.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Not all fish stories are fabrications.

Grant Osborne: **God will take care of his children**, and so they must entrust themselves to his care. The purpose of the command of Jesus to Peter in **v. 27** is both to show that God provides for the needs of his children and to tell Peter to be dependent on God to meet his needs. This is the meaning of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “*Give us today our daily needs*” (**6:11**). It is not a consumer demand for God to give more and more but an expression of our reliance on God to meet our needs.

Leon Morris: “Found” money did not belong to anyone, so there was no barrier to Peter’s paying the tax with it. The little group’s meager store of money would then not have been used to pay taxes. It is also possible that the use of a “found” coin, while it satisfied the tax collectors, did not involve any admission that Jesus was liable to pay the tax; it was not “his” money. Jesus tells Peter to give the coin to the collectors *for me and you*.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does this passage have direct application to the payment of our **civil taxes**?
- 2) Why should Jesus and His disciples be **exempt** from the temple tax?
- 3) Why did Jesus supply the needed payment by way of a **miracle**?
- 4) In what circumstances do we need to be extra careful not to **offend** others by our non-culturally accepted behavior?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stanley Saunders: This unusual story raises questions for us about the nature of discipleship in a world dominated by the interests of kings, governors, and coercive powers. How do Christians best give witness to God’s power and provision in the midst of human expressions of dominion and sovereignty? God does not give us all fish with coins in their mouths, but God does supply those who trust with what they need. God also uses the community of disciples to restore those who are victims of the political and economic systems of the world, to gather God’s faithful, and to unmask the charades of human power. Preaching that attends to these realities will prepare disciples both for the “real world” and for God’s surprising provision.

While the story comes nowhere near to presenting a definitive teaching on the payment of taxes by Christians, it does suggest that when Christians do pay taxes—and they usually must—they should remember that human rulers and systems are only that. When leaders rule by deceit, when they deprive people of what is needed to live, when they depend on violence and domination, and especially when they wrap themselves in the rhetoric of religion and manifest destiny, it is the obligation of Christian preaching to unmask their deceits and to continue to point to God’s sovereignty and provision. And in all realms of life, even when paying taxes, Christians should bear witness to God’s power, grace, and care.

Christians approach their dealings with governmental powers with a clear sense that we are citizens of a different, heavenly realm (cf. **Phil. 3:20**). Whether or not the story affirms the essential freedom of Christ’s followers with regard to the payment of the temple tax, it is nonetheless true that Jesus’ disciples are members of God’s empire, not Caesar’s. That does not mean that Christians can ignore secular obligations, but rather that Christians are free to act in ways that surprise oppressors and opponents by turning the other cheek, for example, or by going the extra mile (cf. **5:39–41**), or even by paying onerous taxes. How might the community of disciples best support such subversions of the status quo, and how might we bear witness to God’s transforming and reconciling power amidst the trappings of nation-states.

Warren Wiersbe: The unique characteristics of this miracle are worth noting.

- It is recorded only by Matthew.
- It is the only miracle he performed to meet His own needs.
- It is the only miracle using money.
- It is the only miracle using one fish.
- It was performed for Peter.
- It is the only miracle that does not have the results recorded.

Donald Hagner: The **avoiding of unnecessary offense** is the central point of the pericope (see esp. **Garland**, 204–5). This same principle of freedom, yet with voluntary sacrifice of that freedom in practice, is advocated later by Paul (cf. **Rom 14:13–23; 1 Cor 8:13–9:1, 12**). The instructions Jesus now gives to Peter involve not simply mysterious foreknowledge (as in **21:2** or **Mark 14:13**) but a **miracle of divine provision**. This miracle is, however, unique in the NT in that Jesus performs it for his and Peter’s own convenience (in this sense it is more like the ad hoc miracle stories of the NT apocrypha). But like the miracle of the withering of the fig tree (**21:19**), its primary function is to provide a “*sign*” to underline a theological truth: that God provides the fish with the coin in its mouth (which the fish had apparently seen shining in the water and taken for food). This serves to underline the truth of Jesus’ point that the children of the king do not themselves have to pay the tax. Peter is to fish in the Sea of Galilee using an ἄγκιστρον, “*fishhook*” (the only occurrence of the word in the NT), and in the mouth of the first fish he takes he will find a στατήρα, “*stater*,” a silver coin worth four drachmas, or the equivalent of a shekel, just enough to pay the temple tax for two (cf. a parallel story of a pearl in a fish in b. Šabb. 119a–b). Peter is then to take it to the tax collectors for himself and for Jesus (ἀντὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ σοῦ, “*for me and for you*”). Jesus thus would pay the temple tax once more before he accomplished in his death on the cross the unique sacrifice that would make the temple superfluous. The fulfillment of Jesus’ directions and their truthfulness are not recorded but left assumed. Thus the miraculous provision is itself de-emphasized in favor of the underlying lessons.

The issue of the pericope concerns not the paying of taxes to the state, i.e., the secular authorities (this issue comes up specifically in **22:15–22**), but a **specifically religious tax** for the

maintenance of the temple and its ritual, wherein atonement for sins was made possible. Given the present situation of the **dawning of the kingdom of God** in the ministry and person of Jesus, the paying of the temple tax was or would be, strictly speaking, no longer a necessity (cf. **12:6**). That **nearness** is an inescapable aspect of this pericope, given the larger context of the Gospel. **Those who participate in this new reality are the children of the king** and thus need not pay the tax to support what will after all soon belong to the old order (cf. the prophecy of the destruction of the temple [**24:1-2**]). Yet for Jesus more important things are at hand, and there is no point to make an issue out of this, thereby offending the Jewish authorities. And so Jesus chooses not to exercise his and Peter's rightful freedom as the children of God not to pay the tax, thereby anticipating what would become a basic principle of Pauline practice and the practice of all knowledgeable and "stronger" Christians: **the avoidance of unnecessary offense** of the "weaker." At bottom here is love and concern for others rather than the use of one's rightful freedom. The two aspects of the pericope—loyalty to the temple together with freedom from the law of the temple tax—would have been particularly appropriate for those grappling with issues of continuity and discontinuity and, of course, would have had important ramifications for relationships with the Jewish community.

Craig Blomberg: What is clear is that Jesus is reinforcing two of the frequent themes of his teaching:

- (1) disciples should avoid unnecessarily offending others (**15:12-13** has shown that they cannot avoid all offense);
- (2) ultimately Jesus has freed them from obeying the law, both oral and written, except inasmuch as it is fulfilled and reinterpreted in his person and teaching (cf. under **5:17-20**). If God's people are freed from paying the tax for the temple's upkeep, they must be freed from the sacrifices for which the temple existed.

Charles Swindoll: Because none of us will ever face the quandary of whether to pay the temple tax, how does this passage apply to us today? Let me suggest that Jesus' way of dealing with the temple tax is a great illustration of the **tensions involved in living as dual citizens**. As God's children, we are citizens of heaven (**Phil. 3:20**). But we are also citizens of earth with rights and responsibilities (e.g., **Acts 22:28**). We are therefore expected both to honor and obey God and to honor and obey the government over us (**Rom. 13:1-5**). This includes paying taxes (**Rom. 13:6-7**)!

Make no mistake: The believer's **first obligation is to obey God**. Our citizenship in His kingdom is first and foremost. When the laws of the land are directly in conflict with His commands, His truth must prevail, and His will takes immediate precedence. In those cases, we are to obey God rather than men (**Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29**). However, in most cases, the laws of the government are in no way contrary to the laws of God. God never dictated how fast we should drive on the highway, but the government does. God never said what percentage of our income we should pay to the government, but our laws do. God never said whether we needed to have our dogs on leashes when walking in public places, but many cities have such laws. In matters like these, we should obey the government.

Yet what about cultural expectations for which there are neither divine commands nor secular laws, but merely societal norms and traditions? In such cases, we must be willing to give up our own preferences for the sake of the gospel. If a countercultural approach to life will bring scorn to the kingdom of God and to His people, we must be willing to surrender our personal rights

and conform to the expectations of our society —again, as long as it doesn't run contrary to God's Word. To help us think through some of these issues, let me ask a few questions.

Are you a good citizen of your country? Or do you take secret delight in breaking some of its laws, making excuses like God doesn't care how fast I drive? Remember your dual citizenship. In matters about which God has not spoken but your government has, you must submit to the authorities over you.

What is your understanding of freedom regarding neutral or gray issues? Do you think freedom in this case means doing whatever pleases you, regardless of how it may offend outsiders or place obstacles in their path to Christ? Do you push your liberty too far and then rationalize your way around a self-centered lifestyle? Think about what course of action will bring the least scorn on the people of God by casting the gospel in a negative light.

TEXT: Matthew 18:1-4

TITLE: *TRUE GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM – HOW DISCIPLES SHOULD VIEW THEMSELVES COMPARED TO ONE ANOTHER*

BIG IDEA:

GOD MEASURES GREATNESS BY THE STANDARD OF HUMBLE DEPENDENCE RATHER THAN ACHIEVEMENTS OR WORLDLY RECOGNITION OR SOCIAL-ECONOMIC STATUS

INTRODUCTION:

One benefit of getting together with your extended family over special holidays like Thanksgiving is that you get a chance to interact with some age groups that maybe you don't tend to spend as much time around. You appreciate the time you have left with those who are getting along in years and you experience the joy of new life and enthusiasm as children are born and grow up in the family. We certainly enjoyed the couple of young children that spent time with us on Thanksgiving Day. Our story today will star an unnamed young child – a child whom Jesus puts forward to drive home an important lesson about **Humble Dependence** in the kingdom of God. At issue on the heart of the disciples is the Question of Greatness – *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* How should we view ourselves and position ourselves compared with others in the body of Christ? Jesus responds with a simple Object lesson with accompanying Explanation. In **verses 5-9** Jesus will go on to make application in terms of how we should treat fellow believers.

How does the world measure Greatness? Think about any realm where the discussion can revolve around Who is the Greatest:

- Sports – pick one – football, baseball, basketball, tennis, ice hockey, soccer . . .
Hall of Fame for each sport has different criteria for judgment – what is more important – individual stats or championships and rings won?? How do you measure success and compare one player's performance against another – especially in different generations?
- Business – Profits are the most common standard of measurement – it's all about the dollars that end up on the bottom line; there are various ways that you establish the value of a business – my son Rick talks to me about this as his venture capital company decides which companies to invest money in
- Entertainment – How many Award shows are there each year?? You name the category and there are multiple shows to recognize the top performers in terms of popularity and fame and skill
- Politics – Blatant grab for Power and the taking credit for accomplishments – whether you deserve the credit or not –all about putting yourself forward and puffing yourself up
- Field of Education – more subtle – but aura of sophistication and arrogance – whether in the arena of teaching or of research and publishing
- Technology / Inventions – Creativity, Innovation, productivity recognized

We like to know **what criteria** will be used in the evaluation process. How would you like a contest where you invested valuable resources to compete along with many other people. At the appropriate time the judging took place and first place was awarded to Mr. X – but the reasoning behind the judgment was never explained. You would find that pretty unfair and frustrating.

The baton of spiritual leadership is about to be passed into the hands of the disciples. They have just been instructed again regarding their Master's impending cruel death. You would think they would be focused on caring for His needs. Instead their heart of selfishness and pride is revealed in their ambitious striving for the #1 spot in the kingdom. **“Tell us the rules,”** they cry out. **“If we have left all to follow You, we need to know where we stand in the pecking order.”**

We will find that any consideration of the subject of the greatest in the kingdom must take us back to focus on the Greatness of Jesus Christ ... Remember when Christ upbraided the rich young ruler in **Luke 18:19** – *there is only one who should be called Good – that is God alone* ... same thing when it comes to calling one Great ...

Craig Blomberg: **Chapter 18** contains Jesus' fourth major teaching block. The first three are the Sermon on the Mount (**chapters 5-7**), the instructions to the Twelve (**chapter 10**) and the kingdom parables (**chapter 13**). This teaching block covers various matters about life in the kingdom community, namely present kingdom life and humility, sin, and forgiveness. The fifth major block of teaching material is the Olivet Discourse (**chapters 24 and 25**). Jesus delivered this fourth discourse in Capernaum after He and the Twelve returned from Caesarea Philippi.

Walter Wilson: With **chapter 18**, we reach the fourth major discourse of the gospel, which of the five is also the shortest and most loosely organized. Like the mission discourse, this speech is addressed only to the disciples, suggesting that its provisions, while of relevance to the community as a whole, are meant especially for its leaders. Whereas the mission discourse focused on external threats to communal survival, **chapter 18** focuses on **internal threats**, especially the sorts of strains and tensions that can bedevil relationships between members of a nascent sectarian group with rigoristic tendencies.

Grant Osborne: Jesus begins by defining greatness in terms of **humility**; the model for true discipleship is the simple humility of a child. In the same way that a child exemplifies a lack of pride and concern for status, the faithful follower must adopt humility in all relationships. At the same time, the section begins with the issue of power and greatness and establishes a tone for the rest of the chapter; this humble use of power will enable the church to overcome sin and find forgiveness.

I. (:1) THE QUESTION – AMBITIOUS PRIDE FOCUSES ON INDEPENDENT SELF EXALTATION

A. Context for Teaching on Humble Dependence

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying,”

At least a temporal connection between this teaching and the previous incident about taxation;

Charles Swindoll: What had precipitated that misguided debate? Perhaps Peter, James, and John had been behaving arrogantly toward the other nine because they had been chosen to accompany Jesus up Mount Hermon to witness the Transfiguration. When asked what happened on the mountain,

they would have been tight-lipped according to Jesus' command (**Matt. 17:9**). This would have increased the tension between disciples already disposed to wrangle over their positions in relationship to Jesus. If that's what was going on, then the three seem to have strangely forgotten the fact that earlier Jesus had been standing in blazing glory while they were reduced to trembling wrecks on the ground. And the Twelve seem to have ignored the fact that Jesus had just told them that He would be betrayed and killed in Jerusalem. Instead of letting those realities sink in and transform their personal priorities, they argued with each other over pride of place.

R. T. France: And there is a further factor which has sharpened the question: in the previous pericope, as in several other situations already in the gospel, **Peter has been in the limelight**, living up to Matthew's singling him out as "*first*" (**10:2**). His declaration at **16:16** has evoked Jesus' warm commendation of his insight (**16:17**) and a consequent statement about his special role and authority in the founding of Jesus' *ekklēsia* (**16:18–19**), and Peter with his two closest colleagues has been singled out for a special journey with Jesus up the mountain (**17:1**), leaving the rest of the disciples behind to face a difficult situation. In **17:24–27** it has been assumed that Peter speaks for Jesus, and Jesus' "solution" to the tax problem has included Peter along with himself, to the apparent exclusion of the rest of the Twelve. "*So who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*"

D. A. Carson: Jesus has just been declared God's unique Son (**v.5**); yet his glory is veiled as he moves toward betrayal and death, thus establishing a pattern of humility for his followers (**18:1-5**). . . (**vv.5-9**) Jesus' disciples must deal as radically with pride as they were earlier commanded to deal with lust (**5:29-30**).

The **issue of Greatness** should focus on the **unique Majesty of the Royal Son of God** – not on the dependent subjects of His kingdom – who need to be humbly performing service and still viewing themselves as unprofitable servants – look at how the context highlights the Greatness of Christ:

- "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" (**16:13**) Passage has tremendous implications for Roman Catholicism – this is where the succession of Peter should naturally be taught; with Christ departing from the scene, will Peter now take over the visible leadership of God's people on earth? Apparently this position of primacy had not been established back in **Matt. 16:17-19** or that would have been the end of the debate.

- "*He was the Christ*" (16:20)
- Transfiguration: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him.*" (**17:5**)
- Ability of Jesus to heal vs the inability of the disciples because of the littleness of their Faith; they were big in their opinion of themselves (Pride) – but not like a child in terms of unquestioning dependence and faith and humility
- Incident about paying the Temple Tax – Jesus is in the unique position of being the Son of the King – "*the sons are exempt*" – not talking about civil taxes to the Roman govt.; This was a **Jewish religious tax** for supporting the service in the house of God

Conclusion of **John Piper: How do we humble ourselves?**

Is not the most effective way of bridling my delight in being made much of, **to focus on making much of God?** Self-denial and crucifixion of the flesh are essential, but O how easy it is to be made much of even for my self-denial? How shall this insidious motive of pleasure in being made much of then be broken except through bending all my faculties to delight in the pleasure of making much of God! Christian Hedonism is the final solution. It is deeper than death to self. You have to

go down deeper into the grave of the flesh to find the truly freeing stream of miracle water that ravishes you with the taste of God's glory. Only in that speechless, all-satisfying admiration is the end of self. Christians should be characterized as those who "make their boast in God" = message of **1 Corinthians 1:3; 3:21, 23**

B. Question That Exposes Lack of Humble Dependence and Failure to Properly Respond to the Unique and Supreme Greatness of Christ

"Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

You have all of the 12 gathered around Jesus in the dwelling place of Peter or the place where Jesus customarily stayed while in Capernaum; familiar home territory; know all of the players

You would think there would be some reluctance or shame on their part to even admit to such a question or debate on the subject of Who is #1 – **Mark 9:33-34** indicates they were ashamed and Jesus had to pull this out of them ...

Grant Osborne: It is clear that they are not so much interested in the qualities that lead to greatness or the kingdom realities behind such greatness. Their question, "*Who then is the 'greatest'* [the comparative *μείζων* for the superlative]?" shows their primary interest is in status, power, and authority—in particular, their own future power position (as will be demonstrated in **20:20–21**).

Bruce Ball: Signs of pride:

- Do I continually think about myself?
- Do I continually talk about myself?
- Do I use the pronoun "I" more than "YOU" or "WE"?
- Do I remember every service I may have rendered?
- Do I feel rejected if someone doesn't know how much I do?

<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=87749&Page=2>

John MacArthur: They were seeking self-glory, prestige, prominence and Jesus had just been teaching them, chapter 16, **verse 24**, that if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me, let him lose his life if he wants to find it. And He's been talking about self-denial and humility all along. And they still are self-seeking, grasping, desiring prominence. They are bent on self-glory. They are bent on sitting in the chief seats. . .

So, what Jesus is talking about is the Kingdom of heaven insofar as it means the rule and reign of God, the dominion of God, the sphere of God's influence and God's power and God's rule and God's blessing coming into the Kingdom of the Lord, coming into the sphere of God, coming in to eternal life, if you will, being saved, being redeemed, belonging to God, under His dominion. So, the concept of Kingdom of heaven simply means God's sphere of rule. . .

So, here we find--first of all--repentance, a sorrow for sin and a desire to change. And then out of that comes a sense of unworthiness knowing you don't have any resource for that, you can't change. You're personally bankrupt. You can't do anything to deserve it. And then you feel humble before such an awesome God and an awesome Kingdom. And then you learn that you've got to do more than just say you want that. It's not just saying you belong to the Lord. It's not external, it's something deep inside. And it's obedience to the will of God. And there you have submission to Lordship...submission to deity.

II. (:2-3) THE OBJECT LESSON AND EXPLANATION – HUMBLE DEPENDENCE IS GOD’S REQUIREMENT

What?? I thought all that was needed was Repentance and Faith??? Now you are adding other conditions???

You cannot truly acknowledge who God is in His Holiness and Majesty and Lordship and who you are in your fallen condition of Total Depravity and Helplessness and Moral Bankruptcy and Inability to save yourself – without **HUMILITY**

A. (:2) Presentation of the Object Lesson (Visual Aid)

“And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,”

William Barclay: There is a tradition that the child grew to be **Ignatius of Antioch**, who in later days became a great servant of the Church, a great writer, and finally a martyr for Christ. Ignatius was surnamed *Theophoros*, which means *God-carried*, and the tradition grew up that he had received that name because Jesus carried him on his knee. It may be so. Maybe it is more likely that it was Peter who asked the question, and that it was Peter’s little boy whom Jesus took and set in front of everyone, because we know that Peter was married (**Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5**).

Grant Osborne: The major points are the low status of children in the first century and their lack of interest in power and prestige.

John Walvoord: They had been asking the wrong question. They should have been asking, How can I best serve the King? Rather than, How can I best serve myself?

They should have been focused on the privilege of being in the kingdom rather than striving for the position of preeminence

Any striving for a position of preeminence in the church is so wrong – cf. **Diotrephes in 3 John 9**

Charles Swindoll: Jesus further explained that the key to having a place in the kingdom is humility. The child had no pride, no arrogance, no conceit, no expectations, no desire for promotion, no spirit of entitlement, and no phony piety. It was a what-you-see-is-what-you-get moment. Those who humble themselves like that little child —that is, those who understand their utter dependence on the mercy and grace of Jesus for their admission and position in relation to Him —will be regarded as greatest in the kingdom of heaven (**18:4**).

B. (:3) Explanation of the Object Lesson – Humble Dependence Required for Entrance Into the Kingdom

“and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

1. What Does Conversion Involve? Fundamentally a change in our relationship to God
2. How is Conversion similar to “*becoming like a child*”?

3. What is the Ongoing application of Conversion (vs. the one time conversion at the point of Justification)?

John MacArthur: Jesus pictures faith as the simple, helpless, trusting dependence of those who have no resources of their own. Like children, they have no achievements and no accomplishments to offer or commend themselves with.

John Piper: The key to humility is not merely feeling the absence of merit (as we saw in the last chapter), but feeling the presence of free grace. Humility is not only like the servant who says, “I am an unworthy servant”; humility is also like a child at rest in his father’s arms.” . . . We must humble ourselves in both ways: like an unworthy servant and like a trusting child.

R. T. France: The instruction to “*become like children*” is thus not about adopting some supposed ethical characteristic of children in general (innocence, humility, receptiveness, trustfulness or the like) but about accepting for oneself a position in the social scale which is like that of children, that is as the lowest in the hierarchy of authority and decision-making, those subject to and dependent on adults.

C. (:4) Explanation of the Object Lesson Extended – Humble Dependence Required as God’s Standard for Measuring True Greatness

“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

1. What is Involved in Humbling Ourselves like a child?

- a. Total Inability
- b. Complete Dependence

John Piper: For a strong, self-confident, self-sufficient, intelligent, resourceful, controlling person, Jesus’ demand was devastating. Jesus knew that children were not models for imitation in his day. The reason he chose them is because of their powerlessness and their low social standing. His demand is that we end our love affair with power and status and self sufficiency and rights and control. . .

Children may have all kinds of faults, but in a normal, healthy family they trust their daddy to take care of them. They do not lie awake wondering where the next meal is coming from. They do not fret in the stroller that the sky is turning gray. The child is, by its very position, lowly . . . and lives by instinctive confidence.

Stu Weber: This second statement served as a poetic restatement of the first (**18:3**), but it also clarified the specific childlike quality believers are to imitate—**humility**. All the complicated mental gymnastics adults use to avoid facing the truth take us farther from the kingdom. The person who comes to Jesus in simple humility, recognizing Jesus greatness and his own lowliness, is the greatest in God's kingdom. This person enters the kingdom by grace and serves in such a way as to inherit reward. A person like this warms the heart of the Almighty. He will be used by God to accomplish the greatest good for the kingdom.

2. Do we still want to be the “*greatest in the kingdom of heaven*”?

Focus our thoughts on the Greatness of Christ.

Respond as His servant – without taking thought for how we might benefit.

(not saying that rewards is not a proper motivation – how does this harmonize?)

- Whoever thinks he is the greatest is the furthest from it = Scribes and Pharisees
- Whoever strives to be the greatest is serving from the wrong motivation

Donald Hagner: From Jesus’ point of view, the disciples were so fundamentally on the wrong track in their admiration of, and quest of, what they considered to be greatness that it was questionable whether they really understood the kingdom he proclaimed and, in particular, that its basis lay in God’s free grace (cf. **Mark 10:15**). The status of the disciples before God was like that of dependent little children, and their corresponding attitude was to be a childlike humility, not pride of position or power (cf. **1 John 2:16–17**). Clearly, a primary virtue of those who would be disciples, hence for those in the church, is a humility that marks them off radically from a world obsessed with the quest for greatness construed only as power and status. The disciple is called to be like his or her Master, whose demeanor even as the Christ was one of humility (cf. **12:18–21; 21:5**).

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What qualities do you value highly when you compare yourself to others?
- 2) What prompted the disciples to consider this question of greatness in the kingdom?
- 3) What Christian leaders in your experience have served as a model of humility?
- 4) Where have you seen a spirit of rivalry and selfish ambition wreak havoc in the church?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kevin Higgins: Jesus was going to deliver, but not in the way they expected. His was a spiritual kingdom that was not of this world and there would be deliverance from the yoke of bondage, but not from the Romans. Jesus had been trying to tell His closest friends these things as He advanced toward the cross, but they just weren’t getting the point. In their minds Jesus was the King who was about to set up His kingdom right here on earth, and even better – they were His right hand men who were going to be the princes in this kingdom! In fact, Jesus had just told them that He was giving to them the keys to the kingdom of heaven and that they would have His authority to conduct kingdom business! They were going to be running the show! They just knew that Jesus was grooming them to run His kingdom when He threw off the shackles of governmental and religious oppression. He had been slowly turning over to them the responsibility of teaching and preaching and they were even performing the same miracles as Jesus! Listen to them, “Man, look at us! Look at what I can do and what I get to do!”

The disciples must have been greatly enamored with their own greatness and importance as time went on --

1. It Is Human Nature to Consider Self First (1)

The disciples had proven repeatedly that they were not too concerned with the needs of others. Remember when Jesus was speaking with the woman at the well?

2. The Lord's People Are of Little Use without Biblical Change (2-3)

So why call this kid? Think about it. Here is this little boy who is a nobody. He has nothing, can do nothing, and for all practical purposes knows nothing. All he did was exactly what Jesus told him to do, and that was come to Him. He called the kid and he came. The disciples were going to have to be converted, that is, they were going to have to have a change of mind and a change of heart, recognize how completely bankrupt they were, how completely dependent they were upon Jesus for their power and ability and everything else if they were going to be of any use to Jesus.

3. True Greatness Is Marked by Humility (4-6)

David Silversides:

1. Christ doing good to unworthy disciples

Condemnation of hierarchical systems of church government; disciples had some awareness of the unworthiness of their argument; Christ saw all the pride and vanity of their heart; He sees the filth of sinful ambition; how can we cherish proud thoughts while at the same time having some sense of the shame of such pride? We put aside the shameful feelings and indulge the proud thoughts; beware of vagueness about our thoughts; Beware of thoughts where you shy away from having them pinned down and defined in such a way as you would see your sinfulness;

Don't be selective in preaching the truth of God's Word

2. The necessity of a childlike spirit

3. Prevailing Pride is a sign of being unregenerate

Conversion here does not have to refer to initial conversion

Disciples (except for Judas) were genuine believers; born of the Spirit; made progress in humility
Deepening sense of unworthiness

True Christianity addresses pride; all false religion leaves pride intact

Dependent on the sovereign grace of God even for the willingness to depend upon Christ

Salvation is both necessary and it is entirely of God

C. J. Mahaney: Humility – True Greatness

As sinfully and culturally defined, pursuing greatness looks like this: Individuals motivated by self-interest, self-indulgence, and a false sense of self-sufficiency pursue selfish ambition for the purpose of self-glorification.

Contrast that with the pursuit of true greatness as biblically defined: *Serving others for the glory of God*. This is the genuine expression of humility; this is true greatness as the Savior defined it.

Grant Osborne: Discipleship and Lowliness

Discipleship means reversing the world's standards of greatness and embracing the position of lowliness. This is a difficult principle for Christians in modern society, for far more than was true in the first century, it is possible for the lowly today to rise above their upbringing. Thus the desire for status and power may be more widespread today than ever before, and so it is hard to embrace this

principle. Moreover, the “American way” is to make the best of yourself that you can, believing that “you can be anything you want to be.” Yet in this “upward mobility,” you are required by Christ to maintain humility and an attitude of service to others. **Wilkins** applies this to the problem of competition and its destructive effect on relationships because it involves “promotion of self at the expense of others.” Believers must depend on God and his mercy, not themselves.

William Barclay: Children have three great qualities which make them the symbol of those who are citizens of the kingdom.

(1) First and foremost, there is the quality which is the keynote of the whole passage, the child’s **humility**. Children do not wish to push themselves forward; rather, they wish to fade into the background. They do not wish for prominence; they would rather be left in obscurity. It is only as they grow up, and begin to be initiated into a competitive world, with its fierce struggle and scramble for prizes and for first places, that this instinctive humility is left behind.

(2) There is the child’s **dependence**. To children, a state of dependence is perfectly natural. They never think that they can face life by themselves. They are perfectly content to be utterly dependent on those who love them and care for them. If men and women would accept the fact of their dependence on God, a new strength and a new peace would enter their lives.

(3) There is the child’s **trust**. Children are instinctively dependent, and just as instinctively they trust their parents that their needs will be met. When we are children, we cannot buy our own food or our own clothes, or maintain our own home; yet we never doubt that we will be clothed and fed, and that there will be shelter and warmth and comfort waiting for us when we come home. When we are children, we set out on a journey with no means of paying the fare, and with no idea of how to get to our journey’s end, and yet it never enters our heads to doubt that our parents will bring us safely there.

The child’s humility is the pattern of the behaviour of Christians to their neighbours, and the child’s dependence and trust are the pattern of the Christian attitude towards God, the Father of all.

TEXT: Matthew 18:5-9

TITLE: *GUARD AGAINST DANGEROUS STUMBLING BLOCKS*

BIG IDEA:

DON'T BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO FELLOW BELIEVERS OR TO YOURSELF

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: in Matthew **chapter 18** a most-interesting thing is going on. The disciples, children of God, who belong to Jesus Christ, are **provoking one another to sin**. By arguing and hassling and debating about who is the greatest in the kingdom, they are provoking each other to bitterness, to rivalry, to ambition, to pride, to envy, to jealousy, to self-seeking. In other words, they are mutually causing each other to sin. And our Lord takes on this matter by instructing them as to the importance of not causing one another to sin. . .

Jesus brings up this whole matter of our responsibility in regard to each other. Most people, and I suppose we could say this hoping that it were true, most people that call themselves Christians have some concern for their own holiness. Most people who really are Christians certainly are concerned about their own purity of life. But I wonder if we really ever stop to think about the purity of the lives of other people. Maybe we're sort of content if we can just take care of ourselves and we don't worry about how we affect anyone else. That's quite contrary to what God is saying and what Christ is teaching in this passage. We must not only do no evil in our own lives but **we must never cause another Christian to sin**. That is the specific message of this passage.

J. Ligon Duncan: **All temptation is a challenge to God's lordship in our lives.** And we can ask these two questions: Do I want God more than I want this forbidden pleasure? That's the sinful temptation. Or do I want God more than I want this gift that I know that comes from him? Do we want the gifts that God gives more than we want God Himself? If we are succumbing to either of those two temptations, either following after forbidden pleasures, or loving God's gifts more than we love the giver, we have already lost the battle of temptation. And Jesus is saying there are dread results from losing that battle. Jesus speaking of hell, of eternal fire, in this passage, is an argument, an inducement for us to mortify sin. He is saying, "If your heart follows the way of your desire in temptation, then you will be separated from Me eternally." Why? Because to sin once causes you to lose your salvation? No. But because your temptation and your incessant following of that temptation reveals your heart. It reveals that you love something else more than you love God. And that is why it is such a danger.

Charles Swindoll: It may seem that Jesus' teaching had gotten off track. Didn't He start by scolding His disciples for arguing over who was the greatest . . . then veer off into valuing children . . . and now wander into a discussion about the seriousness of sin? Actually, Jesus was setting up a contrast between the self-centered life and the other-centered life. Craig Blomberg notes, "A stark contrast thus remains between those who recognize their complete dependence on God, and who therefore welcome other believers in humility and service, and those, including professing believers, who lead themselves and others to sin." Two paths stood before the disciples—one of selfishness, pride, and a spiraling into sin that would destroy self and others; the other of selflessness, humility, and leading even the weakest believers into righteousness.

I. (:5-6) DON'T BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO FELLOW BELIEVERS

What is the connection of vv.5-6 to what went before? Our view of the greatness of Christ must be demonstrated in how we treat the least significant of Christ's followers. Humility eliminates favoritism in how we treat other believers.

J. Ligon Duncan: one way you can see this kind of true humility manifest is in **your attitude towards others**. And He begins to stress to the disciples how important it is that they not become obstacles to the faith of others, even those who are considered least and weak in the eyes of the world. They are to be concerned for those who are unimportant, for those who are marginalized, for those who are not powerful, for those who are least. Their concern for just those kinds of people manifests the fact that they do not think of themselves as high and exalted. And so in their very treatment of those who are least, they show that their heart attitude is, 'No Lord, I am least. And so I must serve my neighbor first.' And Jesus says that is a sure sign that you have grasped **kingdom humility**.

A. (:5) **Encouragement: Helping (Receiving) Fellow Believers – Meeting Their Needs**

"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;"

In fact we should seek out opportunities to care for those who are the most needy = Reverse Favoritism; **James 2:1-17**

Hiebert: There is a spiritual unity between the humble believer, Christ the sent one, and the Father who commissioned Him.

Donald Hagner: Receiving a disciple here, as there (where the same verb, δέχεται, "receive," is used), apparently means showing hospitality and consideration to disciples in pursuit of their calling, and hence especially in missionary work.

Grant Osborne: "Receive" (δέξεται) involves welcome, loving reception, and acceptance. **Hagner** takes it especially of hospitality shown to disciples in missionary work (cf. **10:42**), but more likely it is intended of **community life in general**. A good example would be **Rom 14:1–15:13**, where Jewish and Gentile Christians in conflict are told to **accept one another**. This is to be done "in my name," i.e., as part of his community and under his authority (cf. **7:22; 10:22; 18:20; 19:29; 24:5, 9; 28:19**). To do so is to receive Jesus himself and to experience his blessing. Since Jesus is one with each of his followers, the one showing mercy experiences Christ's presence in the one they are helping.

John MacArthur: It is impossible to separate the Lord from his people. The prophet said, "*He that toucheth Israel toucheth the apple of my eye.*" Now the apple of his eye isn't out here some apple, the best-looking apple in the bunch. That was the Hebrew way of saying the pupil of the eye. God says when you touch Israel, you jam your finger in my eye, and that irritates me. You're taking a poke at God's eye, the most vulnerable part of the exposed anatomy, the most sensitive thing to be wounded or injured. **You are poking God in the most sensitive area when you touch his people; that's a basic principle.** Why? Because when you receive his people, **verse 5**, you're receiving him. The implication is he's bound up with his people as one. Now this is a favorite teaching of the Lord, the concept of the **believer's unity to him** is really in many ways the heart and soul of Christianity. We're not people who believe in a system; we're people

who are united with God, aren't we? We are one with Jesus Christ. We don't just follow his teachings, we're one with him. And the Lord taught using this principle again and again. One of his favorite truths in **Matthew 10:40** we saw that he said, "*He receiveth you receiveth me, he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*" (cf. **Mat. 25:34ff**)

William Barclay: To teach unruly, disobedient, restless little children can be a wearing job. To satisfy the physical needs of children, to wash their clothes and tend their cuts and soothe their bruises and cook their meals may often seem a very unromantic task; the cooker and the sink and the first-aid kit have not much glamour; but there is no one in all this world who helps Jesus Christ more than the teacher of the little child and the harassed, hard-pressed parent in the home. All who take on these tasks will find a glory in the grey, and discover wonder in the ordinary, if in the child they sometimes glimpse none other than Jesus himself.

Thomas Constable: The child in view in these verses is not a literal child, but the disciple who has humbled himself or herself, and in so doing has become childlike (**vv. 3-4**). Jesus was speaking of receiving a humble disciple of His in **verse 5**. (Jesus taught the importance of receiving a little child in **Mark 9:36-37** and **Luke 9:48**.) Whoever receives a disciple in Jesus' name welcomes the disciple because he or she is one of Jesus' disciples, not because that one is personally superior, influential, or prominent. The person who welcomes one of Jesus' humble disciples, simply for Jesus' sake, virtually welcomes Jesus Himself (cf. **10:42; 25:34-46**). In this context, as well as in **chapter 10**, Jesus was speaking of welcoming in the sense of extending hospitality—with its accompanying encouragement and support. To *receive* (Gr. *dekomai*) means to receive into fellowship.

B. (:6) Warning: Hurting (Rejecting) Fellow Believers – Causing Them to Stumble

“but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

“*little ones*” -- **Piper**: emphasizes that they are not great in the eyes of the world. They are not strong. They are not self-sufficient. Instead, what marks them is that they “believe in me.” That is, they trust not in themselves but in Jesus.

Jeffrey Crabtree: *Offend* (v. 6, Greek *skandalizō*) here means to “cause to stumble in faith or entice to sin” (**Grimm**'s 576). Jesus, then, in this discussion was not speaking of personal offenses as in **17:27** but of occasions to sin (**Hagner** 33B:522). To offend or cause to sin in **verse 6** is the verb form of the word translated *offences* in **verse 7**.

Both the word “*depth*” (**Evans**, Matthew 341; **Ex. 15:5; Neh. 9:11; Ps. 63:9**) and the size of the millstone intensify through hyperbole (**Wilkins** 614) the image of judgment. “*Depth*” (Greek, *pelagos*) speaks of the open sea (**Acts 27:5**), that deep part of the sea where ships travel (**Grimm**'s 499). The millstone was the size and kind turned by a donkey, not the hand mills women normally used (ISBE III:356). Donkeys pulled this wheel-shaped stone around a center pole over a flat bottom stone to crush grain. The millstone was so heavy and the water so deep that a person could not possibly free himself. Jesus' point was God's judgment against those who lead others to sin should be feared more than inescapable death by drowning.

Robert Gundry: Such a stone, hung by rope around the neck, would not only ensure drowning but also kill all hope of the drowned body's rising to the surface and floating ashore for burial,

especially since “the depth of the sea” refers to the open sea far from shore. People of the Bible looked with horror on any kind of death that precluded burial. The un-Jewishness of execution by drowning intensifies the horror. But if such a fate is advantageous as compared with causing a fellow disciple’s apostasy, how much more horrible must be the judgment of the disciple who causes the apostasy!

William Hendriksen: The millstone is the top-stone of the two between which the grain is crushed. The reference is not to the hand-mill but to the much heavier stone drawn by a donkey. In the middle of the top-stone, whether of a hand-mill or of a donkey-drawn mill, there is a hole through which grain can be fed so as to be crushed between the two stones. The presence of this hole explains the phrase “*that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck.*” . . .

However, it is not merely the lesson of trustful humility that the Master is here teaching his disciples. The sinful yearning to be greater than one’s fellowmen and to rule over them is not a merely passive attitude. It is a very active drive. Therefore also its opposite and antidote can be nothing less than the similarly active effort to love all, that is, not only to become like the children but also to love them and to protect them; indeed, to exercise this same loving attitude toward all, gladly forgiving all.

S. Lewis Johnson: The best example of the application of this truth of not offending one of these little ones is the Lord Jesus himself. And we have seen in the preceding incident, last Sunday, in the miracle of the tribute money, that the Lord Jesus claimed that he did not have to pay the temple tax, as a matter of fact the whole temple belonged to him. But he stated in the 27th verse of chapter 17, notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, and he went ahead and did that which was which it was unnecessary for him to do. So he beautifully illustrates the fact that one should not offend one of these little ones.

Ray Fowler: (19:13-15) People were bringing their little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples tried to stop them. They obviously thought Jesus was too busy or the children were not important enough to interrupt his schedule. But Jesus said let the little children come and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.

Dan Brooks: How do we cause others to sin?

- Eve offered Adam what God has clearly forbidden; outright transgression and inviting others to participate; **Gen. 3**
- Passively consent in what is wrong; Aaron – while Moses is on the mountain; Israel decides they cannot wait and indulge in idolatrous worship; forgiveness of God = ended up anointing Aaron as first high priest
- Careless exercise of liberty – things that are truly indifferent; matters of conscience; **Rom. 14:20-21**

John MacArthur: How do we cause others to sin?

- Direct temptation – Eve is classic illustration
- Indirect temptation by provoking people – **Ephes. 6:4**
- Setting a sinful example
 - When we lead people right into sin
 - When we abuse our liberty

II. (:7) DANGER OF STUMBLING BLOCKS

A. Stumbling Blocks Present a Real Danger – Caveat of Temptation

“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!”

Thomas Constable: Jesus pronounced woe on the world because it is the **source of opposition** to Him and His disciples, and the source of much stumbling and many stumbling blocks. “*Woe*” announces judgment (cf. **11:21; 23:13-32**). It is inevitable that the world will reject Jesus’ disciples, but God will hold those who do reject them responsible (cf. **Isa. 10:5-12; Acts 4:27-28**).

David Guzik: The first woe is a cry of pity for a world in danger of offenses. The *second woe* is a warning to the one who brings or introduces evil to others.

Grant Osborne: Jesus is saying that divine judgment will fall on the world because its system is the true source of the stumbling that will destroy the faith of too many “*little ones*.” This also means that the **false teachers** [cf. Jewish religious leaders] and others who cause such spiritual catastrophes are truly of the world.

Stu Weber: Woe means that **God’s judgment is about to fall**. It is as though God had his hand raised, ready to come down in wrath at any moment. Jesus pronounced impending judgment on the world for things that cause people to sin. The secular world is filled with temptations for believers. One day this world will be destroyed. The inevitability of temptations in the world does not excuse one’s sin.

B. Stumbling Blocks Are Inevitable in This Sinful World – Certainty of Temptation

“For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come;”

Charles Swindoll: Jesus condemned the world for its plethora of temptations that coax the weak, the innocent, the unlearned, and the naïve down a path of sinfulness. The word “*woe*,” which Jesus expresses toward the world, suggests a strong exclamation of deep emotion —either sorrow or anger. Though these snares are inevitable in a fallen world, those who perpetrate the wickedness are called out and will suffer dire consequences.

R. T. France: “*The world*” (*kosmos*) here refers especially to the **world of people**, rather than the physical creation as a whole; for this sense of *kosmos* cf. **4:8; 5:14; 13:38; 26:13**. People in general are bound to be confronted by stumbling-blocks; the world is a dangerous place. The “*necessity*” of such problems (*anankē* speaks of **inevitability**) springs not from a specific divine purpose but from the nature of things in a fallen world; cf. **13:37–43** for this acceptance that evil (including “*stumbling-blocks*,” **13:41**) will remain in the world until the final consummation. Discipleship was never going to be an easy proposition, but that is no reason for anyone to make it harder by irresponsible behavior toward fellow-disciples. The idea that people are responsible for their actions even though these are “*necessary*” is one which runs through both OT and NT (most notably in the story of Judas Iscariot; note a similar “*woe*” specifically directed at him in **26:24**). The fact that a person is operating within a determined structure does not excuse them for their personal choices and decisions.

Albert Barnes: That is, such is the depravity of man that there will be always some who are attempting to make others sin; some people of wickedness endeavoring to lead Christians astray, and rejoicing when they have succeeded in causing them to fall. Such, also, is the strength of our native corruption and the force of passion, that our besetting sins will lead us astray.

Gill's Exposition: Considering the implacable malice of Satan, his unwearied and indefatigable pains, the malignity of the men of the world, their aversion and enmity to the Gospel of Christ, and all good men; it cannot be thought, God suffering such things for the trial of such as are truly gracious, and for the discovery of hypocrites, and for the manifestation of his grace, power, and faithfulness in the preservation of his dear children, that it should be otherwise, but that such offences should be. . .

C. Source of Stumbling Blocks Liable to Severe Judgment – Culpability of Temptation *“but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”*

J. Ligon Duncan: In that little verse (:7) the Lord Jesus stresses two things. First of all, that temptation is going to be a certainty in this life. The Lord Jesus wants you to know that there is never going to be a day in this life when you're not going to face temptation. But along side of that, the Lord Jesus also wants us to understand though we are going to live in a world fraught with temptation, He does not want us to be contributors to that problem. On the one hand, there is the **certainty of temptation**. But on the other hand, in **verse 7**, there is the **culpability for temptation**. He says that temptation is certain, but let me tell you this, if you become a tempter, you will be held responsible for it. And in **verse 7**, as He pronounces a woe against the world because of stumbling blocks, He is teaching us as His disciples, as His followers, that we are not to become stumbling blocks. We must determine not to be stumbling blocks. Jesus, when He pronounces a woe against the world is using the world in the sense of that system which is allied and united against God; mankind alienated from the life of God; mankind opposed to the life of God. And He pronounces a woe against those who are part of that world system.

And His purpose in pronouncing this woe against world while He's talking to His disciples is precisely this: He is warning His disciples not to act as if they were part of the world in opposition to God. And you notice the juxtaposition here: Jesus' disciples and the world. Now let me tell you that understanding that juxtaposition is a key to understanding temptation, because as we heard from **Thomas Watson** in the beginning of the service, all temptation is a test of sincerity. All temptation, all temptation invites you to, believers anyway, to put one foot in the church and the other foot in the world. All temptation invites believers to try and be partially loyal to God and partially loyal to the desires and the system of the world. And the Lord Jesus immediately says to His disciples, “It's got to be one way or the other. You are either under the pronouncements of woe that I have pronounced upon the world, or you are part of My disciples.” And so He's making it very clear to the disciples that being part of the world will involve judgment.

Daniel Doriani: The Bible often teaches the importance of leading and nurturing young believers; this passage, conversely, tells us **we dare not mislead them**.

D. A. Carson: Implicitly, the offense is gravely magnified when, with particular perversity, some wicked people self-consciously try to entice Christ's “*little ones*” into sin—but the evil is broader than that. Because it signals a rejection of Jesus as well as damaging his people, drowning at sea

before the evil was committed is much preferable to eschatological judgment, the eternal fire of hell (vv.8–9) that awaits the perpetrators. Drowning was a not uncommon punishment in Greek and Roman society.

III. (:8-9) DON'T BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO YOURSELF – DEAL DRASTICALLY WITH YOUR OWN SIN

Charles Swindoll: In **18:8-9**, Jesus leveled the same severe warning against those things in our lives that lead to personal sin and transgression. After all, those who cause others to stumble began by stumbling themselves, and those personal patterns of sin develop for us when we allow stumbling blocks in our own lives. This brings up an often-neglected dimension to sin: Succumbing to temptation is never personal and private. The consequences always affect others in ways we can't necessarily predict. If we let stumbling blocks into our own lives, eventually a chain reaction will ensue that causes others to stumble as well.

Richard Gardner: Here Matthew is drawing on Mark (cf. the three parallel sayings in **Mark 9:43-47**), using sayings cited earlier in the discussion of adultery in the Sermon on the Mount (**5:29-30**). In the context of **chapter 18**, the sayings can be interpreted in two different ways.

- According to some writers, cutting off and tearing out refer to **excommunication**: The church must remove those members whose behavior endangers the faith of others and the life of the community (cf. **1 Cor. 5:2, 13**, and **Dietrich Philips** in Williams:-246).
- It is more likely, however, that the sayings call for **self-examination** on the part of each believer: If any part of our life causes us to stumble, and therefore makes us an obstacle to the faith of other Christians, we must do whatever it takes to correct the situation (cf. the comments on **5:29-30**).

[Alternate View:]

Grant Osborne: εἰ is a condition of fact and assumes that such false teachers (the leaders in Jesus' day, heretical teachers in Matthew's time) are present. Yet this is strongly debated, for the majority of scholars take this in the same sense it had in **5:29–30**, namely, sinful parts of the disciples' own "body" or self that lead them into sin. In **5:29–30** it was temptation to sexual lust, while here it is sin committed in the Christian assembly.

However, **Thompson** argues

- (1) that the **causative force** of the key word "*stumble*" (σκανδαλίζω) must be respected, so that it means "cause others to stumble," and
- (2) that the condition of fact in "*if*" (εἰ) implies a real situation in the community.

Moreover, the **context is corporate**, and vv. **6–7** have warned the church against this very activity, namely, individuals who cause "*the little ones*" to fall spiritually. Thus the terms "*your hand/foot*" are personified to depict false teachers and others who are detrimental to the life of the church. . .

So Jesus takes the personal metaphors of **5:29–30** and applies them corporately here to life in the church. The imagery of amputation parallels **18:17** and refers to the excommunication of offending members. As such this is a call to **church discipline**.

A. (:8) Sin Involving Your Hand or Foot

1. Dangerous Offense

“And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble,”

2. Drastic Response

“cut it off and throw it from you;”

3. Dread of Eternal Hell Fire

*“it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame,
than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire.”*

Matthew McCraw: Jesus is using **hyperbole** to make this point: we must take our sin very seriously and we must be totally committed to defeating it. Jesus says that it’s better to sacrifice in this life than to go into hellfire without sacrificing. Listen, church, hell is real. We don’t know exactly what it’s like, but it’s described as a place with great evil, tortuous fire, great agony, great suffering, and terrible judgment. We don’t want to find out what it’s really like. Sacrificing in order to avoid sin and follow Jesus is worth it every single time. Do whatever you can to avoid sin and pursue holiness. Don’t ask yourself how close you can get to sin, ask yourself how close you can get to Jesus.

B. (:9) Sin Involving Your Eye

1. Dangerous Offense

“And if your eye causes you to stumble,”

2. Drastic Response

“pluck it out, and throw it from you.”

3. Dread of Eternal Hell Fire

*“It is better for you to enter life with one eye,
than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.”*

David Turner: Failure to deal radically with sinful proclivities indicates that one is in danger of punishment in hellfire (cf. **3:10–12; 5:22; 25:41**). As grotesque as these images of amputation and gouging are, the prospect of eternal punishment is far worse. This language is hypothetical as well as hyperbolic (cf. **5:29–30**). Ridding oneself of one’s hands, feet, and eyes would not reach the root of sin, **the heart (15:18–20)**. The point is, rather, that one must deal radically with one’s sinful tendencies (cf. **Prov. 4:23–27; Rom. 13:11–14**). This is necessary before one attempts to correct another member of the community (**Matt. 18:15; cf. 7:3–5; Gal. 6:1**).

Warren Wiersbe: Humility begins with self-examination, and it continues with self-denial. Jesus was not suggesting that we maim our bodies, for harming our physical bodies can never change the spiritual condition of our hearts. Rather, he was instructing us to perform “spiritual surgery” on ourselves, removing anything that causes us to stumble or that causes others to stumble. The humble person lives for Jesus first and others next – he puts himself last. He is happy to deprive himself even of good things, if it will make others happy. Perhaps the best commentary on this is **Philippians 2:1-18**.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What's the connection between humility and showing mercy to meet the practical needs of those in Christ who are marginalized and especially vulnerable?
- 2) What are the different ways that someone can cause a believer in Christ to stumble?
- 3) Does this passage teach that you can lose your salvation? Why or Why not?
- 4) What radical steps have you taken to root out sin in your own life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: To make a break here is somewhat artificial. Jesus' flow of thought was continuous through at least **18:14**. We recognize the continuity of **18:5-9** with the preceding in the use of a little child (**18:5**) and these little ones (**18:6**). But there is also a shift in emphasis here, from the central character of God's child to the Father's protective warning against any who would corrupt his child. Jesus answered Peter's opening question (**18:1**) by saying, in essence, "The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is a weak, vulnerable child who needs protection."

Grant Osborne: [He takes the view that **vv. 8-9** refer to **corporate discipline** of offending members of the assembly.]

The problem dealt with is Christians who become "*stumbling blocks*" to others in the community, i.e., who lead them into sin and even cause them to lose their faith. This warns the community that such will bring severe judgment from God, and so the community had better **discipline** such members before it is too late.

The church is also responsible to protect its members from **spiritual predators** who will destroy their walk with God. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of "*savage wolves*" who would "*not spare the flock*," comprising some "*even from your own number*" (**Acts 20:29-30**), a prophecy that came true about five years later (**Eph 4:14; 1 Tim 4**). The church must respond swiftly and firmly to such dangerous people, and Jesus demands excommunication for such unless they repent (**18:17; cf. 1 Cor 5:3-5; 1 Tim 1:20**).

William Hendriksen: To summarize, what Jesus is saying in **verses 1-6** is this, that, instead of striving to become greatest in the kingdom of heaven (**verse 1**), in the process of attempting this hurting others instead of guarding them (**verse 6**), the disciples should rather learn to forget about themselves and to focus their loving attention upon Christ's little ones, upon the lambs of the flock and upon all those who in their humble trustfulness (or trustful humility) resemble these lambs. By welcoming them they will be welcoming their Lord (**verse 5**). This they will learn to do if they themselves also become like the little children, even like this little one whom Jesus has taken into his arms. That is the only way to greatness in the kingdom of heaven (**verses 2-4**). . .

It is however, impossible in this present realm of sin to put an end to every temptation, every enticement to sin: *For temptations must come . . .* It is of the very nature of sin that it spreads. It would be easier to stop water hyacinths from clogging the waterways of Florida than to prevent

temptations from clogging the tracks of the human race, including even the church. But though it is impossible to eradicate temptation, by God's grace it is possible to prevent oneself from belonging to the company of the tempters. . .

By God's grace it is also possible to overcome temptations in one's own life. . . Drastic action is necessary to overcome temptation, action made possible by prayer (**Matt. 6:13; 26:41**).

Matthew Henry: Considering the cunning and malice of Satan, and the weakness and depravity of men's hearts, it is not possible but that there should be offences. God permits them for wise and holy ends, that those who are sincere, and those who are not, may be made known. Being told before, that there will be seducers, tempters, persecutors, and bad examples, **let us stand on our guard**. We must, as far as lawfully we may, part with what we cannot keep without being entangled by it in sin. The outward occasions of sin must be avoided. If we live after the flesh, we must die. If we, through the Spirit, **mortify the deeds of the body**, we shall live. Christ came into the world to save souls, and he will reckon severely with those who hinder the progress of others who are setting their faces heavenward.

TEXT: Matthew 18:10-14

TITLE: PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

BIG IDEA:

3 REASONS WHY WE MUST NOT DESPISE ANY OF GOD'S VULNERABLE SHEEP SINCE THEY ALL ARE INDIVIDUALLY VALUED

INTRODUCTION:

David Turner: In addition to dealing decisively with sin in their own lives, disciples must also avoid contempt for fellow members of the community (cf. **Rom. 14:3, 10, 15; 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12**), described here, as in **18:6**, as "*little ones*." These must not be **despised**, because angels represent them before God (cf. **Heb. 1:14**). Such angelic ministry to believers is real, albeit mysterious.

Richard Gardner: When weaker members stray, therefore, the community must not despise them for their weakness, but rather act with loving care to find and restore them.

Bethany Bible Church: Here then, we see that Jesus calls us to greatly respect and highly regard the "*little ones*" who believe on Him.

- He calls us to make very sure that we never look down on them or despise them.
- He calls us to diligently seek them when they wander away.
- And He calls us to give ourselves to the pursuit of the Father's good will for their lives.

Craig Blomberg: The main plot unfolds exactly as in **Luke 15:3-7**, but most of the details differ. These two passages probably represent similar teachings of Jesus from two separate settings in his ministry. In Luke Jesus uses the lost sheep to represent **unsaved sinners**. In Matthew he applies the parable to **errant disciples**, as the distinctive framework of the passage (vv. **10, 14**) makes plain.

Matthew McCraw: **God doesn't want to lose any of His children.** God doesn't want to lose any of His followers. Because God has this heart towards His children, we should as well. Our hearts should reflect the heart of God, amen?

Part of our vision of developing disciples who love the church is that we will go after those members of our church who are lost and wandering. We must go after them with the love and compassion of God the Father, seeking to bring them back where they belong.

We should not look with judgment on those who are wandering, but with love and compassion. We all need the grace of God and it is God's grace that brings us back and puts us back on the right path. . .

One lost sheep is worth seeking out and one found sheep is worth celebrating!

Donald Hagner: So important are the disciples of Jesus, these "*little ones*," that they have "*their*" (αὐτῶν) angels, who presumably look after their welfare primarily through intercession, but perhaps also in other ways. This passage falls short of describing "guardian" angels (despite the

“guardian angels” of NEB; corrected in REB to “angels”) assigned to each individual Christian, who attempt to keep her or him out of danger. A more general idea is in view, namely, that angels represent the “*little ones*” before the throne of God. The point here is not to speculate on the ad hoc role of angels in aiding disciples of Jesus but rather simply to emphasize the importance of the latter to God. If the very angels of God’s presence are concerned with the “*little ones*,” how much more then should also fellow Christians be for one another! They are to be received and esteemed; special care must furthermore be taken not to cause them to stumble.

I. (:10a) PROHIBITION – DON’T DESPISE ANY OF GOD’S VULNERABLE SHEEP

“*See that you do not despise one of these little ones,*”

Jeffrey Crabtree: “*Despise*” (Greek *kataphroneō*) means “to feel contempt for someone or something because it is thought to be bad or without value” (Louw and Nida I:763).

Grant Osborne: “*Hold in contempt*” (καταφρονήσητε) connotes both the attitude of despising a person and the contemptuous actions that result (so Gundry).

Who are the “*little ones*” here? Throughout Matthew the “*little ones*” are disciples. Yet there may also be double meaning: they are all believers as despised by the world (so it refers to all relationships in the community) and also those of lower status in the community (thus referring also to economic and ethnic prejudice in the community). It may also be the leaders of the church looking down on those under them (so Luz).

Charles Swindoll: Returning to the spiritual lesson related to **those who appear to be least in the kingdom** but who are actually greatest, Jesus urged the disciples not to devalue and discount such people. How easy to undervalue or discount little children, or, for that matter, other believers who are weak and fragile in their faith. By showing preferential treatment to those who are gifted or wealthy or famous or powerful, we turn our backs on those less noticeable members of the church who often exhibit the character of Christ better than others. Like children who live under a special watchful eye of heaven, those with simple, childlike faith are watched over by the angels themselves (18:10). The God-man Himself gave up His life for such seemingly insignificant ones, who would be utterly lost without Him (18:11). If heaven places such a value on lost and weak souls, shouldn’t we?

John MacArthur: Two main points:

- The Rule (:10)

The word “*despise*” in the Greek is very interesting: *kataphroneō*. *Phroneō* has to do with the mind and thinking, and *kata* is down. **Don’t think down on people.** Don’t put yourself up here and look at them as if they were below you, as if they were beneath you, looking at them with disdain, looking at them with indifference, as if they were valueless or useless or worthless, holding them in contempt, not worth your consideration.

- The Reason (:12-14)

II. (:10B) PRECIOUSNESS PROVEN BY THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS – REASON #1 = EVERY SHEEP MATTERS TO THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN

*“for I say to you,
that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.”*

William Barclay: To say that these angels behold the face of God in heaven means that they always have the right of **direct access to God**. The picture is of a great royal court where only the most favoured courtiers and ministers and officials have direct access to the king. In the sight of God, the children are so important that their guardian angels always have the right of direct access to the inner presence of God.

Craig Blomberg: **Heb 1:14** teaches that angels are concerned for believers and serve them. So Jesus' words here are appropriate even if we cannot be sure of all the specific ways in which angels minister to us.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus says no one should despise little ones, for *“their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (18:10)*. The passage does not necessarily imply that each child has one angel. One angel could guard many people. “To use an athletic analogy, the angels may be playing ‘zone’ rather than ‘man on man’ defense.” Still, the Lord has assigned angels to protect his *“little ones,”* and those angels have free access to the Father’s presence.

[Verse 11 not found in the best manuscripts --

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”]

III. (:12-13) PURSUIT OF THE LOST SHEEP – REASON #2 = EVERY SHEEP MATTERS TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD

(:12a) Call to Reflection

“What do you think?”

Stu Weber: *What do you think?* was a common way for a Jewish teacher to start his students' minds working over a mental problem, as he introduced a new concept or teaching (**17:25; 21:28; 22:42**).

A. (:12b) Priority of Seeking the Lost Sheep

*“If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains
and go and search for the one that is straying?”*

William Barclay: In Judaea, it was tragically easy for sheep to go astray. The pasture land is on the hill country which runs like a backbone down the middle of the land. This ridge-like plateau is narrow, only a few miles across. There are no restraining walls. At its best, the pasture is sparse. And, therefore, the sheep are always liable to wander; and, if they stray from the grass of the plateau into the gullies and the ravines at each side, they have every chance of finishing up on some ledge from which they cannot get up or down, and of being marooned there until they die. . .

The love of God is an **individual love**. The ninety-nine were not enough; one sheep was out on the hillside, and the shepherd could not rest until he had brought it home. However large a family may be, parents cannot spare even one; there is not one who does not matter. God is like that; God cannot be happy until the last wanderer is gathered in.

David Turner: Although it is not stated, one tends to assume that the shepherd would not jeopardize the entire flock in order to seek the single lost sheep (contra **Huffman** 1978: 211). The phrasing of the parable may allude to **Ezek. 34:10–12, 16**.

Craig Blomberg: The *ninety-nine* refer to faithful followers of Jesus who no longer need to repent because they are not straying from him. The wandering sheep is the believer—“*one of these little ones*”—who wanders away from intimate fellowship and consistent obedience. The Greek “*one of [them]*” (v. 12) employs the same wording as in vv. 5-6, 10 and reappears in v. 14, so it is clear that Jesus still has **Christians** rather than literal young people in mind. Leaving the ninety-nine does not imply they are unprotected; other shepherds would keep watch over them. At the spiritual level, of course, **God is able to search for the wanderer even while still protecting those who have not strayed.**

Stu Weber: This emphasis also drew attention to the Father's grace. God wanted the universe to know that he is a God who pursues his own and rescues even those who rebel against him.

B. (:13) Joy of Finding the Lost Sheep

“And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.”

Grant Osborne: The *μᾶλλον* indicates God rejoices over the returned sheep “*more than*” those believers who remain in the fold. This hardly means he has no joy in the faithful but rather highlights the **importance of restoration**. Parallel passages are found in **Gal 6:1** (the “*Spirit-led*” restoration of those caught in sin) and especially **Jas 5:19–20** (those who “*bring them back*” will “*save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins*”). The latter passage provides further reasons for the joy.

R. T. France: The greater joy over the one recovered sheep than over the ninety-nine “*good*” sheep emphasizes God’s pastoral care: it is caused by the recovery, rather than by any inherent superiority in the sheep itself. The natural tendency to regard such discriminatory joy as unfair is firmly repudiated in the figure of the elder brother in **Luke 15:25–32**.

IV. (:14) PERSEVERANCE AND PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS – REASON #3 = EVERY SHEEP MATTERS TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER

“Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”

Grant Osborne: God’s sovereign will is for the security of the believer, as in **2 Pet 3:9**, “*not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” From this standpoint, it is inconceivable that the church and its leaders would fail to do the same, seeking always to protect the sheep both from predators and from the tendency to wander off. The mention of “*perish*” raises the stakes, for the end result is not just loss of reward but destruction.

Donald Hagner: ἀπόληται, “*perish*,” is a particularly strong word to describe the fate of one who stumbles or falls away (cf. **10:28**). This **ultimate ruin** or destruction is itself a further sobering reason for care in one’s conduct with others. This then is the reason that disciples, members of the community, are to be received and welcomed by their brothers and sisters in the faith and

why one is to be careful not to cause them to stumble: each of “*these little ones*” is precious in the sight of God, whose very angels seek their welfare and whose will it is that not one perish.

D. A. Carson: Jesus drives the lesson home: the heavenly Father is unwilling for any of “*these little ones*” to be lost. If that is his will, it is shocking that anyone else would seek to lead one of “*these little ones*” astray. (**Thompson**, *Matthew’s Advice*, 187–88, follows the line of thought admirably.) This love for the individual sheep is not at the expense of the entire flock but so that the flock as a whole may not lose a single one of its members

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the ways that we **look down on** some marginalized believers?
- 2) How can we place more emphasis on the **role of angels** in ministering to each of God’s children?
- 3) What is involved in proactively seeking to **find** and **restore** a single lost sheep?
- 4) How can we demonstrate the heart of God in how we **value** each member of God’s family?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Turner: In the Scriptures, God is the shepherd who pastures his people Israel through theocratic leaders such as kings and priests. The imagery has eschatological overtones in **2 Sam. 7:7–8; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 23:4–5; 31:10; Ezek. 34:11–16, 23**. In Matthew, Israel’s leaders are not faithful shepherds, and Jesus compassionately rescues the lost sheep of Israel (**Matt. 9:36; 10:6; 15:24, 32; 26:31**). By implication, Jesus’s disciples must model their lives and ministries after the concern of the Father as exemplified in Jesus and expressed by the parable. Jesus calls on his followers to serve one another as he has sacrificially served them (**20:27–28**). Disciples must receive one another, not cause one another to go astray (**18:5–9**).

William Barclay: Here we have Jesus’ favourite picture of God and of God’s love. This parable teaches us many things about that love.

- (1) The love of God is an individual love.
- (2) The love of God is a patient love.
- (3) The love of God is a seeking love.
- (4) The love of God is a rejoicing love.
- (5) The love of God is a protecting love.

Grant Osborne: Emulating God’s Concern

God’s people must emulate God’s concern by caring for and watching out for each other. In **5:48** Jesus said, “*Be perfect ... as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” This means we are to be like God in every aspect of our lives; here that includes shepherding God’s flock. God’s deep-seated and active vigilance over even the weakest of his sheep must become the pattern for the church. The

greatest joy a church will experience comes when a wandering member gets right with God. Moreover, every member should actively seek those who are failing spiritually and “*restore*” (Gal 6:1) them to Christ, the good Shepherd.

Daniel Doriani: This passage makes four essential statements about **God’s care for his people**. First, God cares for us individually. Once, a crowd of people pressed and jostled Jesus from every side, but he asked, “*Who touched me?*” *The disciples replied, “You see the people crowding against you . . . and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”* (Mark 5:31). But Jesus insisted so that the woman emerged and confessed that it was she, and Jesus healed her. Later, when Jesus passed through Jericho, the crowd lining the streets was so thick that one Zacchaeus, full-grown man that he was, had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of him. Then, when Jesus reached Zacchaeus’s spot, he called out to him and said, “*I must stay at your house today*” (Luke 19:5). So Jesus redeems us one by one.

Second, God seeks us when we stray. He finishes the work that he begins in us (Phil. 1:6). Moments before Jesus’ current teaching, the disciples were straying as they argued, wondering which of them would be greatest in the kingdom. Jesus silenced them and taught them just as he teaches us when we stray.

Third, Jesus rejoices over us when we return to him. The Lord rejoices whenever anyone passes from skepticism to faith or from doubt to faith. He rejoices when any sinner repents and returns to him. God has holy emotions, which include the holy joy he feels over us when we walk with him.

Fourth, the Lord exercises his care for his people through his people. We are responsible to seek the lost when God places them in our lives. If you cannot see them, ask the Lord to open your eyes and heart to see the lost and feel the compassion that leads to action. The Father cares for his children by the work of Jesus, by the movement of the Spirit, by his providential control of history, and by appointing angels to watch over us. But he also instructs believers, especially the mature, to seek our brothers, especially little ones in the faith, when they stray. Paul says, “*If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently*” (Gal. 6:1). And James says, “*My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins*” (James 5:19–20).

Matthew Henry:

(1) The caution itself. “*See that you do not look down on one of these little ones.*” He will be displeased with the great ones of the church, if they despise the little ones of it. We may understand it literally of little children; of them Christ was speaking, v. 2, 4. Or, figuratively; true but **weak believers** are these little ones, who are like little children, the lambs of Christ’s flock. We must not despise them, not have low esteem for them. We must not make a jest of their infirmities, not conduct ourselves scornfully or disdainfully toward them, as if we did not care what became of them. We must not impose on the consciences of others. There is a respect owing to the conscience of every man who appears to be conscientious. We must take heed that we do not despise them; and be very cautious what we say and do, lest we should inadvertently cause Christ’s little ones to sin.

(2) The reasons to enforce the caution. We must not look on these little ones as contemptible. Let not those be looked on by us with disdain, whom God has honoured. To prove that the little

ones which believe in Christ are worthy to be respected, consider,

The ministration of the good angels around them; “*Their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father.*” Two things he lets us know concerning them.

First, That they are the little ones’ angels. God’s angels are theirs. They can look by faith on the heavenly hosts, and call them theirs. It is bad being enemies to those who are so guarded; and it is good having God for our God, for then we have his angels for our angels.

Secondly, That *they always see the face of the Father in heaven*. This suggests,

1. The angels’ continual joy and honour. The happiness of heaven consists in the vision of God, beholding his beauty.
2. It suggests their continual readiness to minister to the saints. They see the face of God, expecting to receive orders from him what to do for the good of the saints. If we would see the face of God in glory hereafter, we must see the face of God now, in readiness to our duty.

John MacArthur: Now the text basically says to us that **God cares for His children**. That’s the basic bottom line truth in this text: God cares for His children. And you can see it pretty well in **verse 14**: “*Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish,*” – or should be marred, or should be ruined, or should be led into disaster. The Father then cares for His children. God is a God who cares for His own.

Another underlying principle is this: that **God cares for them equally**, that He cares for them equally. He says, “*One of these little ones,*” in **verse 14**. He says, “*One of these little ones,*” in **verse 10**. And both times that numerical “one” is put in there just so nobody gets eliminated. It is so very important that every single, individual Christian be thought of as in the utmost sense important to the care of God the Father.

How do we despise others?

- By flaunting our liberty,
- By looking down on the lowly,
- By withholding from those in need,
- By ridiculing someone’s physical features,
- By looking with indifference on a Christian who has fallen.
- By rejecting those who confront our sinfulness.
- By taking advantage of a fellow believer for personal gain.

S. Lewis Johnson: And so the Son of God will not rest—having accomplished the atonement by which they are saved—he will not rest until every one of his sheep is brought into the fold. What a wonderful expression of the concentrated, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotence of the sovereignty of our great God in the accomplishment of his purposes. And when he dies, he does not die in order to make men savable. He dies to save. He does not die in order that men may be able to save themselves, but he dies to save, and he accomplishes his purpose by virtue of the blood, and the Spirit, who in effectual grace to which I have referred brings them to Christ.

Now, what more of a missionary warrant could we possibly have as Christians than the example of our Lord Jesus who sought the one? Incidentally, he didn't mind seeking one. He didn't mind seeking one little one. He didn't mind seeking one little one that was going astray. So often, in Christian circles, we have failed to seek the little one who is going astray. We see them astray, and we pull up our skirts and say we must not have any fellowship with them. He sought them, and he sought the one, he sought the little one, he sought the little one in their straying condition.

Now finally, and our time is up. In **verse 14**, he says the third reason why we should not despise one of these little ones is that it is **not the will of your Father who is heaven that one of these little ones should perish**. To despise one of these little ones, then, is to be

- out of harmony with the Son,
- out of harmony with the angels, and
- out of harmony with our sovereign God and Father in heaven.

What a terrible thing it is then **to despise one of the little ones**.

Scott Harris: But when a lost sheep is found there is **much rejoicing**. When a believer who has gone astray has been restored, there is a special joy, not because they are more valuable, but because of the special concern evoked in the shepherd because of the danger they were in. It is the same way in a family when a child is seriously ill. That child receives more attention and care. When the child does get well, the special rejoicing is not over the children that remained healthy, but the sick one that has been restored. That is the special joy spoken of here when a wayward believer is returned to the fold.

Jesus cares for every one of His sheep and He will even search after those that go astray. If Jesus cares that much for even wandering sheep, how could we even think about despising any believer?

TEXT: Matthew 18:15-20

TITLE: CONFRONTING SIN IN THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

BIG IDEA:

THE STEPS FOR CONFRONTING SIN IN THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY DEPEND ON THE DELEGATED AUTHORITY FROM THE RATIFYING DIVINE PRESENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Gardner: Having acknowledged the possibility of **stumbling** or **straying**, Matthew goes on to treat the question: **What do we do as a community of faith when a member sins?** . . . In confronting sin, we are not called to act as crusaders or prosecutors, but as sisters and brothers seeking whole relationships with every member of the family. To develop the point, Matthew brings together three pieces of material on sin and forgiveness. **Verses 15-20** describe a sequence of three steps for dealing with sin, supported by several sayings on authority in the church.

Charles Swindoll: Discipline, accountability, confrontation —these are not signs of the Lord’s hatred toward people, but proof of the Lord’s love for His children.

What’s true of our earthly parents and of our heavenly Father is also true of those in the body of Christ. And there are benefits to being accountable to one another. Through proper accountability in the community of believers, we truly exercise love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Accountability includes loving and learning from one another, observing and affirming one another, encouraging and counseling one another, and also confronting and disciplining one another. It’s not that we confront because we like to intrude in people’s lives. **We confront because we care.**

Grant Osborne: The process of discipline centers on those who refuse to “*turn [their] lives around*” (v. 3) and repent. In this instance, it covers what to do when a member sins and refuses to repent and return to the community; the goal is still **redemptive**, for at every stage the way is marked for **reconciliation**. There are three stages (private confrontation, challenge from two “*witnesses*,” and judgment by the whole community); if at any stage the offending individual repents, full reconciliation will occur.

Stanley Saunders: The community that exercises divine power, that binds and looses on earth and in heaven, and that experiences the presence of Jesus himself is also the community of children and little ones who seek the lost, guard against stumbling blocks, and reach out to reclaim even the victimizer. Jesus will affirm in the next portion of this discourse that this is also a community of unrelenting forgiveness.

I. (:15-17) FOUR STEP PROCESS OF CONFRONTING SIN IN THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

A. (:15) Step #1 = Confrontation in Private One-on-One

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”

Donald Hagner: The reference to ὁ ἀδελφός σου, “*your brother*,” indicates that conduct within the community of disciples continues to remain in view.

D. A. Carson: The aim is not to score points over him but to **win him over** (same verb as in **1Co 9:19–22**; **1Pe 3:1**) because all discipline, even this private kind, must begin with redemptive purposes (**Lk 17:3–4**; **2Th 3:14–15**; **Jas 5:19–20**; cf. Sir 19:13–17). Jesus assumes that the individual (second person singular) who personally confronts his brother will do so with true humility (**vv.3–4**; cf. **Gal 6:1**). If it is hard to accept a rebuke, even a private one, it is harder still to administer one in loving humility. Behind this verse stands **Leviticus 19:17**: “*Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.*”

Warren Wiersbe: Approach the person who sinned and speak with him alone. It is possible that he does not even realize what he has done. Or, even if he did it deliberately, your own attitude of submission and love will help him to repent and apologize. Above all else, go to him with the idea of winning your brother, not winning an argument. It is possible to win the argument and lose your brother.

We must have a spirit of meekness and gentleness when we seek to restore a brother or sister (**Gal. 6:1**). We must not go about condemning the offender, or spreading gossip. We must lovingly seek to help him in the same way we would want him to help us if the situation were reversed. The word *restore* in **Galatians 6:1** is a Greek medical word that means “to set a broken bone.” Think of the patience and tenderness that requires!

R. T. France: Sin, of whatever form, is not to be tolerated within the disciple community, but is to be dealt with when it is noticed. But it is to be dealt with sensitively and with a minimum of publicity. The principle set out in these verses is of **minimum exposure**, other people being brought in only when the more private approach has failed. The ideal solution is “just between the two of you.”

Daniel Doriani: There is **exception** to this: when a public person commits a **public offense**, it may demand a public rebuke. For example, Peter played the hypocrite and refused to associate or eat with certain Christians in Antioch simply because they were Gentiles. Thus on that occasion Paul had to rebuke him publicly. The situation would be the same in the rare case where someone openly taught heresy in an evangelical church.

John MacArthur: We are **all involved** in going out to seek one another to restore one another to gain back the sinning brother who has drifted away from the community of God’s people. By the way, I suggested to you last time that there are some prerequisites. First is **willingness**. You have to be willing to go, and these commands imply that you have to act on your will. Jesus is saying, “You go and you tell him.” And that indicates that you need a responding will to that.

Secondly, there must be a **zeal for God**. David said in **Psalm 69:9**, “*Zeal for thine house has eaten me up; the reproaches that are fallen on thee are fallen on me.*” David had such a tremendous sense of God’s glory that when God was wounded, David felt the pain. And we need that same kind of response so that when God is dishonored, we feel the pain. Our heart is so knit with God’s heart.

And the third thing is **personal holiness**. You can’t go, as Jesus said in **Matthew 7**, to take a splinter out of somebody else’s eye if you’ve got a two by four in your own. So willingness, a

zeal for God, and personal holiness. Paul sums it up wonderfully in **Galatians 6** when he says, “*If a brother is overtaken in fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one.*” And so you’re the person. I’m the person. We’re all to be involved in this. And I’ve thought about this so often in these recent days how marvelous it would be if all of the assembly of God’s people were totally committed to the recovery of every sinning brother and sister. We would become ministers of holiness.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus is saying, ‘Look, when a Christian, a fellow Christian in your congregation sins against you privately, don’t announce that to everybody in church, don’t put it on the prayer chain, don’t get your small group to start praying about it.’ Don’t shame that Christian, go privately to him. . .

Listen to what **William Hendriksen** says about this passage: “Jesus means that the offended brother should in the spirit of brotherly love, go and show the sinner his faults and this not certainly most of all for the purpose of receiving satisfaction for a personal grievance, but rather in the interest of the offender that he may repent and may seek and find forgiveness.” You see, the resolution of personal conflict is not the main point here. That is a side effect, that’s a side benefit of this procedure.

The **prime concern** that Jesus says He wants you to have in your heart, is that your brother or sister not be hindered in their spiritual growth, that your brother or sister not become hardened in sin, that your brother or sister not drift away from the way of light and truth. The main concern is with the **spiritual welfare of the offender**.

B. (:16) Step #2 = Corroborating Witnesses

*“But if he does not listen to you,
take one or two more with you,
so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”*

D. A. Carson: It is not at first clear whether the function of the witnesses is to support the one who confronts his erring brother by bringing additional testimony about the sin committed (which would require at least three people to have observed the offense) or to provide witnesses to the confrontation if the case were to go before the whole church.

Warren Wiersbe: If the offender refuses to make things right, then we may feel free to share the burden with one or two dependable believers. We should share the facts as we see them and ask the brethren for their prayerful counsel. After all, it may be that **we** are wrong. If the brethren feel the cause is right, then together we can go to the offender and try once again to win him.

Richard Gardner: If not, one proceeds to the second step described in **verse 16**. The instruction to bring one or two witnesses into the conversation is drawn from **Deuteronomy 19:15**, which specifies the need for two or three witnesses to confirm a person’s guilt in a judicial setting. In Matthew, the purpose of the witnesses is not to secure a legal judgment, but to buttress the attempt at fraternal correction, to make an even stronger appeal to the member who has stumbled to acknowledge sin and be restored.

Charles Swindoll: If you’re in a situation in which you must take this second step, choose the other one or two people carefully. Prudence, impartiality, experience, integrity, maturity, and biblical and theological knowledge are key. So are compassion, patience, kindness, and genuine

love for the sinning individual. Remember, the goal is not to corner the person or to gang up on him or her. The goal is to draw on the combined wisdom provided by a plurality of godly men or women. As **Proverbs 11:14** says, *“In abundance of counselors there is victory.”*

C. (:17a) Step #3 = Corporate Pressure = Last Resort

“And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;”

R. T. France: The object of the gathering is not to pronounce judgment but to strengthen the pastoral appeal, in the hope that the offender may yet *“listen.”* The offender, faced by the disapproval of the whole local disciple community, ought surely to recognize that this was not just a personal grievance on the part of the initiator. Anyone who is not willing to accept such united testimony may then properly be regarded as no longer a fit member of the community. *“You”* (singular, referring to the individual who raised the issue, not, at least explicitly, to the community as a whole) should then treat them as *“a Gentile and a tax-collector”*.

Grant Osborne: The body as a whole is the **final stage of appeal**, the third time the offender is given the opportunity to admit wrong, repent, and be reconciled to the offended party, the local church, and God. Certainly the purpose of the local assembly is not just to declare the person guilty and render judgment, but to appeal to the offender as a corporate group and seek to bring about repentance.

John MacArthur: That’s the place, *ekklesia*, the *called out ones*. The **assembly**. Listen carefully. This is the third time this word is used in Matthew. That is the second use of it; in **verse 17** is the third use. In the book, the first one being in **chapter 16**. It’s only used three times. It is **non-technical in Matthew**. It does not refer to the church born at Pentecost. It was a word simply meaning an assembly. Nothing more than that. It is used in that way elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of the church in the wilderness, referring to Israel as the assembled people of God in the wilderness. It was used in extra biblical Greek culture to speak of a town meeting. Any group of assembled people. And that’s exactly its use in this text. It anticipates the church of Pentecost. It anticipates the church of today. It anticipates the official church with a capital C, that born by the baptism of the Spirit of God in **Acts 2**. It anticipates that for sure. But here the root idea is simply the collection of the redeemed community, the assembly of the redeemed, and it doesn’t have to wait for Pentecost to be applied. It can be immediately implied in the assembly of the disciples who are gathered in the house at Capernaum on the day Jesus taught it. It simply means the collection of God’s assembled people.

D. (:17b) Step #4 = Excommunication

*“and if he refuses to listen even to the church,
let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”*

Donald Hagner: Thus the unrepentant offender is not simply put out of the community but categorized as among the worst sort of persons. (The Pauline admonitions of **1 Cor 5:9–13** and **2 Thess 3:14–15** are similar in effect; cf. **Titus 3:10**.)

David Turner: Repeated rejection of the overtures of a fellow disciple, of two or three additional witnesses, and then of the entire community is tantamount to rejection of Jesus and the Father.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Fourth, if the offender refuses to repent, *“even”* (v. 17, Greek ascensive kai; Osborne 686) to the church, both the offended party (v. 17, *“thee”*) and the church (v. 18, *“ye”*)

are to withdraw fellowship and treat the offender as an unsaved person with no rights and privileges normally associated with congregational life. . . **Blomberg** (56) rightly sees a link between this withdrawal and the law's requirement to cut off offenders from Israel (**Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38; Lev. 17:10; Num. 19:13**). Godly communities in both testaments were instructed to keep the community clean by disciplining antinomian and errant members.

II. (:18-20) DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY FOR DEALING WITH SIN – PROCESS OF RATIFICATION

Richard Gardner: Having followed the text thus far, the reader might well ask: **Does the church have authority to act in this way? Verses 18-20** supply an answer to that question. According to verse 18 (which begins with the solemn formula *Truly, I tell you*), the power to bind and loose granted to Peter in **16:19** is now bestowed by Jesus on the disciples as a group, and thus on every community of believers. In the context of the discussion about sin in the church, bind and loose convey the sense of convict and acquit, and may allude to the extreme case of **excommunication**. The church, then, has authority to pronounce judgment in God's name, and the church has authority to release persons from that judgment and restore them to fellowship.

R. T. France: The change from the second person singular address of vv. **15–17** to the second person plural in vv. **18** and **19** marks a broadening of the subject. The specific case dealt with in vv. **15–17** is left behind, and we are told now about the authority with which the disciple community as a whole has been entrusted. So here we find the theoretical background which justifies the practical appeal to the *ekklēsia* in v. **17**. The corporate wisdom of the community as to what is and is not permitted (“*tying*” and “*untying*,” see on **16:19**) represents not only their human judgment but the will of God in heaven; what they corporately declare to be “*sin*” God also disallows.

David Thompson: Now **verses 18-20** are verses connected to this very context. The point of these verses is this: whenever a sinning brother has been confronted in this manner and the church has been told, whatever stand the church takes on earth will be honored in heaven. If the church determines that the brother is in sin and after refusing to repent, it stands against him, God will stand against him. If the church determines the brother has repented and is freed from the sin, God will view it the same way.

These are solemn and serious words against a non-repentant brother or sister. God carefully follows and monitors the disciplinary process of the church. God would give the church tremendous authority. The assumption of **verse 19** is that the church is praying about the sin issue. The church is obeying the Word and praying to the Father. Notice that this is done in the name of Jesus Christ, which adds a new dimension to prayer. When two or three are gathered together to confront sin matters with a brother, Jesus Christ is in their midst. When God's people are praying about sin matters, God is powerfully at work. God expects His church to face things and deal with things, not run from things. Great disciples do not run away from problems. They face them and deal with them and go on for the glory of God.

A. (:18) Scope of Authority = To Bind or Loose

“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Donald Hagner: Here the binding and loosing have to do directly with matters of church discipline, whereas in **16:19** they concern matters of conduct more generally. However, in both instances the ultimate issue concerns membership in the community. In the present instance, which addresses the case of one who has “sinned” (v. 15), the connection with **John 20:23** (“If you forgive [ἀφῆτε] the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain [κρατῆτε] the sins of any, they are retained”) becomes more apparent. Loosing is the equivalent of forgiving, binding of retaining. The leadership thus has the ability to make decisions concerning unrepentant sinners in the community—decisions that carry authority such that they are said to be likewise fixed in heaven. At stake is nothing less than the ultimate welfare of the offending individual.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The church should not only be characterized by confrontation of sin and compassion toward repentant brothers but also consensus in its disciplinary action (**Wilkins** 620). This entire disciplinary procedure is to be bathed in unity and prayer (v. 19). The church that agrees to carefully contemplate God’s will in disciplinary matters will find that God will reveal His will to them and support their disciplinary actions against the wayward brothers or sisters.

J. Ligon Duncan: Now **binding** and **loosing** is a wonderful natural metaphor drawn from the law court. Binding referring to the idea of condemning. Loosing referring to the idea of acquitting. You get the picture. A prisoner who is bound, who is not yet freed, is still at least still under the suspicion of the court, if not under the open condemnation of the court, but a prisoner who is loosed is considered innocent and free in light of the court. And so the language of binding and loosing refers to the action of the officers of the church when they admit members into the fellowship and when they very sadly and regretfully have to dismiss members from the fellowship of the leaders.

B. (:19-20) Solidarity and Divine Presence

1. (:19) Disciplinary Solidarity Ratified by the Father

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”

Grant Osborne: So while “ask for” (αἰτέω) is often used of prayer in the NT, here it is specifically a prayer for wisdom and the Spirit’s guidance in decisions regarding discipline. Thus “any matter” (παντὸς πράγματος) is virtually synonymous with πᾶν ῥῆμα in v. 16, “every matter” that the church is facing in issues of discipline. The phrase here was commonly used in legal/judicial “matters” (so **Hill, Carson**).

Daniel Doriani: He does not promise that if two people agree about anything whatsoever he will grant it. He promises aid to disciples when we meet to heal broken relationships in the church.

Michael Wilkins: Jesus assumes the place of the divine presence among his disciples, guaranteeing that when his followers have consensus when asking in prayer for guidance in matters of discipline, his Father in heaven will guide them as they carry it out.

2. (:20) Divine Presence of Christ in the Disciplinary Process

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”

Charles Swindoll: The point is that as soon as the proper process of accountability, confrontation, and discipline begins, Jesus is present, and God the Father is working through the interactions

that take place. Even in the private, one-on-one confrontation, two believers are present in Jesus' name, and the result will be that God will confirm and empower the actions that are taken in conformity with His Word.

Karl Jacobson: Jesus offers a simple guide to help us handle our sin and its consequences here. But far more importantly Jesus promises us that he is present, that his presence is real for us, when we are gathered in his name — both in agreement, and in sin. Within the context of the overarching narrative of Matthew, which is governed by the **promised real presence of God**, in the promise of child named Emmanuel, God With Us (**1:23**) and in this God's parting assurance to us that he is with us always (**28:20**), this is the Good News for us who are members with one another of Christ's church.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-23/commentary-on-matthew-1815-20-2>

Grant Osborne: The “two or three” as in **vv. 16, 19** are the witnesses confronting the guilty person. As they make their decision, certainly while in prayer, Jesus wants them to understand that he is with them, and the “*heavenly Father*” is guiding their verdict.

The omnipresence of Jesus in the church is a central concept in Matthew (cf. **1:23; 28:20**), and as **Luz** says, is “the christological center of the entire chapter.” Jesus is virtually declaring his divinity, for such a claim is possible only for God himself. To gather “*in my name*” (εἰς τὸ ἔμὸν ὄνομα) means **to be in union with Jesus**, part of his community, and under his authority (cf. **7:22; 10:22; 18:5**). So Jesus is especially present among them, not just metaphorically but through the Spirit of Christ in their midst. This does not mean Jesus is with us only corporately and not individually, for as in **1 Cor 5:4** we can know that “*the power of the Lord Jesus is present*” with us.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of sins should be covered by love vs. what types of sins require direct confrontation?
- 2) How does excommunication mesh with the purpose of discipline which is to love your brother and seek his restoration?
- 3) Why do so many local churches ignore and disobey these clear instructions from Jesus and refuse to administer any church discipline?
- 4) How are **verses 18-20** used improperly by ignoring the context here of church discipline?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Before we walk through Jesus' step-by-step process of accountability, confrontation, and church discipline, it would help to take a step back and consider five general

principles that help bring clarity and balance to our understanding of this important topic.

1. First, confronting serious sin is loving.
2. Second, confronting serious sin requires us to have the fortitude to do what's right.
3. Third, confronting serious sin is not optional.
4. Fourth, confronting serious sin is not penal but remedial.
5. Finally, confronting serious sin is not for outsiders but for insiders. Church discipline is to be carried out by believers and for believers.

Craig Blomberg: In an age in which churches can be sued for disciplining their members unless procedures have been stated in writing and disseminated and explained to all the congregation, it is imperative to think carefully about how to implement Jesus' instructions. Many churches avoid the problem simply by disobeying Jesus and making no attempt to follow his principles.

Application also proves difficult because our society for the most part is not made up of those tightly knit communities whose welcome or rejection had a powerful impact on individuals in the ancient world. Today, church members who are disciplined often leave one congregation for another that accepts them with no questions asked. Only as we recreate intimate community within the local church and networks of accountability among different churches can we hope to apply these verses effectively. But without this application, sin in the church will continue to compromise the unity and testimony of God's people.

Daniel Doriani: Listening comes up three times in our passage. . .

First, we listen with our ears, to hear the words. We try to follow what others say and what they mean. If a speaker struggles to articulate a thought, we help, knowing that some things are hard to express.

Second, we listen with our eyes, watching the eyes and the body of those who speak. Are they tense? Is there something more they want to say? Does their mouth say one thing and their body another? Proverbs says, "*Even in laughter the heart may ache*" (**Prov. 14:13**). As a professor, I noticed that students occasionally made appointments for the most trivial matters. Half a point on a quiz could be resolved in thirty seconds after class, but they wanted a thirty-minute session. They came, we resolved the putative issue in two minutes, and then they sat, a bit tense, on the edge of the chair, not quite ready to go. I would ask, "Is there something else you want to talk about?" "Yes," they would reply. "There is one other thing. I finish in six months and I really don't know what to do after graduation. If you have another minute . . ."

Third, we listen with our heart. To listen with the heart is not to listen for emotions. In the Bible, the heart is the center of life, the core of our being. The Bible says the Lord knows the secrets of the heart, tests the heart, weighs the heart, probes the heart (**Ps. 44:21; Prov. 21:2; Jer. 17:10; 20:12**). It is the source from which we speak and move. For this we must look and listen.

Jason Lim: Go and Tell Him His Fault

The way the world deals with conflict is either to take revenge or to walk away. But God's people are called to a higher ethic- we are to confront our offenders about their sin. Not in bitterness or in a vengeful spirit, but in a spirit of gentleness and love. We are to love one another and to restore one another from ongoing sin. Jesus gave very specific steps as to how we should speak to a brother regarding a fault.

I. What is the Purpose of church discipline.

A story is told of a pastor who had a **conflict** with his worship leader and he was preaching a

sermon on encouraging the people of God to get up and to serve. But the song leader after the service, after the message, came up and said, “We will sing our last song - *I shall not be moved.*” Alright, next week, the pastor came up to preach another sermon and the sermon now is about giving, about giving your finances for the advancement of the kingdom. After the service, the worship leader again came up and said, “We shall sing our last song - *Jesus paid it all.*”

This guy ... third sermon, he preached about gossip and how we not we should not gossip, and the song leader got up, after the sermon and said, “We shall sing our last song - *I love to tell the story.*” The next Sunday, the pastor got up again and said, and preached and then he said, “You know, I've been feeling of stress and strain, I feel like I should resign from the church.” And the song leader got up and said, “This will be our last song – *O, why not tonight?*”

You know, sometimes we hate someone so much you want to get rid of that person. That's why we think, “Oh, we need to go and tell him his fault because if he doesn't repent, good, the church will come and kick him out.” But that's not the purpose! We need to understand why. The reason as I've mentioned again is out of love that you want to gain your brother. This is why it is so counter-cultural. In the world, when you're offended, people generally like to give an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. You've cost me to be upset, I will do something to make you upset. . .

So I want you to be clear that when we talk about church discipline, though the word, ‘discipline’ sounds fierce. You imagine your principal, scary... but actually the intention behind it must be love. It is for the good of the offender. You don't go to him to tekan [bully in Malay] him. You go to him to love him. That's the purpose! I think that's the most important point.

II. What is the Procedure to church discipline.

Now, some of you do mathematics, you are brilliant, you're a genius, you're working, you skip steps. But when it comes to church discipline you cannot skip steps. . .

Now, you must understand the wisdom of following it step-by-step. It's giving the offender maximal opportunity and grace to repent. That's the goal!

III. What are the Principles for church discipline?

1. Principle 1: Take The Initiative
2. Principle 2: Not Too Loud Please!
3. Principle 3: Clarify Your Goal
4. Principle 4: Check Your Facts
5. Principle 5: Step Up When Needed
6. Principle 6: Do All In Gentleness And Love

<https://gospellight.sg/sermons/go-and-tell-him-his-fault-matthew-1815-20/>

Scott Harris: God's Correction of His Children (Heb. 12:4-11)

In this scenario you see something in a brother that needs to be corrected. The potential is that this could be any sin, but since both **Proverbs 10:12** and **1 Peter 4:8** tell us that *love covers a multitude of sins*, this is not referring to the minor irritations of life that can either be overlooked, the true definition of tolerance, or handled with a gentle admonishment such as caution or request for a more righteous action. There are many things we do that are in fact sinful because they arise out of pride and selfishness instead of seeking God's glory, and they may even be mildly irritating, but they are relatively minor. They can be tolerated.

If the sin is more serious so that it is causing a conflict in the relationship or is an obvious blight on the glory of Christ, **then something must be said**. However, even then what was considered to be a sin may in fact be a misunderstanding or an honest difference of opinion about what is right. Talking about it privately allows for correction of misunderstandings and tolerance for differences of opinion. Even if you do in fact see a better way, there can be tolerance and nothing needs to escalate unless it is a Biblically defined sin that is obvious or continuing. Or viewed from another angle, if what you see requires repentance, then you need to talk with them about it. If it does not, then you could mention it but you don't have to do so. . .

Combining the principles of these passages we find that while any sin has the potential of escalating through the steps of church discipline, not all issues require direct confrontation. There is a lot of room for tolerance generated by genuine love and for minor issues to be handled by gentle admonishment. However, in our society which views tolerance as a supreme virtue, which it most certainly is not, there is a great danger of overlooking things in the name of love when the real reason is either indifference, the opposite of love, or fear of involvement. These passages also makes clear that obvious sin must be confronted in the effort to win a brother back. You only go to step two if the individual is stubborn. . .

The idea of treating the person as a Gentile and tax-gatherer confuses most people. First, this does not mean to ostracize or to shun. There is no room in Christianity for treating other people with that sort of disdain. Jesus commanded us in **Matthew 5:44** that we are to love our enemies and pray for even those that persecute us. To treat a person as a Gentile and tax-gatherer is to treat the person as a non-Christian and to refuse to have fellowship with them.

The Steps of Church Discipline (:15-17)

The Authority for Church Discipline (:18-20)

Jesus explains in **Matthew 18:18-20** that God has given the church the authority to correct those who profess to be one of His children. We do not practice church discipline on those who are not Christians.

First, the church has authority to carry out discipline even to its conclusion in disfellowship because Jesus commands it here in **Matthew 18:15-17**.

Second, the church has the authority to forbid and permit. . .

The idea of **bind** or **loose**, as I pointed out earlier in **Matthew 16:19**, has nothing to do with Satan & demons. To bind or to loose has to do with “whatever” and not “whoever.” The phrase is a Rabbinic expression meaning **forbidding** and **permitting**. The Church has the authority to examine a person's life and compare it with the Scriptures and then determine whether that person is in sin or not and whether they are repentant or not.

<https://www.gracebible.org/gods-correction-of-his-children-matthew-1815-20>

TEXT: Matthew 18:21-35

TITLE: *UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS TO FELLOW BELIEVERS*

BIG IDEA:

HAVING BEEN FORGIVEN MUCH, BELIEVERS MUST NOT PUT LIMITS ON THE FORGIVENESS THEY EXTEND TO OTHERS

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: The opening exhortation to forgive without limit is undergirded by a parable which compares God's forgiveness and ours; it is because there is no limit to God's generosity to his undeserving people that they in their turn cannot claim the right to withhold forgiveness from their fellow-disciples. A community of the forgiven must be a forgiving community. . . The parable thus speaks of the totally unmerited grace of God which forgives his people more than they could ever imagine because they are unable to help themselves.

Donald Hagner: Conduct in the community of disciples called "*the church*" is to be patterned after the mercy and grace of God's free forgiveness of sins—which is an important basis for the very existence of the community. As God freely forgives those who have sinned against him, so are disciples to freely forgive those who sin against them. In both instances the repentance of the sinner is assumed. The failure to forgive one who is repentant casts doubt on the genuineness of a person's discipleship. The refusal to forgive others will be reflected upon the disciple in God's refusal to forgive him or her. Thus, in keeping with the thrust of the larger discourse, we see again the high importance of a person's conduct toward other members of the community. The community must treat its members as God treats them. Failure in this respect creates an intolerable inconsistency at the very point where the kingdom is to manifest itself: in the community of the redeemed, living in a fallen world.

Stu Weber: We are obligated, because of the Father's infinite mercy toward us, to treat with unconditional mercy our fellow believers who sin against us.

Jesus completed his discourse about the value and treatment of his children with one more caution applied to our relationships with fellow believers who sin against us. As we deal with straying believers (**18:15-20**), we may be tempted to become **merciless** toward them, especially when they sin against us. In abandoning mercy, we forget that the Father has shown us great mercy. In this regard, we are no better than our sinning fellow believers. Jesus illustrated through a parable the attitude we are to display toward those who are "indebted" to us in their sins against us. It is an attitude that he displayed lavishly toward us, and we are to imitate this attitude in our relationships with others.

Forgiving our sinning brothers and sisters is a part of our duty toward God's children, just as it is our duty to pursue them for restoration to righteousness. To fail to forgive fellow believers is to abuse God's children, and so incur the Father's wrath. **Forgiveness is a foundational characteristic of the family of God.**

Stanley Saunders: Jesus envisions a quantum leap to boundless, over the top, absurd, unimaginable levels of forgiveness. Jesus' call to forgive "*seventy-seven*" times counters the

pronouncement of murderous revenge by Cain's descendant Lamech (**Gen. 4:24**). God's empire does not trade in such terror, nor find "justice" in revenge, but stands in contrast to the bloody violence and retribution that stain human experience to this day. Jesus' answer also suggests that disciples should not anticipate an end to the sin or violence of the world around them, nor even the end of sin in the community of disciples. But to retaliate, to act in kind, is not permitted. Jesus' call to enduring, relentless forgiveness makes the disciples a new "generation," the first since the generation of Cain to trust themselves wholly to the **power of forgiveness**—not only when it seems reasonable or possible, but when it is unthinkable. . .

Forgiveness is the defining discipline of the community of disciples. Unlimited forgiveness bears continued witness to the distinctive nature of God's reign and offers a true alternative, perhaps the only alternative, to the cycles of exploitation, violence, and revenge that plague the world. A church that dedicates itself to the practice of unlimited forgiveness is necessarily diverse, resilient, schooled in dealing with conflict, patient, and supportive. Limitless forgiveness cannot be sustained by individuals alone, nor even by a collection of individuals, but requires the sustained attention of a disciplined community that will not gloss over conflicts and differences or settle for words rather than transformed relationships.

I. (:21-22) POSING THE QUESTION OF THE EXTENT OF FORGIVENESS

A. (:21) Sincere Question – What Should Be the Extent of Forgiveness?

"Then Peter came and said to Him,

'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'"

William Barclay: Peter was not without warrant for this suggestion. It was Rabbinic teaching that a person must forgive another three times. **Rabbi Jose ben Hanina** said: 'He who begs forgiveness from his neighbour must not do so more than three times.' **Rabbi Jose ben Jehuda** said: 'If a man commits an offence once, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a second time, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a third time, they forgive him; the fourth time they do not forgive.' The biblical proof that this was correct was taken from Amos. In the opening chapters of Amos, there is a series of condemnations on the various nations *for three transgressions and for four* (**1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6**). From this, it was deduced that God's forgiveness extends to three offences and that he visits the sinner with punishment at the fourth. It was not to be thought that people could be more gracious than God, so forgiveness was limited to three times.

Peter thought that he was going very far, for he takes the Rabbinic three times, multiplies it by two, for good measure adds one, and suggests, with eager self-satisfaction, that it will be enough if he forgives seven times. Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus' answer was that the Christian must forgive seventy times seven. In other words, there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness.

Craig Blomberg: Peter seems to have learned the lesson of Jesus' teaching in **vv. 10-14** and generously proposes to forgive fellow disciples seven times. Seven is a common biblical number for **completeness** and goes well beyond the rabbinic maxim of forgiving three times (e.g., **b. Yoma** 86b, 87a). "Against me" parallels "against you" in **v. 15**. Peter's words likely allude to the sevenfold avenging of Cain; Jesus' reply contrasts starkly with the seventy-sevenfold avenging of Lamech (**Gen 4:24**).

J. Ligon Duncan: Peter thinks that the Lord is going to be impressed with his generosity, and commend him for being such a gracious soul as to be willing to forgive someone up to seven times, but in this passage, in **verses 21 and 22**, Jesus teaches us that Christians' willingness to forgive ought to be **unlimited**. No limit on the Christian's willingness to forgive. And so when Peter asks Him "*Up to seven times?*", expecting that pat on the back in response, he gets instead the Lord saying, "**No, Peter, 70 times 7,**" meaning "**Don't even count**. When someone comes to you and asks forgiveness, you be ready and willing to extend it, not just seven times, not just seven times a day, but you have a heart that is ready to forgive and which puts no limit on the willingness to forgive." Jesus, you see, is undercutting Peter's rabbinical counting approach to mercy. Jesus is saying, "Peter, your heart needs to be transformed by your realization of how much God has forgiven you. And if you'll think for a minute, Peter, how much God has forgiven You."

B. (:22) Shocking Answer -- Limitless

"Jesus said to him,

'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"

Craig Blomberg: We dare not keep track of the number of times we grant forgiveness. Jesus takes Peter's number of completeness and multiplies it considerably. Few people ever have to forgive the same person this often, at least not over a short period of time. But Jesus' point is not to withhold forgiveness after the seventy-eighth (or 491st) offense. As with the principles in **vv. 15-16**, Jesus' advice may work well with unbelievers too, but his **primary focus remains on believers**. And **genuine repentance**, which includes changed behavior, must occur, or the principles of **vv. 15-18** come into play instead. The subsequent parable (**vv. 23-35**) will illustrate both the incredible generosity believers should demonstrate in forgiving fellow believers who do beg for mercy and promise to change as well as the severe judgment awaiting those who refuse to forgive or respond properly to forgiveness.

David Thompson: Now these numbers are interesting. They are **Biblical numbers**. For example, in **Genesis 4:24** this is the number that Lamech would be avenged if he were wronged. But more significantly than this is Daniel's prophecy in **Daniel 9:24-27**. This was the total number of years (70 times 7, or **490 years**) from the time of Daniel until the time the Messiah would set up His kingdom for Israel. He would be cut off after 483 years, which from the time of Daniel was the exact amount of years until Christ entered Jerusalem, which would leave seven years prior to the kingdom, which will be the seven years of the Tribulation. These numbers are **grace numbers** in that it shows God will graciously give Israel her kingdom in spite of her persistent sin and rebellion. Jesus is telling Peter that disciples should be gracious and forgive sin time and time again, when there has been repentance.

II. (:23-34) PUTTING FORGIVENESS IN PERSPECTIVE – IMITATE THE EXAMPLE OF GOD'S COMPASSION AND MERCY

(:23) Introduction to the Parable

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."

Craig Blomberg: As in **vv. 10-14**, Jesus uses a parable to explain the rationale for his previous commands. In a nutshell his teaching is this: God eternally and unconditionally forgives those

who repent of so immense a debt against him that it is unconscionable for believers to refuse to grant forgiveness to each other for sins that remain trivial in comparison.

Charles Swindoll: The story in **Matthew 18:23-34** illustrates a vital principle of the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus mentions “*the kingdom*,” He’s often not talking about *the place* we call heaven—that spiritual realm where God dwells. Frequently, Jesus is seeking to bring out aspects of **kingdom living**, a lifestyle with distinct principles, priorities, and allegiances. In such cases, the “*kingdom of heaven*” or “*kingdom of God*” is discussed to encourage followers to **imitate the model of Jesus, the King**. As believers and members of the church—the mysterious spiritual form of the kingdom on earth—we emulate the character of the King and are transformed into His likeness. And in this realm of kingdom living, the **grace** and **mercy** expressed in limitless forgiveness are paramount.

A. (:24-27) Example of Great Mercy

1. (:24-25) Legitimate Debt Requires Full Repayment

a. (:24) Legitimate Debt

*“And when he had begun to settle them,
there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.”*

D. A. Carson: We glimpse some idea of the **size of the indebtedness** when we recall that David donated three thousand talents of gold and seven thousand talents of silver for the construction of the temple, and the princes provided five thousand talents of gold and ten thousand talents of silver (**1Ch 29:4, 7**). Some recent estimates suggest a dollar value of twelve million, but with inflation and fluctuating precious metal prices, this could be over a **billion dollars** in today’s currency.

R. T. France: A **talent** was originally a weight (probably about 30 kg.) of metal; when used as a monetary term without specifying the metal involved it would probably have been understood to be of silver. While the exact amount varied, a talent of silver was conventionally reckoned at 6,000 denarii. If one denarius was an acceptable day’s wage for a laborer (see **20:1–15**), a single talent would then represent what a laborer might hope to earn in half a lifetime. It was, at all events, a very large sum of money. Ten thousand talents (sixty million denarii; or some 300 tons of silver!) is therefore a sum far outside any individual’s grasp. Ten thousand (*myria*, hence our “*myriad*”) is the largest numeral for which a Greek term exists, and the talent is the largest known amount of money. When the two are combined the effect is like our “**zillions**.” What God has forgiven his people is **beyond human calculation**.

b. (:25) Lack of Resources to Repay Leads to Bondage

*“But since he did not have the means to repay,
his lord commanded him to be sold,
along with his wife and children and all that he had,
and repayment to be made.”*

2. (:26-27) Compassionate Grace Extends Merciful Forgiveness

a. (:26) Plea for Mercy with Unrealistic Promise

*“The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying,
'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.'”*

Grant Osborne: The strong imagery of “*falling down*” and “*prostrating*” himself before the king shows how **desperate** the man was. He begs for mercy and “*patience*” (with “*be patient*” [μακροθυμέω] often used of God’s “*long-suffering*” toward Israel in the LXX). The very same plea will be made by the fellow slave in v. 29. Obviously the man could never “*pay back everything*” with such a huge debt. So the king’s mercy is given even greater emphasis by this **patently ridiculous pledge**.

- b. (:27) Practicing Compassion in Canceling the Debt
“*And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.*”

Craig Blomberg: The man begs for mercy and makes a promise he almost certainly will not be able to keep. To the astonishment of Jesus’ original audience, the king pities the man and cancels his debt. Not only will he not sell him into slavery, but he will not require repayment of any kind. Sheer grace is at work here. “*Took pity*” is the same word for the compassion that characterizes Jesus’ emotions and behavior in **9:36; 14:14; 15:32; and 20:34**.

Donald Hagner: The metaphor of forgiven debt for the forgiveness of sins is found in **Luke 7:40–43** (where the greater the debt, the greater the love of the debtor for the creditor). In response to the plea of the servant for clemency in the form of the time to repay the enormous debt, the sovereign responds with nearly unimaginable grace in the full dismissal of all indebtedness. It is not difficult to hear the **echo of the gospel** of the forgiveness of sins in this verse.

B. (:28-34) Example of Great Hypocrisy

1. (:28) Forgiven Debtor of Much Should Not Be Abusive Collector of Little

“*But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'*”

William Barclay: The biblical scholar **A. R. S. Kennedy** drew this vivid picture to contrast the debts. Suppose they were paid in small coins (he suggested sixpences; we might think in terms of 5-pence pieces or dimes). The 100-denarii debt could be carried in one pocket. The 10,000-talent debt would take an army of about 8,600 carriers to carry it, each carrying a sack of coins 60 lb in weight; and they would form, at a distance of a yard apart, a line five miles long! **The contrast between the debts is staggering.** The point is that nothing that others can do to us can in any way compare with what we have done to God; and if God has forgiven us the debt we owe to him, we must forgive our neighbours the debts they owe to us. Nothing that we have to forgive can even faintly or remotely compare with what we have been forgiven.

2. (:29-30) Insistence on Retribution Exposes a Heart of No Compassion and No Mercy

- a. (:29) Plea for Mercy
“*So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'*”

- b. (:30) Pursuit of Retribution
“*He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.*”

Craig Blomberg: “*He refused*” is literally *he was not willing*, showing that the servant made a conscious choice to harden his heart. Needless to say, the other servants are outraged and report the matter to the king.

3. (:31-34) Failure to Forgive Consigns One to Painful Torment

a. (:31) Shocking Hypocrisy

“So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.”

Grant Osborne: The other slaves “*saw*” it all (temporal participle ἰδόντες) and had an intense reaction. “*Distressed*” (ἐλυπήθησαν) has overtones of both **grief** and **indignation**, and the depth of their reaction at the man’s harsh hypocrisy led them to report it all to the king, with διαφέω meaning to “*tell in detail*” or “*explain fully*” the events to the king.

b. (:32-33) Shameful Indictment

1) (:32) Your Experience of Great Mercy

“Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.’”

Richard Gardner: The reaction of the king to the news of this transaction is one of **righteous indignation**. He calls the official wicked because of the heartless way he has treated a brother servant. He points to the inconsistency of accepting a gift of mercy and withholding mercy from another. And he consigns the official to torture in prison until he comes up with the money. It is the same action the official himself took in relation to his fellow servant (cf. v. 30). Only now, where the debt in question can never be repaid, the implication of the sentence is imprisonment forever.

2) (:33) Your Response of No Mercy

“Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?”

c. (:34) Severe Punishment

“And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”

Ray Stedman: [Explaining the “torment” experienced by those who fail to forgive:]

This is a marvelously expressive phrase to describe what happens to us when we do not forgive another. It is an accurate description of gnawing resentment and bitterness, the awful gall of hate or envy. It is a terrible feeling. We cannot get away from it, we cannot escape it. We find ourselves powerless to avoid it. We feel strongly this separation from another, and, every time we think of them, we feel within the acid of **resentment** and **hate** eating away at our peace and calmness. This is the **torturing** that our Lord says will take place.

Donald Hagner: Torturers, though disallowed by the Jews, were common in Roman prisons; in the case of unpaid debt, friends and relations would have accordingly been more urgent in raising money. Given the enormity of the debt, the imprisonment would have been permanent. This together with the reference to the torturers may hint (cf. v. 35) at eschatological punishment. This verse is the close counterpart of v. 30, which describes in similar language the servant’s imprisonment of his fellow servant until his debt was paid. It demonstrates concretely the

teaching that as one treats others so also will one be treated, a point made explicit in the application of the parable in the following verse.

III. (:35) APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE – FAILURE TO FORGIVE DISQUALIFIES YOU AS A GENUINE DISCIPLE

“So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

Craig Blomberg: Jesus' conclusion reminds us of what v. 23 made clear—that the purpose of the story is to communicate a spiritual lesson about the kingdom of heaven. It also points out that, at least on this occasion, Jesus was not trying primarily to conceal truth from the crowds but to clarify it for his disciples. The reference to a “brother” ties Jesus' conclusion in with Peter's original question (v. 21). The following three themes emerge from the main characters and episodes of the parable: God's boundless grace, the absurdity of spurning that grace, and the frightful fate awaiting the unforgiving. The law of end-stress highlights the third of these, but all are important. **Carson** correctly captures the balance of mercy and judgment reflected here: “Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and punishes so ruthlessly, and neither should we. Indeed, it is precisely because he is a God of such compassion and mercy that he cannot possibly accept as his those devoid of compassion and mercy.”

David Turner: The connection of the story with 6:14 is clear. Disciples cannot presume that God will forgive them if they are unwilling to forgive their fellows. Those who have genuinely received forgiveness will be forgiving to others (6:14–15; cf. Luke 6:36; Eph. 4:31–5:2; James 2:13; 1 John 4:11). And this forgiveness must be genuine, from the heart, another important Matthean theme (cf. Matt. 5:8, 28; 6:21; 11:29; 12:34; 13:15, 19; 15:8, 18, 19; 22:37; 24:48).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage help you appreciate the depth of the Lord’s forgiveness?
- 2) Is there someone in your life whom you struggle to forgive?
- 3) How does the obligation to forgive differ in the case where the person is repentant as opposed to when the person is unrepentant?
- 4) What are some of the negative consequences of an unforgiving heart?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: [This parable] teaches that lesson which runs through all the New Testament – **we must forgive in order to be forgiven.** Those who will not forgive others cannot hope that

God will forgive them. “*Blessed are the merciful,*” said Jesus, “*for they will receive mercy*” (Matthew 5:7). No sooner had Jesus taught his disciples his own prayer than he went on to expand and explain one petition in it: “*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:14–15). As James had it: “*For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy*” (James 2:13). **Divine and human forgiveness go hand in hand.**

Warren Wiersbe: The main character in this parable went through three stages in his experience of forgiveness.

(1) He was a debtor (vv. 23-27).

(2) He was a creditor (vv. 28-30).

Perhaps he had the *legal* right to throw the man in prison, but he did not have the *moral* right. He had been forgiven himself – should he not forgive his fellow servant? He and his family had been spared the shame and suffering of prison. Should he not spare his friend?

(3) He became a prisoner (vv. 31-34).

The world’s worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. Some of the most miserable people I have met in my ministry have been people who would not forgive others.

R. T. France: While a hundred denarii is a plausible amount for one man to owe another, ten thousand talents is far beyond what any individual, still less a slave, might owe even to a king. The suggestion that the first debtor is in fact a highly-placed official responsible for handling the tax revenues of a large province may perhaps bring the sum closer to the bounds of possibility, but the way the rest of the story is told hardly encourages that supposition; note that the debt is described in v. 27 as a “*loan,*” and that the debtor is a “*slave*”. But in any case there is no need to make the sum more possible. A parable is not necessarily a reflection of real life. It is an **imaginary story** designed to **make a point in a striking way**, and the more improbable the sums involved the greater the audience’s gasps of astonishment and the greater their amazement both at the unheard-of generosity of the master and at the obtuseness of the slave. Larger-than-life imagery makes for compelling listening, and is not well served by pedantic explanation.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The O.T. character Joseph is a classic example of the type of forgiveness Jesus requires of all of His followers (Gen. 50:17-21). See also Stephen’s prayer in Acts 7:60. However, none can compare to the Savior who prayed while dying on the cross, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Lk. 23:34).

J. Ligon Duncan: And so we ask ourselves, “What then does it mean that we ought to be ready to forgive? What if the other person is not repentant?” Well, Jesus is ready for us there as well, because He’s speaking in this passage, about an attitude of forgiveness.

Calvin helps us, by the way, in this area in his commentary by suggesting that there are two kinds of forgiveness. There is the willingness to forgive, and there is that forgiveness of a repentant person that helps restore the relationship. Those are two different things. There may be times where God calls upon You to have a merciful heart toward someone who is not yet repentant. God may call on You to be ready to forgive that person in case they are repentant, and

yet to deal with the fact that they have not gotten to the point where they have seen their sin. In that case, you can't restore the relationship on your own. You can't bring about reconciliation because the other party doesn't think there needs to be any reconciliation, doesn't think there's been any offense to you. But you can be ready to forgive.

J.C. Ryle puts it beautifully. He says, "It takes two to make a quarrel, but let us purpose ourselves as Christians that we will not be the one." We will not be the obstacles to reconciliation in the relationship. Our hearts are going to be open to reconciliation in the relationship if only our brother or sister will cooperate. But isn't it so often the other way around? We, ourselves, want forgiveness to extended immediately to us – in fact we almost think it's a right – but when we are deeply hurt, when we have been deeply wounded in those most serious of sins in relationships, we are very grudging in our willingness to hand out the same kind of mercy that we want for ourselves.

Jason Lim: **C. S. Lewis** once said, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." God's will is for us to forgive our enemies. He wants us to put away all wrath and malice and bitterness. And it is for our good too. Someone said that resentment is like drinking poison hoping the other person dies. Unforgiveness puts us into a prison of suffering. It is a heavy burden for the soul. Unforgiveness is like blood-sucking leeches of your spiritual life. But how can I forgive? It's so hard! The secret is in the **gospel -- how God has forgiven the inexcusable in you**. You see, the gospel is not a message that cries out, "Pay God for your sins!" The gospel is the glorious news, "Jesus paid it all!" And just as we have received this stunning love that we are fully forgiven of all our sins, we are now to bend this love and forgiveness outwards towards our enemies. Therefore, we must learn to linger at the cross, and soak in the soothing bath of God's love in order that the leeches of unforgiveness can fall off our souls. . .

Matthew 18, verse 21 to 35, really revolves around this subject of **vengeance or forgiveness**, something we all can identify with. A couple quarrels quite a lot - The husband and the wife. But one day when they were not quarrelling, the husband asked his wife, "Dear, how is it possible that after we quarrel each time, you are able to stay so calm and collected the next day? You don't seem to be angry with me anymore. You don't seem to be upset. How is it that you can remain so collected when I am so upset and I want to shout at you?" The wife says, "Easy! I just clean the toilet." "What?" "Yes, I just clean the toilet." "But how is cleaning the toilet able to keep you calm?" "Well, I clean the toilet using your toothbrush."

Getting even is a natural instinct, isn't it? You see that in little children. . .

Forgiveness is not forgetting. Forgiveness is a voluntary; intentional choice to release someone from a debt they have to pay to you. You see when someone offends you, when someone despises you, when someone slanders you, you feel like there is a debt they have to pay. It's an emotional debt and you hold that person to that debt until he pays. Forgiveness, however, is that voluntary intentional choice to say, "I release you from the debt. I'm not going to make you pay. I'm not going to make you suffer. I'm content to absorb that injury." . . .

I say to you friends, "Your homework today is to go back and to linger there at the cross. To stay there, to soak in the bath, to relish in the amazing love of God. Preach to yourself the **Gospel**. Remind yourself of what Jesus has done." Each time we gather for Lord's Supper, let there be a reminder of God's love. Each time we gather to worship, as we sing, as we hear God's Word, let

us be refreshed in our soul about the love of Jesus. Oh, then you find that perhaps one day, the blood sucking leeches of unforgiveness will finally, finally fall off!

<https://gospellight.sg/sermons/how-shall-i-forgive-matthew-1821-35/>

Ray Stedman: Breaking the Resentment Barrier

The parable we have before us deals with the **healing of hurts between people**, that is, the way to **resolve differences**, to heal the breaches that frequently come between members of families and members of churches, to dissolve the resentments and settle the bitter feuds and the fights that sometimes break out.

Some time ago I read a psychologist who said that Christians, he felt, were very much like porcupines on a cold winter's night. The cold drives them to huddle together to keep warm, but as soon as they get close to another they start jabbing each other with their spines and that forces them to move apart; thus they are forever coming together and moving apart in a kind of slow dance.

There may be a great deal of truth to that. You will remember the little jingle that I frequently quote,

*To dwell above
with saints we love,
Oh, that will be glory.
But to dwell below
with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.*

But now we want to speak about forgiving one another; the only way to break through the resentment barrier that separates us from each other. Forgiveness, of course, is the virtue we most enjoy, and least employ, in our Christian experience. We all love to be forgiven -- we expect it, and want it. But we find it a struggle to forgive; we resist it, and refuse oftentimes to do it. . .

The valuable of this parable lies in seeing that it is a **picture of us**. The Lord Jesus is here holding up a mirror in order that we might see ourselves. We are the servant who has been forgiven a vast and staggering amount of money, and God is the great king that has forgiven us.

We must see ourselves in this if we are going to be helped by this word of Jesus. We must see that the sum of our offenses against God through the years constitutes this kind of a debt, an absolutely impossible amount. Our rebellions, our selfish acts and thoughts, our willful choices, our lovelessness toward one another, and the hurt we have caused others, our pride, our anger, our lusts, our bitterness, our hates, and our lies; all these add up through the years to a staggering debt we owe God and which we cannot pay. But then there comes the good news, the wonderful good news of the gospel. There came a day when we stood in the presence of God and heard him pronounce those words, "Forgiven, in Christ's name." The debt was wiped away. In one moment it was gone. How well we remember, as we look back to it, the glory of that moment when we realized that before God we stood cleansed, blameless, free; the debt was paid and we were free.

There are two reasons revealed here why Christians must forgive each other: First, we must forgive because **anything less is hypocritical**. We cannot demand justice from others because we do not stand on that ground ourselves. As the king said to this servant, "*You wicked servant!*

Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" This is what Jesus is saying to us. We must forgive one another because we have already been forgiven. Is not that the ground the Apostle Paul takes in Colossians 3, and in Ephesians 4:31?

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32 RSV)

That is the basis of Christian forgiveness. Jesus says that, when we refuse to do this, when we hold a grudge, or are difficult or bitter and refuse to settle an issue, then we are doing exactly what this unrighteous steward does here. In the very moment of our own forgiveness we are demanding justice, when we ourselves cannot and do not stand on that level.

The sign that we are acting on the basis of justice and not mercy is that, like this servant, we act harshly. That is the invariable mark we are demanding justice and not acting in forgiveness or mercy. We speak severely and sharply to the other. . .

The second reason we must forgive is **because of the torment which an unforgiving spirit inflicts upon us. . .**

If we insist on justice, we will be given justice ourselves. As James tell us, "*Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy,*" (**James 2:13**). The result will be that we are "*delivered to the torturers.*"

This is a marvelously expressive phrase to describe what happens to us when we do not forgive another. It is an accurate description of **gnawing resentment and bitterness**, the awful gall of hate or envy. It is a terrible feeling. We cannot get away from it, we cannot escape it. We find ourselves powerless to avoid it. We feel strongly this separation from another, and, every time we think of them, we feel within the acid of resentment and hate eating away at our peace and calmness. This is the torturing that our Lord says will take place. In the book of Hebrews we read, "*Let no root of bitterness springing up trouble you,*" (**Hebrews 12:15**). Notice where the trouble occurs? It hits you, not the other fellow. . .

Therefore, if there is a grudge, if we have been harboring resentment, if there is a feeling of antipathy, if we do not want to speak to someone else, if we feel cut off from another, two things have happened: We have reacted as an ungrateful wretch to the grace that has been extended to us, just as this unforgiving steward did. Second, we have consigned ourselves to bitterness of heart, to the eating of the acid of resentment to our own hurt. This is why nothing will ever take place toward the healing of the world until there is the healing of the church, the healing of the heart, and the healing of hurts, one with another, by the grace God has shown to us. Let us move over onto this ground, and live on this level.

TEXT: Matthew 19:1-12

TITLE: PERMANENCY OF MARRIAGE

BIG IDEA:

GOD DESIGNED MARRIAGE TO BE A PERMANENT ONE-FLESH DIVINE UNION BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN FOR LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

Orthodox Evangelical commentators have long been divided on their positions on this passage as it relates to the teaching of Jesus regarding the permanency of marriage and potential for divorce and remarriage. You have **John MacArthur** and **D. A. Carson** and the vast majority of Christendom today on the side of allowable exception clauses that would validate divorce and remarriage for believers in specific cases. While **John Piper**, **James Boice**, **Voddie Baucham** and others would hold to no allowance for divorce and remarriage under any circumstances as long as the departing spouse has not yet died. So I enter humbly into this discussion without claiming that I have the last word or the simple truth.

It is interesting that both sides have criticized the other side for taking a position based on utilitarian grounds, when in fact all the players named above certainly have accurate biblical exegesis and the pursuit of truth as their sincere goal. It has been claimed that those holding the permanency view are simply trying to stem the tide of rampant increases in the rates of divorce and remarriage in society. While the reverse charge is that pastoral pressure from the prevalence of complicated life situations has rendered the permissive interpretation less than inductively-based and objective in approach. I choose to stay clear of all such charges and admit the complexity of the issues since so many different passages are involved. I have to add that no expositor can claim complete objectivity, but at least I don't have some of the more common pressures of denominational positions or immediate pastoral pressures of a large church to impact my thinking.

There is no question that a pastoral heart is required for sensitivity towards those who have either experienced or been impacted by such situations. We must always embrace the compassion of God in extending love and forgiveness and grace as we seek to maintain the unity of the body and to encourage all believers to grow in Christ in their present situation. But still truth is truth and we must endeavor to discern the mind of Christ on this important issue and apply truth without compromising.

My personal view aligns with the **Permanency of Marriage** without any provision for divorce or remarriage. Obviously, the "exception clauses" such as we find in **Matt. 19** will be the major sticking point for me. The following observations have informed my conclusions:

- The starting point should be **God's design for marriage** and His stated **hatred of divorce** rather than investigating how far one can push the envelope before crossing the line into obvious transgression. How can anything but death of one of the partners break the **one-flesh union** that God creates in marriage?
- The simple statements of Jesus show that He is comfortable with unambiguous support of the permanency of marriage. It is only in the **Jewish context** in Matthew, when pressed

by the entrapment-minded Pharisees that He addresses any type of possible exception. There are a variety of approaches to interpreting His response.

- The Pharisees expected Jesus to support the more conservative of the two schools of thought of the day – that which would only allow divorce in the case of adultery or sexual sin. Yet Jesus so shocked His disciples by taking **a more extreme position** that they almost despaired of the option of marriage. Jesus encouraged them with additional teaching about God’s grace and provision for **celibacy** where appropriate. Thus Jesus remained consistent to His requirement that kingdom ethics required righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees.
- Some of the topics in the surrounding context in the Gospel of Matthew include the **unlimited nature of forgiveness** and the importance of **faithfulness to vows** – both of which would be compromised by the Permissive View.
- The Permanency view better maintains the essential symbolic picture of the **relationship between Christ and His bride the church**.
- The Permanency view better fits the hermeneutical principle of **interpreting unclear passages in light of clear passages** rather than vice versa.

I also find that the Permissive View allows for fallen humans to attempt to “game” the system and create a situation where they can take advantage of the “**exception**” **loophole** to escape an undesirable marriage.

- For example, take a mixed marriage situation where the believing spouse could antagonize the unbeliever to the point where the unbeliever would seek a divorce and supposedly release the believer from bondage to remarry.
- Or even in a marriage between believers, a spouse could manipulate the situation to make it more like that the partner commit adultery and make divorce and remarriage a viable option.

That seems like a dangerous can of worms to me.

Of course the relevant passages still need to be exegeted in a manner that would allow for this Permanency View.

Stu Weber: Lifelong marital faithfulness is God's intention, requiring our dependence on his supernatural strength.

William Barclay: Beyond all doubt, the ideal is that marriage should be an indissoluble union between two people, and that marriage should be entered into as a total union of two personalities, not designed to make one act possible, but designed to make all life a satisfying and mutually completing fellowship. That is the essential basis on which we must proceed.

R. T. France: The whole pericope therefore constitutes a double challenge to conventional attitudes to marriage:

- on the one hand God intends marriage to remain unbroken, and the current acceptance of divorce is a surrender to human failure;
- on the other hand, for some people obedience to God’s will may properly mean that they do not marry at all.

The resultant argument develops as follows:

- statement of basic scriptural principle (**vv. 4–6**);

- counter-scripture (v. 7);
- resolution of how scripture B relates to scripture A (v. 8);
- resultant pronouncement (v. 9).

Donald Hagner: Again in this pericope we encounter the absoluteness of the kingdom of God and its ethics. In his answer to the question about divorce, Jesus appeals to the creation narrative of Genesis. The kingdom of God brought by Jesus is ultimately to involve the restoration of the perfection of the pre-fall creation, and the ethics of the kingdom as taught by Jesus reflect this fact. As God intended no divorce for the Garden of Eden, so divorce is not to be allowed in the new era of the kingdom of God. The call of some to celibacy also reflects the priority of the kingdom in the present time frame.

Van Parunak: Each component of the Lord's teaching emphasizes that marriages are made in heaven, but divorce is a purely human product. Every party involved in divorce and remarriage is guilty of adultery. The Lord condemns the mate who initiates the divorce, and (if remarriage follows the separation) the one who is put away and the second partner. The fornication clause seems to make an exception. But it was **only recorded for Jewish audiences**, and they should know from their own Scriptures that fornication leads, not to divorce, but to **death**.

(:1-2) GEOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

A. (:1) Jesus Leaves Galilee for Judea

“And it came about that when Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee, and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan;”

Grant Osborne: The first clause is Matthew’s formula for ending a discourse (cf. **7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 26:1**) and introduces the first of the comments on the travel narrative in Matthew. Jesus has spent his entire ministry thus far in Galilee (in Matthew at least; cf. **John 2:1–13; 4:1–5:47; 7:1–52; 10:22–42** with several trips to Judea for the feasts) and now begins his final journey.

R. T. France: This is now the fourth use of the concluding formula which marks each of the five main discourses. The formula serves again both to conclude the discourse and to move the narrative on into its next phase. Within the narrative structure of this part of the gospel the next phase must be the approach to Jerusalem, which was announced as the ultimate goal of their journey in **16:21** and toward which they have been travelling since leaving the area of Caesarea Philippi. They have passed through Galilee again on their way southward (**17:22, 24**), but now the group finally leave their home province and head for the unfamiliar territory of Judea and its threatening capital Jerusalem. They will not return to Galilee until **28:16**, after all Jesus’ predictions have been fulfilled.

D. A. Carson: Their “*test*,” here, was probably delivered in the hope that Jesus would say something to damage his reputation with the people or even seem to contradict Moses. Perhaps, too, they hoped that Jesus would say something that would entangle him in the Herod-Herodias affair so that he might meet the Baptist’s fate.

B. (:2) Jesus Heal Many among the Crowds

“and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.”

I. (:3-6) PERMANENCE = GOD'S DESIGNED INTENTION FOR MARRIAGE

A. (:3) Entrapment by the Pharisees Regarding the Issue of Divorce

*“And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying,
‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?’”*

Stu Weber: John the Baptist's dealing with the issue of divorce had cost him his head. The verb test is from *peirazo*, meaning “to test, tempt.” It is the same verb Matthew used of Satan tempting Jesus in **4:1, 3**; the Pharisees and Sadducees demanding the second sign in **16:1**; the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians together trying to trap Jesus concerning taxation (**22:18**) and the greatest commandment (**22:35**). Their “test” was an action of **malicious intent**.

Van Parunak: The Pharisees know that divorce is a **sensitive subject in Perea**. They also know that the Lord's position on divorce, as presented in the Sermon on the Mount, is similar to John's. When they find Christ in this region, they try to lure him into saying something about divorce that will enrage Herod's wife, so that she will destroy him as she did John. Matthew and Mark record portions of the resulting conversation.

Charles Swindoll: The debate among the Pharisees themselves centered on the meaning of the words “*he has found some indecency in her*” (**Deut. 24:1**). The interpretations of this expression tended to go in one of two directions in Jesus' day. The more conservative school of thought restricted this language to be referring to only sexual immorality, while the more liberal school of thought understood “*indecency*” to include anything that displeased a husband. . .

I suppose this question was posed by the more conservative teachers. But they weren't trying to win Jesus' support so as to gain points against their liberal opponents. Rather, they were attempting to set up a trip wire that Jesus would spring, entangling Himself in a net of complex biblical, theological, practical, and political controversy from which He wouldn't be able to extricate Himself. Little did they know that they weren't dealing with some amateur interpreter of the Law of Moses . . . they were dealing with the Author Himself!

Stanley Saunders: The Pharisees, following **Deuteronomy 24**, presume the legality and legitimacy of divorce, as well as male cultural dominance and prerogative in initiating divorce. Jesus will challenge each of these assumptions.

B. (:4-6) Exposition by Jesus Regarding God's Design for Marriage

“And He answered and said,”

1. (:4b-5) Argument from God's Design in Creation

a. (:4b) Potential for Marriage Union Derives from Creation of Male and Female

*“Have you not read,
that He who created them from the beginning
made them male and female,”*

No gender confusion back at the point of creation.

Stu Weber: *Haven't you read* implies that the answer should have been **obvious**. Jesus was unveiling the Pharisees' true motives, which was to trap him. In effect, he was saying, “You know better than to ask this question.” Marriage should reflect God's image, not guarantee our

personal “happiness.” The permanent marriage bond is in keeping with God's original design for men and women.

Grant Osborne: Jesus’ point is that God created men and women to be together, not to be divorced. . . The purpose of creation is the God-given union of “*male and female.*”

Jeffrey Crabtree: The creation of the two sexes was foundational to God’s order. God’s creation of Adam as male and Eve as female shows God planned for their physical union from the beginning (**Hendriksen** 715). Their potential for union is one basis for the permanency of marriage.

- b. (:5) Permanence of Marriage Derives from Creation of New Family Unit
“*and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh ?’*”

Robert Gundry: Traditionally, marriage vows were “consummated” by sexual union. The Bible says husband and wife “*become one flesh.*” God planned for a man and a woman first to give their hearts, then their wills to each other, through wedding vows. Then they can give their bodies. Then, as the Bible says, they can be naked and feel no shame. We can reveal ourselves, show our warts, both literal and metaphorical. When two people pledge to love one another for life, it becomes safe to give the body. It is safe to become pregnant. When two people promise to love as long as they live, it is no longer a half-insane risk to have a child.

But God wants more than “safety” for us. The pledge of lifelong loyalty makes physical intimacy safe. But when the pledge begins to feel formal or dry, physical intimacy both expresses and rekindles love.

As the Song of Solomon celebrates love in marriage, the woman says, “*I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me*” (**Song 7:10**). We are used to hearing that we should control our desires, but the Bible encourages desire in marriage and for good reason. In marriage, we take the body of the beloved after we have first given mind and will to the beloved. Then we can take another without abusing the other, and we can give ourselves without fear of rejection or domination. That provides the foundation for intimate love.

But when we give the body without marriage, the relationship often becomes unsettled, insecure. People fret, “Is he committed to this relationship? As much as I am?” When premarital sex is common, it also leaves people less motivated to marry.

S. Lewis Johnson: And finally, I think we can say the Lord Jesus regarded marriage as a **permanent union**. We read, here, for example—or rather, **verse 5**—“*For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife.*” That word is very interesting. That word in the Greek text is a word that meant, literally to glue or cement together—something I don’t think that we are to take literally—but you can see that it expresses a union that is regarded as permanent. **Erasmus** referred to this in the Latin text and translated this, *aglutinabatur*, which means the same thing, “*shall be glued together.*” You can recognize our English word from the Latin word, *aglutinabatur*, the future tense of that word. Glued together. So, the ideal is an **indissoluble union**. He says, “*And shall cleave to his wife.*”

2. (:6) Argument from the Nature of the Marriage Union

a. One-Flesh Union

“Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

b. Indissoluble Union

“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

II. (:7-9) PERMANENCE = CHRIST’S CLEAR COMMAND DESPITE CONFUSION OVER MOSAIC PRACTICE

A. (:7) Objection of the Pharisees

“They said to Him,

‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?’”

Charles Swindoll: In their response, they essentially argued, “If what You say is true, that divorce was not part of God’s intention for marriage, then why would Moses—the great revealer of the Law—command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Here, they tried to pit Jesus against Moses—His words against the Law. Ignoring Jesus’ argument from **Genesis 1 and 2**, they went back to **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. The argument, in their minds, was compelling: If it were unlawful to divorce a wife, based on the words of Genesis, then Moses was breaking God’s law by providing for divorce in Deuteronomy.

D. A. Carson: But what was the “*indecent*” in Moses’ day that allowed for divorce? “*Something indecent*” could not be equated with adultery, for the normal punishment for that was **death**, not divorce (**Dt 22:22**)—though it is not at all clear that the death penalty was in fact regularly imposed for adultery (cf. **Henry McKeating**, “Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society,” JSOT 11 [1979]: 57–72). Nor could the indecency be suspicion of adultery, for which the prescribed procedure was the bitter-water rite (**Nu 5:11–31**). Yet the indecency must have been shocking. Ancient Israel took marriage seriously. The best assumption is that the indecency was any lewd, immoral behavior, sometimes including, but not restricted to, adultery—e.g., homosexuality or sexual misconduct that fell short of intercourse.

R. T. France: This is a principle which applies much more widely than only to the specific issue of divorce: ethical norms should be sought not in legal texts which deal with the situation where things have already gone wrong, but in the most fundamental statements available of the positive will of God for human behavior. There is a saying, “**Hard cases make bad law**,” and it may be suggested that they make even worse ethics. The ethics of the kingdom of heaven, as we have seen them illustrated in **5:21–48**, seek not primarily how evil may be contained and alleviated, but how the best may be discerned and followed. It would make a huge and beneficial difference to modern debates on divorce if this priority were observed, so that the focus fell not on what grounds for divorce may be permitted (as in the Pharisees’ question), but on **how marriage may best live up to the Creator’s purpose for it**. There will, no doubt, always be a need for trouble-shooting legislation and pastoral help when things have gone wrong, but if that is where our ethical discussion begins the battle is lost before it is joined.

- Those who start from **Deut 24:1–4** will have as their basic presupposition that divorce is to be expected, the question being only how it is to be regulated.
- Those who start from **Genesis 1–2** will see any separation of what God has joined together as always an evil; circumstances may prove it to be the lesser evil, but that can

never make it less than an infringement of the primary purpose of God for marriage.

Van Parunak: The Pharisees want the Lord to comment on **Deuteronomy 24** and divorce. The Lord deflects their attention to **Genesis 3** and marriage. Frustrated, they try to pull him back to Deuteronomy. They carelessly drop their guard, and show their real attitude toward the passage by calling it a command. Matthew records this part of the conversation.

[The Pharisees] *say unto him, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to dismiss away?" He says unto them, "Moses because of your hardness of heart allowed you to dismiss your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:7, 8).*

The Lord answers, not by opposing Moses, but by opposing their interpretation. They claim, "*Moses commanded.*" He responds, "*Moses allowed.*" Moses' legislation does not command divorce. It only makes allowance for it, by telling people what to do if they are divorced.

The Pharisees see divorce as a right guaranteed by the Law, following the three law interpretation of **Deuteronomy 24**. The Lord says that it merely makes provision for man's sin. He supports the interpretation of the entire paragraph as a **single command**.

The Lord has **taken control of the conversation**. From this position of strength he delivers his teaching:

And I say to you, "Whoever dismisses his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery, and he who marries a dismissed woman commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

Ironically, this is probably just the sort of strong statement that the Pharisees originally hoped to elicit from him. Yet he delivers it only after making clear to them who is in control. His control extends beyond them to Herod, for inspite of their malice, they do not succeed in bringing John's fate upon him.

The Lord's teaching on divorce here is similar to that in the Sermon on the Mount. He again uses the Pharisees' word for divorce, meaning literally "*dismiss*." He again says that it is adultery to marry a dismissed woman. Going beyond the Sermon on the Mount, he adds that the husband who dismisses her and marries someone else commits adultery, unless he dismisses her for fornication. Once again, we understand from **Deuteronomy 22** that in the case of fornication she is dead, and there is no danger of adultery.

B. (:8) Divorce Is Rooted in Hardness of Heart

*"He said to them,
'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives;
but from the beginning it has not been this way.'"*

Grant Osborne: In light of the creation principle that God does not want divorce, Moses' statement becomes mere "permission" rather than command. As **Keener** points out, "To be able to exercise some degree of restraint over human injustice, Moses' civil laws regulated some human institutions rather than seeking to abolish them altogether: divorce, polygyny, the avengers of blood, and slavery." So what is behind it is not God's will but "*the hardness of your hearts.*"

Stu Weber: Moses knew that hardhearted people would continue to divorce their spouses, so he passed on God's guidelines to protect those who were victims of divorce.

The second half of **19:8** states God's original intention, preparing for **19:9**. But contrasts God's will concerning divorce (**that there be none**) with his permission of divorce through Moses. *From the beginning* refers to God's original plan. God's clear intention was that there be no divorce at all. He actually hates the concept (**Mal. 2:16**).

Jesus' point was that anyone who saw divorce and remarriage in terms of what may or may not be permissible was already out of line. Divorce is not some morally neutral option open to God's people. It is **fundamentally sinful**, and it grows out of the hardness of the selfish human heart.

Ken Peterman: General observations about the use of *hardness* in Scripture:

- **Hardness** is associated with stubbornness (**Acts 19:9**). Stubbornness involves an unwillingness to accept truth and perhaps a turning from the truth itself.
- **Hardness** is associated with disobedience (**Hebrews 3:8**). Disobedience involves an unwillingness to receive the truth rather than an inability to understand it (**John 6:60**).
- **Hardness** is associated with selfishness (**Matthew 25:24**). Selfishness is a product of the flesh, not the Spirit.

C. (:9) Christ's Clear Prohibition of Divorce

*"And I say to you,
'whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'"*

Leon Morris: We should be clear that he is not setting up a new set of regulations and providing for all the exceptions that a law must take note of. He is laying down in strong terms the **permanent nature** of the marriage tie in the face of a society where a marriage could be dissolved at any time a husband chose to write out a few lines containing the necessary formula, sign it before witnesses, and hand it to his wife. Jesus is saying that this is no way to treat a divine ordinance. He is not defining under what circumstances a divorce may or may not take place.

D. A. Carson: The second problem concerns the meaning of *porneia* (NIV, "*marital unfaithfulness*," GK 4518; KJV, "*fornication*"). **H. Baltensweiler** (*Die Ehe im Neuen Testament* [Zurich: Zwingli, 1967], 93) thinks that it refers to **marriage within prohibited degrees (Lev 18)**, i.e., to incest. Many others, especially Roman Catholic scholars, have defended that view in some detail (cf. **J. A. Fitzmyer**, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," TS 37 [1976]: 208–11). Appeal is often made to **1 Corinthians 5:1**, where "*a man has his father's wife*" (his stepmother). But it should be noted that even here Paul gives no indication he is dealing with an incestuous marriage but only an incestuous affair. It is very doubtful whether Paul or any other Jew would have regarded an incestuous relationship as marriage: Paul would not have told the couple to get a divorce but to stop what they were doing. And in the next chapter, Paul uses the same word (*porneia*) to describe prostitution (**1Co 6:13, 16**).

Others have argued that *porneia* refers to **premarital unchastity** (A. Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Testament* [Lund: Gleerup, 1965], 135ff.; Mark Geldard, "Jesus' Teaching on Divorce," *Churchman* 92 [1978]: 134–43); if a man discovers his bride is not a virgin, he may divorce her. This has the advantage (it is argued) of being no real exception to Jesus' prohibition of divorce, making it easier to reconcile Matthew and Mark, who omits the "except" clause. Moreover, it provides a neat background for the disciples' shock (v.10), for if *porneia* refers to every sexual sin, Jesus is saying no more than what many rabbis taught.

Still others hold that *porneia* here means "**adultery**," no more and no less (e.g., T. V. Fleming, "Christ and Divorce," *TS* 24 [1963]: 109). Certainly the word can include that meaning (**Jer 3:8–9** LXX; cf. Sir 23:23). Yet, in Greek the normal word for adultery is *moicheia* (GK 3657). Matthew has already used *moicheia* and *porneia* in the same context (**15:19**), suggesting some **distinction** between the words, even if there is considerable overlap. A. Mahoney ("A New Look at the Divorce Clauses in Mt 5:32 and 19:9," *CBQ* 30 [1968]: 29–38) suggests *porneia* refers to **spiritual harlotry**, a metaphor often adopted by the OT prophets. Jesus then prohibits divorce except where one spouse is not a Christian. But it is almost impossible to conceive how such a response, couched in such language, could have any relevance (let alone intelligibility) to the disputants here. . .

The reason these and many other creative suggestions have been advanced lies in the difficulty of the verse as a whole, both in its immediate context and as a parallel to Mark-Luke. But it must be admitted that the word *porneia* itself is **very broad**. In unambiguous contexts, it can on occasion refer to a specific kind of sexual sin. Yet even then, this is possible only because the specific sexual sin belongs to the larger category of sexual immorality. *Porneia* covers the **entire range of such sins** (cf. TDNT, 6:579–95; BDAG, 854; Joseph Jensen, "Does Porneia Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina," *NovT* 20 [1978]: 161–84) and **should not be restricted unless the context requires it**.

Van Parunak: There are two ways in which a man may "*dismiss*" his wife.

1. He may "**divorce**" her, putting her out of his house. In this case he causes her to commit adultery, for she will be without support unless she remarries.
2. But if she is guilty of fornication, he has another option. **Deuteronomy 22** says that a married woman who commits fornication should be stoned to death. If she is guilty of fornication, he may "**dismiss**" her from life by having her tried and stoned. In this case he does not cause her to commit adultery, for she is dead and so cannot remarry.

The law of **Deuteronomy 22** prescribes stoning not only for adultery (unfaithfulness after betrothal or marriage), but also for uncleanness before marriage that is concealed from the bridegroom. The word "*fornication*" covers both of these cases, and so the Lord uses it in his instruction.

The second part of the Lord's teaching is also clear.

And whoever marries a dismissed woman commits adultery.

Remarriage is possible only when the woman is "dismissed" in such a way as to leave her alive. Whenever the woman survives her "dismissal," remarriage is adultery, both for her and for her new spouse. When a woman is "dismissed" by stoning because of fornication, though, the question of remarriage does not arise.

The Lord thus rejects the Pharisees' notion that God sanctions divorce. Divorce and remarriage is adultery. By introducing the case of fornication, with its associated penalty of stoning, he emphasizes that **only death can break the marriage bond**. His answer reflects not only the Old Testament notion that "*the Lord hates divorce*" (**Mal. 2:16**), but also the law that condemns impure wives to death (**Deuteronomy 22**).

Various explanations of dealing with *porneia* here that would fit within the Permanency View:

- 1) Treating the act of **dismissal** as death by execution rather than divorce – advocated by **Van Parunak**
- 2) Treating this case as unfaithfulness during the **Jewish betrothal period** (**John Piper, Voddie Baucham** – see below in the notes)
- 3) Treating *porneia* as some other type of Jewish prohibited marriage within the **prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18** (**Charles Ryrie** and **J Carl Laney** in *The Divorce Myth*.)

III. (:10-12) SHOCK OF THE DISCIPLES REGARDING JESUS' HIGH STANDARD OF MARRIAGE WITHOUT DIVORCE

A. (:10) Dismay of the Disciples over the Elimination of the Option of Divorce and Remarriage

*"The disciples said to Him,
If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry."*

Van Parunak: The disciples' next question shows that they have always thought of divorce as a possible escape from a bad marriage.

His disciples say to him, "If the case of the man be so with the wife, it is not expedient to marry" (Matt. 19:10).

If there really is **no escape from marriage other than death**, then one had better remain unmarried.

The disciples' suggestion shows how strong they understand the Lord's teaching to be. Some modern readers may try to find loopholes in the Lord's words. To the disciples, who hear the teaching over and over and discuss it with the Lord, there are no loopholes. The Lord's answer to their comment certainly doesn't add any, either.

Grant Osborne: The **gift of celibacy** is a valid option in the church. The disciples made an ironic statement that it would be better to be single (v. 10), but Jesus turns that on its head and says they are right. For many in ministry, it would be better to remain single and thereby have more time for kingdom business (cf. **1 Cor 7: 7, 26–35**). This is as valid today as it was in the time of Jesus or Paul. We are all aware of those leaders who have chosen the path of celibacy (e.g., John Stott) and of the ministries they had as a result. Pioneer missionaries, evangelists, itinerant teachers, and many others should consider this gift as part of their calling. Most importantly, it is a calling and is not for everyone; Jesus does not elevate single status above marriage but rather says it is a valid calling for those in ministry.

Stu Weber: No matter how one interprets Jesus' stance on divorce and remarriage, it was far **stricter** than the disciples (or anyone else) expected. They had lived all their lives in a society

where divorces were granted liberally. The prevalence of arranged marriages and the tendency for women to be viewed as property may have contributed to the number of divorces. To learn that there was no easy way out of an unsatisfactory marriage caused the disciples to rethink the marriage commitment. They considered that it might be better to avoid the risk of getting into a bad marriage by staying single. The disciples' conclusion, given Jesus' high standards, was, it is better not to marry. Jesus had made his point.

David Turner: **Matthew 19:10–12** should not be read as requiring singleness for all those who have been divorced (contra **Gundry** 1994: 381–82; **Heth and Wenham** 1984: 88). This would imply that God has gifted all divorced people with celibacy. It should also be noted that this passage does not teach that celibates are holier than married people or that their lifestyle is morally superior. Only those who are enabled by special gift should choose a celibate lifestyle for the sake of the kingdom. This passage does not promote asceticism as the ideal for human existence.

B. (:11) Difficult Truth Regarding Celibacy

“But He said to them,

‘Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.’”

C. (:12) Diverse Types of Celibacy Reflect the Possibility of Living a Life of Sexual Abstinence

Grant Osborne: This may be an example of Jesus' wisdom teaching, in which he uses two concrete realities of everyday existence (those born eunuchs and those made eunuchs) to support a third spiritual or moral truth (those eunuchs for the kingdom). The first two described the two different types of eunuchs in the world, those born without sexual organs or impotent and those “*made eunuchs*,” either castrated (often for service in a royal court [e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8**] or in a harem) or had become impotent due to disease or accident.

John Piper: Jesus does not deny the **tremendous difficulty** of his command. Instead, he says in **verse 11**, that the enablement to fulfill the command not to remarry is a divine gift to his disciples. **Verse 12** is an argument that such a life is indeed possible because there are people who for the sake of the kingdom, as well as lower reasons, have dedicated themselves to live a life of singleness.

1. Celibacy Caused by Physical Handicap at Birth

“For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb;”

2. Celibacy Caused by Forced Surgery in Order to Serve the Interests of Powerful Men

“and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men;”

3. Celibacy Caused by Voluntary Embracing of Ministry Opportunities

“and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”

4. Celibacy Not for Everybody

“He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

Craig Blomberg: If many Roman Catholics have overly exalted celibacy as an ideal, most Protestants have drastically undervalued it. Christian singles need much more support from their married friends and their churches, who must value them as equally significant members of the body of Christ. In a society that constantly pressures people into hasty marriages, the church desperately needs to encourage all who sense God leading them to remain single, for however long or short a period of time, to remain faithful to his guidance.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the **intent of the Pharisees** in raising this issue?
- 2) Why does Jesus insist that the **starting point** for any discussion of Divorce and possible Remarriage must be God's original design?
- 3) What is your view of the so-called "exception clause" in **verse 9**?
- 4) Why were the disciples so **shocked** by the position that Jesus advocated?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. T. France: The remainder of the journey narrative before the arrival in Jericho and the eventual climb up to Jerusalem consists of a series of episodes and sections of teaching some of which are provoked by people outside the disciple group, but the main focus of which is on the experience of the disciples as they are confronted by increasingly **unsettling challenges to their conventional attitudes and values**, especially as these relate to family and social life. The sequence will be concluded with the last and most detailed prediction of Jesus' coming rejection, death and resurrection, followed by the extraordinary request of the mother of James and John which reveals that the disciples' grasp of the values of the kingdom of heaven remains at best embryonic. Jesus' response to their continuing quest for positions of importance hinges on the key demand "*It shall not be so among you*" (**20:26**); things do not work the same way in the kingdom of heaven as they do in the kingdoms of the world. **19:30** sums up the revolutionary values of the kingdom of heaven, "*Many who are first will be last, and the last first,*" and the same slogan will be repeated in **20:16**; it is this lesson which, in a variety of ways, the disciples must learn while Jesus is still with them. It will not be a comfortable experience, as one situation or pronouncement after another reveals how far they have still to go before they can see things as he sees them. Their "human thoughts" must be set aside in favor of "the thoughts of God." (**16:23**) It may be deliberately symbolic of the disciples' experience that the last event which occurs before they reach Jerusalem, after this period of re-education, is a **miracle of the cure of blindness**, which results in those who have been cured "*following*" Jesus (**20:34**). . .

What matters is that they are on their way to Jerusalem, where the paradoxical values of the kingdom of heaven will be fully revealed and the disciples' grasp of them will be painfully put to the test.

Warren Wiersbe: The Characteristics of Marriage

- 1) It is a divinely appointed union.
- 2) It is a physical union.
- 3) It is a permanent union.
- 4) It is a union between one man and one woman.

H. Van Dyke Parunak: *Let Not Man Put Asunder: A Biblical Study of Divorce* [Summary Conclusions]

WHAT IS A MARRIAGE?

The Bible regards **marriage** as the only legitimate context for physical union between man and woman. Physical union, though, is not enough to make a couple man and wife before God. The Lord Jesus makes this clear to the woman at the well of Sychar when he tells her that the man with whom she is presently living is not her husband (**John 4:18**). In the next chapter, we will see that at least three things are true of unions that the Bible recognizes as marriage.

- The man and woman enter into a covenant or commitment to one another.
- They make this commitment in keeping with the standards of their society and culture.
- They unite physically.

In discussing unlawful union, we will use the terms "*fornication*" and "*adultery*" in keeping with their biblical usage. "*Adultery*" describes a union in which at least one partner belongs to someone else. It always involves unfaithfulness to marriage. "*Fornication*" describes any unlawful union, whether or not the participants are being unfaithful to their spouses. Every case of adultery is a case of fornication, but some cases of fornication (such as premarital union between single people) are not cases of adultery.

TWO IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES [this section comes from a later chapter]

Deuteronomy 22 gives us two principles of the Mosaic Law, principles that will be important in our later study.

Why were Marriages Terminated?

Moses' Law does specify circumstances when a marriage should be terminated. When a man or woman commits adultery, or when an unmarried girl involved in fornication hides this from her betrothed until after the wedding, Moses requires an end to the marriage.

The reason for ending the marriage is always moral impurity. There is no mention of "incompatibility," "mental cruelty," or "domestic violence." In fact, when a husband accuses his innocent wife, we can imagine that their relation is already very poor. Still, the Law does not separate them, but insists that they stay together.

How did the Law Terminate Marriages?

The means by which the Law terminates a marriage is **death by stoning**. This verdict is very severe to the guilty, but unlike modern divorces, it leaves no nagging questions about whether the innocent spouse may remarry. The survivor is not divorced, but widowed. The old union is over and done as only death can make it.

Does Moses approve divorce? [back to the Summary Conclusions]

He is recognizing that divorce does occur, and is telling people what they may and may not do as

a result. In particular, Moses teaches that
IF a couple is divorced, and
IF the wife remarries, and
IF that second union ends,
 whether by death
 or by divorce,
THEN the original couple may not remarry.

The Lord says that fornication excuses dismissing and remarriage. Thus many Christians feel that fornication is the one legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage.

It is not.

We will see that "dismissing" does not mean exactly the same thing as "divorce." Divorce is one way to "dismiss" a member in a marriage. But "dismiss" in the Bible can also mean "**put to death; kill.**" In the context of these verses about fornication and dismissal, the Pharisees are distorting what Moses taught about fornication and divorce, and the Lord is correcting their error. Moses taught that the nation Israel should put to death a spouse who is guilty of immorality. This, the Lord says, is the only way to dissolve a marriage so that one spouse is free to remarry.

In other words, the Lord is saying,

Anyone who dismisses his wife by divorce, as you people commonly do, causes her to commit adultery when she remarries, and commits adultery himself by remarrying. There is, however, one case in which remarriage is not adultery. If she is guilty of fornication, the Law requires Israel to dismiss her, not by divorce, but by **execution**. In that case, the surviving spouse may **remarry**.

Which Parties may Remarry? — In four different passages (**Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18**) the Lord Jesus describes a second marriage after a divorce as adultery. Modern Christians sometimes claim that such a marriage may not be adultery, depending on whether the previously married person initiated the divorce or not, or was guilty of infidelity or not. Close study of the Lord's words shows that both parties in a divorce commit adultery if they remarry.

Does Paul permit divorce?

God hates divorce, and his children do all they can to avoid it. Sometimes, though, a believer is divorced by an unbelieving spouse. May the believer remarry?

Paul's words in **I Cor. 7:15** have been interpreted as allowing remarriage under these circumstances.

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such cases.

We will see in **Chapter 12** that "*bondage*" here is not the marriage tie, but the obligation to share bed and board with an antagonistic spouse. Each partner in a marriage has duties toward the other. Paul teaches that when an unbelieving partner leaves the marriage, the believer is freed from those duties.

For instance, a wife should submit herself to her husband (**Eph. 5:22**). If he leaves her, she is no longer bound to obey him. It is quite another thing to say that she is no longer joined to him by

God, and thus free to remarry. This Paul does not say. Divorce does not end a marriage so far as God is concerned, whether the one who institutes it is a believer or an unbeliever.

A SUMMARY PRINCIPLE

Out of the entire study, one overwhelming conclusion emerges:

**There is no biblical basis
for a second marriage after divorce
while the first spouse lives.**

Paul puts it this way, in a more restricted context:

*Let not the wife depart from her husband.
But if she depart,
let her remain unmarried, or let her be
reconciled to her husband (I Cor. 7:10-11).*

It is a terrible thing when husband and wife separate. It may be unavoidable, when an unbelieving partner initiates it. Subsequent marriage to someone else is not unavoidable. As long as the first spouse lives, remarriage violates the Lord's solemn command, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

<https://www.cyber-chapel.org/LetNotManPutAsunder.pdf>

John Piper: Divorce & Remarriage: A Position Paper (1989)

All of my adult life, until I was faced with the necessity of dealing with divorce and remarriage in the pastoral context, I held the prevailing Protestant view that remarriage after divorce was Biblically sanctioned in cases where divorce had resulted from desertion or persistent adultery. Only when I was compelled, some years ago, in teaching through the gospel of Luke, to deal with Jesus' absolute statement in **Luke 16:18** did I begin to question that inherited position.

Eleven Reasons Why I Believe All Remarriage After Divorce Is Prohibited While Both Spouses Are Alive:

1. **Luke 16:18** calls all remarriage after divorce adultery.
2. **Mark 10:11-12** call all remarriage after divorce adultery whether it is the husband or the wife who does the divorcing.
3. **Mark 10:2-9** and **Matthew 19:3-8** teach that Jesus rejected the Pharisees' justification of divorce from **Deuteronomy 24:1** and reasserted the purpose of God in creation that no human being separate what God has joined together.
4. **Matthew 5:32** does not teach that remarriage is lawful in some cases. Rather it reaffirms that marriage after divorce is adultery, even for those who have been divorced innocently, and that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of the adultery of her second marriage unless she had already become an adulteress before the divorce.
 - 4.3 I will save my explanation of the exception clause ("*Except on the ground of unchastity*") for later in the paper, but for now, it may suffice to say that on the traditional interpretation of the clause, it may simply mean that a man makes his wife an adulteress except in the case where she has made herself one.

5. **1 Corinthians 7:10-11** teaches that divorce is wrong but that if it is inevitable the person who divorces should not remarry.

6. **1 Corinthians 7:39** and **Romans 7:1-3** teach that remarriage is legitimate only after the death of a spouse.

7. **Matthew 19:10-12** teaches that special Christian grace is given by God to Christ's disciples to sustain them in singleness when they renounce remarriage according to the law of Christ.

8. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** does not legislate grounds for divorce but teaches that the "*one-flesh*" relationship established by marriage is not obliterated by divorce or even by remarriage.

8.1 The remarkable thing about these four verses is that, while divorce is taken for granted, nevertheless the woman who is divorced becomes "*defiled*" by her remarriage (**verse 4**). It may well be that when the Pharisees asked Jesus if divorce was legitimate he based his negative answer not only on God's intention expressed in **Genesis 1:27** and **2:24**, but also on the implication of **Deuteronomy 24:4** that remarriage after divorce defiles a person. In other words, there were ample clues in the Mosaic law that the divorce concession was on the basis of the hardness of man's heart and really did not make divorce and remarriage legitimate.

9. **1 Corinthians 7:15** does not mean that when a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving spouse he or she is free to remarry. It means that the Christian is not bound to fight in order to preserve togetherness. Separation is permissible if the unbelieving partner insists on it.

9.12 The word used for "*bound*" (*douloo*) in **verse 15** is not the same word used in **verse 39** where Paul says, "*A wife is bound (deo) to her husband as long as he lives.*" Paul consistently uses *deo* when speaking of the legal aspect of being bound to one marriage partner (**Romans 7:2**; **1 Corinthians 7:39**), or to one's betrothed (**1 Corinthians 7:27**). But when he refers to a deserted spouse not being bound in **1 Corinthians 7:15**, he chooses a different word (*douloo*) which we would expect him to do if he were not giving a deserted spouse the same freedom to remarry that he gives to a spouse whose partner has died (**verse 39**).

9.13 The last phrase of **verse 15** ("*God has called us to peace*") supports **verse 15** best if Paul is saying that a deserted partner is not "bound to make war" on the deserting unbeliever to get him or her to stay. It seems to me that the peace God has called us to is the peace of **marital harmony**. Therefore, if the unbelieving partner insists on departing, then the believing partner is not bound to live in perpetual conflict with the unbelieving spouse, but is free and innocent in letting him or her go.

10. **1 Corinthians 7:27-28** does not teach the right of divorced persons to remarry. It teaches that betrothed virgins should seriously consider the life of singleness, but do not sin if they marry.

11. The exception clause of **Matthew 19:9** need not imply that divorce on account of adultery frees a person to be remarried. All the weight of the New Testament evidence given in the preceding ten points is against this view, and there are several ways to make good sense out of this verse so that it does not conflict with the broad teaching of the New Testament that remarriage after divorce is prohibited.

11.1 Several years ago I taught our congregation in two evening services concerning my understanding of this verse and argued that "*except for immorality*" did not refer to adultery but to premarital sexual fornication which a man or a woman discovers in the

betrothed partner. Since that time I have discovered other people who hold this view and who have given it a much more scholarly exposition than I did. I have also discovered numerous other ways of understanding this verse which also exclude the legitimacy of remarriage. Several of these are summed up in **William Heth** and **Gordon J. Wenham**, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nelson: 1984).

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper>

Voddie Baucham: The Permanence View of Marriage – Matt. 5:31-32

Context of Sermon on the Mount: Key Principles:

- The law of God is perfect, timeless and relevant and yet insufficient for our salvation.
- Jesus is our key to interpreting the OT in light of the Kingdom.
- Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

Must look at Pharisaism thru lens of original hearers – think of the most righteous people you can imagine (not as group of hypocritical, self-righteous wicked people).

Consistent pattern throughout these 6 antitheses.

- “*You’ve heard this*”
- “*But I say this*”

It is as wrong to keep the law as if that will justify you as it is wrong to not keep the law.

Continuing discussion with the 7th commandment relating to adultery. Now Jesus brings in the issue of Divorce and Remarriage.

These are forgivable sins. Person may have a fulfilled life of service after repentance. God also blesses second union after repentance.

Overwhelming number of Christians today do not hold to this Permanence view of Marriage that we hold.

Shortest and most concise of these 6 antitheses. Jesus referring to the case law here of **Deut. 24:1-4**, not directly to the Ten Commandments. The case law is the outworking of God’s moral law to particular situations.

Two schools of thought in Jesus’ day regarding reference to “*indecency*”:

- School of **Shammai** – gross indecency or immorality
- School of **Hillel** – more liberal and generous – extended meaning to all types of real or imagined offenses including an improperly cooked meal

(comes into play more in **Matt. 19** text)

Major Views on Divorce and Remarriage in the church:

- 1) Permanence View – no divorce; no remarriage under any
- 2) Semi-Permanence View – allows for divorce, but doesn’t allow for remarriage
- 3) Permissive View – allows for divorce and allows for remarriage
 - One Clause view -- Some say remarriage allowable in the case of adultery only; but not abandonment or anything else
 - Two Clause view – In the case of adultery and in the case of abandonment of a believing spouse by an unbelieving spouse
 - Liberal View – For just about anything

Nuances within each of these views. Not a deal-breaker; doesn't mean we can't fellowship with others. Not arguing that everybody that disagrees with us is out in the weeds.

Argument: Difficult to hold to Permanence View from a pastoral perspective because of so many people in difficult situations. But there's **difficulty regardless of your position**. Still people you have to look in the eye and say "No you may not divorce; No you may not remarry."

e.g. what about abuse or neglect or incompatibility or fiscal irresponsibility or idolatry or blasphemy or lying and deceit or refusing to have children or drunkenness or addiction or lengthy imprisonment or unbelief in prior marriage = not biblical grounds for divorce and then remarriage even if you hold to Two Clause Position

Only difference is that despite the thousands of difficult situations that we might encounter, the Permanence View has only 2 more difficulties to deal with than the Permissive View.

It's difficult regardless of the position you hold. But it is a moot view because we don't base our position on the pastoral difficulties involved in counseling others.

Principles of the Permanence View:

1) The one-flesh union created in marriage is permanent until death.

Matt. 19 – look at what happens before you get to the exception clause. Pharisees questioning Jesus on a number of things that he had preached on. Jesus points them back to marriage ordinance in Genesis. Jesus only gives the exception clause after He has been asked another question. This first question is asked and answered with no exception clause given. Unequivocal answer of "No" – you cannot separate them.

Mark 10:9

In our vows we say "For better or worse, forsaking all others until death do us part" – otherwise we should change our vows

Next antithesis Jesus addresses in **Matt. 5** = oaths and vows – marriage vows are permanent

2) Initiating a divorce is never lawful.

Next question in **Matt. 19** – diving into the case law; Jesus says you are reading the case law wrong; Moses did not command Israel to give certificate of divorce; **Deut. 24** is about remarriage; Moses assumes that divorce is already happening – not addressing that; putting restrictions on the existing practice

1 Cor. 7:10-11 – don't get divorced

1 Cor. 7:12-16 – don't get divorced

3) Remarriage after divorce is an act of adultery if a former spouse is living.

Rom. 7:2-3 – no exception clause in any of these passages; only death paves the way for remarriage without adultery [notice that it says "*act of adultery*" – not perpetual adultery]

Mark 10:10-12 – no exception clause; whoever does this commits this

Luke 16 – the other parallel passage

Matt. 5:31-32 – What’s this a statement about? If she has committed this act she has already made herself an adulteress – you haven’t made her an adulteress. But if you divorce her for some other reason you have made her an adulteress when she goes and remarries.

Whoever marries a divorced woman for any reason for any circumstance as long as her former spouse is still alive (doesn’t say “Unless her divorce was a lawful one”) – no exception clause

Exception Clause – Only in **Matt. 5** and **Matt. 19** --

Porneia used – instead of word for adultery – sexual immorality – Why use this broader term; associated with **Jewish betrothal law** not a consummated marriage; betrothal was a covenant; a legally binding document; Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience; Joseph was going to put Mary away for *porneia*

3 Purposes for Marriage: Procreation / Sanctification / Illustration – think about divorce and remarriage within this framework

1) Procreation

Mal. 2 – God was seeking godly offspring

2) Sanctification

1 Cor. 7 – legitimate desires God has given for sex can be legitimately fulfilled within context of marriage

3) Illustration of the relationship between Christ and His Church

Divorce and Remarriage is a perversion of this intended picture;

Unthinkable under any circumstance to think that Christ would divorce the bride for whom He died.

What about principle that your *righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees*?

- Hillel School – no problem here
 - Shammai School – big problem – Jesus would be saying: “The Pharisees say that you can only divorce in the case of gross immorality; I say to you exactly the same thing”???
- You don’t have to do any better than they do.

Pastoral Implications:

1) We will always encourage you to stay married. To keep your vows.

No reasons you can give that would change our mind to say that divorce is allowed in your extreme situation.

2) We will always walk with you through difficult marriage circumstances with a view towards repentance and reconciliation. No loophole that allows you to check out and be completely righteous. We will not perform wedding ceremonies for those seeking a second marriage while the first spouse is living. Go be reconciled.

Pastoral responsibility to protect a spouse who is being abused. But still would not advise divorce.

What this does not mean:

- That the couple is committing new acts of adultery with every instance of intimacy

thereafter

- Does not mean you should divorce current spouse and return to initial spouse; you don't re-commit a sin to demonstrate your repentance for the first time you did it; Instead, now grab ahold of the Permanence View and don't let go
- Does not mean that divorced and remarried people are second class citizens in the kingdom of God

Don't mess with God by presuming on His grace and reasoning: I know that God forgives this sin as with any other so I will go ahead and sin and then look for forgiveness

I tell my wife: "If you leave me, I'm going with you."

Marriage is not difficult because of the person you are married to. You are the problem. If leave and enter another marriage you take with you the problem = You!

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11309913170>

Adam C. Parker: Position on Remarriage After Divorce

The thing that I would like to close with is a re-emphasis of the **absolute permanence of marriage** in the eyes of God, as well as a quick word regarding those who have already remarried. It is essential that those who have already remarried recognize the sinfulness of what they have done. I know of the parents of a friend of mine who both agree that their decision to leave their first spouses and marry one-another was sinful. This was not an easy conclusion to come to, since they didn't deliberately disobey, but they still recognized that remarrying was wrong. Those who have remarried should **remain with their new spouse**, however, because divorcing for a second (or third or fourth time) would be an even greater sin. Besides that, it is important that a new union has been formed and that, "while not the ideal state, staying in a second marriage is God's will for a couple and their ongoing relations should not be looked on as adulterous."

It is also important that those who are divorced and single depend upon **the strength that God provides to remain single**. In some situations, if they nor their spouse have remarried, there is still time for reconciliation, though this is often difficult and challenging for both parties to work through the hurt they have endured and inflicted upon one another.

To those who have yet to marry, I think that this position on divorce and remarriage gives a great opportunity for us to **reflect upon the seriousness, the permanence, and the absoluteness of marriage**. It is a challenge to the to-be-newlyweds that one must look before they leap, recognizing that their choice of a nuptial partner will be set in stone. "Til death do us part" seems to take on a much more literal meaning, given this view. Scripture does not give Christians a secret "back-door" out of a marriage, but even if that back-door is taken, the door only opens from one side, and

Christians today divorce just as often as their secular counterparts, and I believe that a loose view of marriage, which permits remarriage, is one of many contributors to this cultural malaise in the Christian community. This view of marriage should not be held to because of its usefulness (that is a utilitarian concept), **but instead because it is indeed the Scriptural view**.

http://www.mountainretreatorg.net/articles/remarriage_after_divorce.shtml

Ken Peterman: (Source: *Remain Faithful to Your Spouse in a Soap Opera Society*)

Fundamental hermeneutical principle: Interpret a cloudy passage of Scripture in light of a clear passage – never vice versa. . . Scripture should always be interpreted in light of other Scripture passages. . . If five different passages teach a given truth and the sixth passage seems to contradict it, the cloudy (the sixth passage) is suspect, not the five clear ones! In the case of marriage and divorce there are several passages that clearly contradict the teaching that adultery is the one legitimate basis for divorce. Consider the following observations:

A. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate His extensive teaching about complete and total forgiveness in **Matthew 18** (and many other forgiveness passages in the New Testament.).

B. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the extensive teaching about the unity in marriage as found in **Matthew 19:6** and **Ephesians 5:31**.

C. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the clear biblical teaching that marriage is binding until death (with no exceptions) as found in **Romans 7:1-3** and **Matthew 19:6**.

D. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the obvious biblical teaching that marriage represents the mystical and enduring relationship between Him and the Church as found in **Ephesian 5:22-23**.

E. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the encouragement to reconciliation as found in **1 Corinthians 7:10, 11**.

F. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the responsibility of forgiveness as mentioned in **Ephesians 4:32**.

G. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate what He just told the Pharisees in **Matthew 19:4-6** about the permanency of marriage.

H. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate what He just taught in **Matthew 19:6** about the one-flesh relationship.

I. It is absurd to think that by this one exception clause the Lord Jesus would violate the “one-flesh” relationship He has with the Church (**Ephesians 5:29-32**).

John MacArthur: [Alternative View:]

Divorce is a severe and staggering problem. Forty-eight out of the 50 states have no fault laws, which make divorce as easy as getting married, except you don’t need a blood test. Now in past years, families and marriages were held together. This is a relatively new phenomena. The divorce rate in America has doubled in the last 20 years, and threatens to do so again in the next.

I think the problem is not that the Bible is unclear, but that thinking is fuzzy. And what fuzzes up people’s thinking is that they go to the Bible with certain **preconceptions**. For example, you have some people who are looking at the divorce rate and saying, “We’ve got to stop divorce.” And so in order to stop divorce, we’ll just have to come up with a doctrine that says no divorce, no time, for nobody, for no reason. So we have people who are doing that, and they’re

advocating the fact that there's no divorce, for nobody, forever, for any reason whatever, and absolutely no remarriage anytime for anything. . .

So on the one hand, you have people who want to raise the standard, on the other hand you have people who want to lower the standard, and what we must we do is go back and see what Jesus said and what God says in the pages of Scripture. And we're going to do that in **verses 1-12**.

So you have Jesus presenting himself in Judea and Jerusalem, you have him moving toward his passion, the crowds are there, the people are there, the populous is there, but interspersed and woven through all of that lessons, and more lessons, and more lessons for the disciples who are to carry on the ministry. So it's a great time of transition for the Lord. . .

4 Reasons Divorce is not God's desire:

- 1) One man created for one woman.
- 2) A strong bond – leaving and cleaving
- 3) They have become one person in the union of marriage. It is an indivisible number.
- 4) What God puts together, don't divorce.

The reason we keep a marriage together is because God says that's His priority, and what we want to do is to submit to the authority of the Word of God, right? And we're right back there. As we walk in the Spirit, we have wonderful submission to one another because we reverence God. And wives in the power of the Spirit can return to that pre-fall bliss of being wonderfully submissive to their husbands. And husbands can return to that pre-fall bliss in a sense of being loving, caring, nourishing, cherishing toward their wife. And where sin comes in, there will be forgiveness, as God forgave Israel and Christ the church. . .

If God made you, he knows how to make you work best, right? If he's the manufacturer, he's got the manual on your operation. And so we come right back to where we started. Listen. The job of the pastor and the role of the church is to bring you under submission to the authority of this Word. And we've done that, and we've told you what God feels about divorce. We've laid out God's perspective on divorce. And the only thing we can say in response is "cursed" or "woe" be unto the person who fights or argues with his maker. . .

What makes a marriage? It is not the sex act that makes a marriage; it is the covenant that makes a marriage. It is the coming together of two people who pledge lifelong covenant of companionship. The Bible affirms that the covenant makes a marriage. Marriage is a covenantal arrangement for lifelong companionship. And so, when a person has a sex relationship with someone, that doesn't make a marriage; and when a person in a marriage has a sex relationship with someone else, that doesn't make another marriage. That just is a sin against the marriage the person is in by covenant. So, it is the binding covenant of lifelong pledge of companionship that constitutes a marriage.

And anytime that happens, anytime two people make that covenant, whether they're saved people or not, they come together in a God-ordained and God-created union which therefore should never be divorced. That's the essence of what our Lord is saying. And so, that's His answer. . .

Now, what amazes me here is that they are not all interested in the divine ideal that the Lord has just presented. The Lord has affirmed lifelong marriage. The Lord has said God hates

divorce, in essence. From the very beginning, God never intended that. But they are not interested in the divine ideal. They are only interested in the exception. And this is how it is with sinful people. They're not interested in abiding by the law; they're only interested in finding the loopholes, that's all. And the Pharisees are classic cases of people looking for loopholes in God's law. On the one hand, they want to be thought of as keeping God's law because that's how they enter into God's favor. On the other hand, they want to find every way out they possibly can. . .

Deut. 24 – “*some uncleanness, some indecency*” -- It seemed to be a very obvious issue of decency, and that is the very same term that is used in **24:1**: he found in her some indecency, some unclean thing, some dirty thing, some vile thing, some shameful thing, some improper thing, something unbecoming to a woman, something embarrassing to her husband. **But, it cannot refer to adultery.** Because adultery, at this point, resulted in, what? **In death.** And it would have said adultery. It is something dirty, something embarrassing, something gross but not adultery because **Deuteronomy 22** very clearly says that there is to be death for adultery, in **verses 22 to 24.** So, this has got to be **something short of adultery.** Now, we don't know what it was, but let me give you what I think is the proper understanding.

If you knew in your society that adultery ended in death, you might do a lot of things but you generally would control yourself just short of adultery, true? I mean, you really wouldn't want to die. And so, apparently what happened was, there were people who were entering into shameless indecent, habitual indulgence in sexual sin or other sin, but coming just short of actually committing adultery, acts that stop just short of adultery. And that appears to be what happened in **Deuteronomy 24.** Here's a woman who is shameful, who is vile, and she stops short of adultery so the death penalty cannot be applied, but she commits these evil things and her husband just divorces her. . .

And so, this text does not command divorce; it commands that you do not remarry an illegitimately divorced person.

So, Moses did permit it, but it wasn't in the **Deuteronomy 24** passage that it was permitted. Frankly, dear friends, we don't know where in the Old Testament Moses actually permitted it because it doesn't say that, but we do know that it must have been permitted for a legitimate basis or it wouldn't have been discussed for illegitimate basis in **Deuteronomy 24.** But the Old Testament does not give us a text where it says I permit you to get a divorce on the basis of this. So, we have to sort of draw that out. And I think there's a reason for that. I think God avoided saying it. It is a permission, but it's sort of way behind the scenes, it's not overtly stated lest people hurry to that passage to justify themselves. . .

And as I said before, **if divorce is a merciful concession to the adulterer,** do we then say that because God shows mercy to the guilty, **He penalizes the innocent?** In other words, let's say in the Old Testament your husband commits adultery, he's dead. He has no chance to repent. If he's unredeemed, he's in hell forever. Are you free to remarry? Sure, because death breaks the marriage. If God allows you to divorce, he allows that person to live in order that that person may have time to repent and be restored and even redeemed. **Because He's gracious to that person, does He penalize this innocent person over here to a life of celibacy?** Hardly, because God doesn't have to make tradeoffs. He isn't gracious to one, and make somebody else pay the price. And so, **we believe that where there is grounds for divorce, there must**

therefore be grounds for remarriage. The purpose of the divorce, after all, was only to show mercy to the guilty, not to sentence the innocent to lifelong singleness, loneliness or misery.

The Pharisees came to Jesus in **Matthew chapter 19** and they said in **verse 3**: “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?*” And Jesus, in effect, said: no, you cannot get a divorce for every cause. There’s only one cause in the law of God for God’s people and that is **hard-hearted adultery** and then the innocent partner is free to remarry. Now, that is a simple statement. I really don’t think there’s a lot of confusion about that if you understand the Scripture. Now you can back into the Bible with your pre-conceptions and come up with a lot of things, and people have done that and confused the church in many ways. But it’s very clear if you just take it from the text. The problem with it is it’s so isolated, it doesn’t tell us about all the exceptions. It doesn’t answer all of our myriad questions. It just lays down **one principle**. . .

1 Cor. 7 -- So, **is sex unspiritual?** No, it’s not. It’s okay not to engage in that, if God’s called you to a life of singleness and has given you the gift to deal with that. It’s also okay to be married. And if you are married, it’s not okay to be celibate. So, sex is not unspiritual. Sex is very spiritual. It’s created by God; it is the most obvious affirmation of the one-flesh truth. And keep in mind if you are single, it’s not for freedom’s sake, it’s not for promiscuity’s sake, and it’s not for lack of commitment’s sake. It’s for the service of the kingdom sake.

So, question number two, still with me, folks? So, question number two, **should formerly married people remarry?** The answer is: it’s optional. If you can stay single, stay single. If you can’t, then marry, it’s okay. It’s better to marry than to burn. . .

So, the question then he has to answer is: what happens now that you’ve become Christians, you’re still married, do you stay married or do you shed your partner, what are your rights and privileges in that regard?

Should those saved after widowed or divorced remarry? Yes. If they can’t stay single for the service of the Lord. What are the alternatives for those who are married? If you’re married to a Christian, stay married. If you’re married to a non-Christian, stay married; unless the non-Christian wants out, then you’re free to remarry. Should salvation change your marital status? No.

If you’re a believer and an unbeliever, cling to that marriage and be everything you should be as a Christian and in living your Christian life to the very fullest, if that unbeliever wants out, you’re free. You’re free, and I believe your freedom is a freedom to remarry. If it wasn’t, he would have repeated what he repeated in **verse 11** when he said there: “*If you divorce, then you must remain unmarried or be reconciled.*” And, if you could only be free from that marriage but never marry again, why wouldn’t he have repeated that same phrase? No, no. If you’re free, you’re free. Just the same freedom in **Romans 7** that death gives. So, if an unbeliever has left you, if they wanted out of that union, you’re free. . .

Now let’s get to the virgins, he says, *parthenos*. “*I have no commandment of the Lord.*” The Lord never commented on this, so I can’t quote Jesus, “But I’m going to give you my judgment and it is the judgment by the way of a man who was faithful to God.” So, this is the divine judgment. I’m being true to the faith. I’m being consistent with God. I’m giving you good advice from the Holy Spirit as a man who’s received mercy from the Lord to be faithful. So, this is God’s advice to you. “If you’re a virgin,” he says in **verse 26**, “it’s good.” See, he’s right

back to that advocating of singleness again. It's good. You see, society wants to pressure everybody to be married but there's a reverse trend in this chapter where Paul's trying to pressure people to stay single if they can handle it, because of the tremendous liberty in serving the Lord. So he says, I think it's good. Stay single.

So, the Apostle is giving us a good word here. He's saying it's good to be single. It's good to be single, because of the passing world, the hard time's coming, the difficulty of sinners living that close intimacy and proximity, because of the difficulty in being free to serve the Lord fully, and so forth and so on. So, if you're a virgin, it's good. Stay single. But, **verse 28**: "*If a virgin marry, she hasn't sinned.*" It's no sin to marry. It's good to marry, too. . .

Let me summarize quickly, listen now. You're single. If you're single, you fall into four categories. Category number one is what I call the delay. You're single, but you're not going to stay that way. This is just a delay until you can get married. What does the Word say to you? Get married, right? Better to marry than to burn. You're single by divine design for the service of Christ. What should you do? Stay single. You're single by divorce. Well, you should consider whether you ought to stay single first of all, and then if you've been divorced out of an adulterous situation, or if your divorce was before you were saved, or if your divorce was an unbeliever departing, you're free to marry. In fact, it's better for you to marry than to burn also. And the fourth category of singleness is those that are single by death. Stay single if you can. But, if you can't get married, you haven't sinned.

Now what about the married? If you're married to a Christian, what? Stay married. If you're married to a non-Christian, what? Stay married. If the unsaved person wants out, let him out, you're free. Now, there's only one other category. And some of you are sitting there saying, "I've got a problem, because I got a divorce that wasn't legitimate when I was a Christian. I fouled up my marriage when I was a Christian. I am an adulterer or an adulteress. I remarried when I had no grounds. What is my status?" Well, you're a sinner. Welcome to the club. If you've already violated God's laws as a Christian, if you were illegitimately divorced, illegitimately remarried when you had no grounds, if you're in a union that the Bible defines as an adulterous union, you have only one recourse: that is, to confess the sin, tell God the sorrow of your heart, and stay in that same union and see if God will not make sweet out of the bitter, honey out of the lion's body.

TEXT: Matthew 19:13-15

TITLE: JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

BIG IDEA:

JESUS WELCOMES LITTLE CHILDREN AND POINTS TO THEIR HUMILITY AND DEPENDENCE AS IDENTIFYING MARKS OF KINGDOM CITIZENS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The movement from husband-wife relations to children is a natural progression. Children here become a model for discipleship and an essential part of the kingdom community. Far from nuisances to be avoided, children are God's special gift to the community and are to be embraced. Even more than that, they are the very embodiment of the kingdom in the church.

J. Ligon Duncan: This event seems mundane enough but it was important enough to the gospel writers that not only Matthew but also Mark and Luke took the time to record it, with Mark adding some details that Matthew and Luke do not provide. So its brevity belies its significance. There is terse truth in this passage that warrants our attention.

Lesson: We must aspire to child-like lowliness and humility if we want to be in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Brian Evans: **Jesus shows how important children are to the Kingdom of God** and how important children are to Him. **This vital significance of children must also be shown by all who belong to Christ and His Kingdom.** We too must value others especially children.

William Barclay: To Jesus no one was unimportant. Some might say: 'They're only children; don't let them bother you.' Jesus would never say that. No one was ever a nuisance to Jesus. He was never too tired, never too busy to give all of himself to anyone who needed it. There is a strange difference between Jesus and many famous preachers or evangelists. It is often next to impossible to get into the presence of one of these famous ones. They have a kind of retinue and bodyguard which keep the public away lest the great figure be wearied and bothered. Jesus was the opposite of that. The way to his presence was open to the humblest person and to the youngest child.

Charles Swindoll: By the rules of this world, the more wealthy, famous, important, and powerful you are, the less approachable, accessible, and available. None of us can stroll into the White House, knock on the door of the president of the United States, and ask for a few minutes of time to talk. If we were to see an Academy Award-winning actress dining at a pricey Hollywood restaurant, who of us would be able to slip into an empty seat at the table and ask about her next project? In our world, inaccessibility is a measure of importance.

Not so with Jesus. As usual, He **defied cultural expectations** and turned the rules of the world upside down. He didn't favor the powerful, give special access to the elite, or make extra space for the influential. He was **eminently approachable, accessible, and available . . .** to everyone. Jesus was in touch with every kind of person —young and old, poor and rich, sick and healthy, corrupt and honest, harsh and courteous, hateful and loving, humble and proud, the devoted

follower and the cruel critic. His refusal to construct social barriers and to limit access is nothing short of astonishing.

David Thompson: (:13-26) Christ's disciples are totally confused about the kingdom.

THE DISCIPLES ARE CONFUSED AS TO WHOM WILL BE BLESSED IN THE KINGDOM AND CONFUSED ABOUT WHO WILL BE IN THE KINGDOM, SO JESUS GIVES THEM SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION DESIGNED TO UNRAVEL THEIR CONFUSION.

Now I want you to notice that in both episodes described in these verses, **the disciples respond wrong -- 19:13b; 25**. They have been with Jesus nearly three years and yet still they are not quite tuned in to His program. So these two episodes are designed to help straighten them out.

I. (:13a) IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING LITTLE CHILDREN TO JESUS

A. Positive Example of the Parents

"Then some children were brought to Him"

Grant Osborne: This is the normal form for a blessing in the ancient world. **Laying on of hands** was used for parental blessing (**Gen 48:14, 17-18**), ordaining leaders (**Num 27:18; Deut 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3**), presenting sacrifices (**Exod 29:10, 15; Lev 1:4**), healing (**Matt 9:18; Mark 6:5; 7:32**), and giving the Holy Spirit (**Acts 8:17; 19:6**). In Matthew the bringing of the children to Jesus recognizes his "authority as the one who determines human destiny" as well as his "mercy and compassion" for those who need his help.

Warren Wiersbe: It is fitting that our Lord's teaching about marriage should be followed by His blessing of the children, for children are the happy heritage of those who are married. Jesus did not look on the children as a curse or a burden. "*Two shall become one flesh*" is fulfilled in the birth of children, and the love of the parents is deepened and matured as it is shared with others in the home.

David Thompson: The noun "*children*" in Greek is *παιδια*, which refers to a "little" child. These were little children who could not come to Christ on their own, so they were brought by their parents. Now when the children were brought to Christ, the parents wanted Christ to "lay hands" on them and "*pray*." What this means children were not brought to Christ for healing, but for **blessing**. The laying on of hands and is that these praying was that which a religious leader would do to ask God to bless a person and to greatly use them.

B. Negative Example of the Disciples

"and the disciples rebuked them."

D. A. Carson: Why did the disciples stoop to this rebuke? Perhaps they were annoyed that Jesus was being delayed on his journey to Jerusalem; perhaps they felt they were being interrupted in their important discussion. Although children in the Judaism of the time were deeply cherished, they were thought in some ways to be negligible members of society. Their place was to learn, to be respectful, to listen. But two deeper insights suggest themselves:

- (1) the preceding pericope (**vv.3-12**) implicitly stresses the **sanctity of the family**, and **vv.13-15** continue by saying something important about children; and
- (2) in **18:1-9**, children serve as **models for humility**, patterns for Jesus' "*little ones*"; yet

Jesus' disciples, his "*little ones*," show little humility here.

J. Ligon Duncan: It may have been that the disciples thought that Jesus was too important to be bothered with dealing with children that would have been too young to understand His message, the proclamation to the kingdom of heaven to the people of Israel, that Israel should repent and turn to the God of their fathers and should receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven and recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Perhaps the disciples thought that Jesus was too great a personage as the Messiah of Israel to be bothered with these children. Perhaps it was their concern that by praying for these children, by blessing these children, it would delay the Lord Jesus in His journey toward Jerusalem. Perhaps they thought that this request was too similar to a current practice that was done by the people, whereby they took their children to the scribes and asked the scribes to bless their children. And perhaps the disciples thought, "O well, you see they are equating the Lord Jesus with the scribes and that's a bad thing, it sort of offends us, and so we're going to keep them away."

II. (:13b) PURPOSE OF BRINGING LITTLE CHILDREN TO JESUS = BLESSING

A. Laying on of Hands

"so that He might lay His hands on them"

B. Praying

"and pray;"

Do we value the intercessory prayer that Jesus is offering right now on our behalf at the right hand of the Father?

III. (:14) APPROPRIATENESS OF BRINGING LITTLE CHILDREN TO JESUS

A. The Command

"But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me;'"

Grant Osborne: The priorities of the disciples were warped, and they had not assimilated what Jesus taught in **18:3–5** about the centrality of little children in the kingdom community. As stated in **18:3–5**, little children model kingdom realities in their helpless state and vulnerability as well as their sense of total dependence.

Brian Evans: Mark's Gospel records the fact that **Jesus was angry with the disciples**. He uses the word **indignant** in the Authorized. He was furious with them. Only two or three times He really got mad at them. Frustrated with them – a lot, disappointed – a lot, but really angry – just a few times. This is one of them, and **the only time that particular word of indignation is used of Jesus in reference to them**. He was very angry with them for trying to stop these parents from bringing their children, and it is expressed as to why He was angry with them, if you just think about the scene.

Why was Jesus so angry?

There were those who wanted to come to Him and the disciples were blocking the way. The parents were wanting to come to Jesus with their little ones for a blessing and a prayer. **Jesus was not saving these children.** He was not entering them into the Kingdom of God through

salvation. He was not instituting infant baptism as some of our Presbyterian friends might argue. He was welcoming them, praying for them and sending them away with a blessing. From their Jewish education, **the disciples thought Jesus was too busy to be bothered with children.**

Interesting that He uses two verbs, and there's a reason. The first one is in the **aorist tense**: point action, permit right now, this moment, let them come; and then "*forbid them not*" is **present tense**. And what He's saying is, "**Right now, let these come, and from now on, don't ever make it a practice to stop them from coming.**" So, He takes care of the present and the future, and by the way, He doesn't rebuke the parents at all, so it indicates to me that their motive was pure.

B. The Lesson

"for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Charles Swindoll: Earlier, when the disciples had asked who was the "*greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" (18:1), Jesus had answered, "*Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven*" (18:3). Something about a child's simplicity, openness, honesty, and wonder perfectly illustrates the kind of person who is closest to the kingdom of heaven in attitude and actions. No pretenses, no agenda, no inhibitions, no reluctance, no self-consciousness—children displayed none of those things that hold back heavy-laden adults from approaching Jesus with nothing but their own desperate neediness.

And these children stood in direct contrast to the next person to show up looking for an audience with the Master.

(:15) JESUS MINISTERS TO THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND DEPARTS

A. Significance of Laying on of Hands

"And after laying His hands on them,"

Leon Morris: Jesus did as he was asked and laid his hands on them. Matthew does not specifically say that he prayed, but we must surely understand that he did this. He had been asked to do so, and he had rebuked those who tried to keep the children away from him. So, of course, he would have prayed for them.

B. Geographic Transition

"He departed from there."

Stu Weber: The Messiah-King stooped to impart his blessing on the children by laying his hands on them (19:13). Then he moved on, nearer to Jerusalem and the cross. This final comment by Matthew, *he went on from there*, brings into focus the contrast between Jesus, the meek lover of children, and the looming shadow of the cross. How could such a gentle man be found guilty of death? Perhaps Matthew wanted us to see the gentle, sacrificial lamb of **Isaiah 53:7-9** (cf. **1 Pet. 2:21-25**), being led toward the slaughter.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some practical ways we can show children their value in the kingdom and encourage them to come to Jesus?
- 2) When do we treat children as unimportance or as a nuisance or as a disruption to our agenda?
- 3) What is the significance of the laying on of hands?
- 4) Are we consistently praying for the spiritual welfare of the little children in our world?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus had a special place in his heart and in the kingdom for the downtrodden and despised of the world—tax collectors, the poor, women, and children. With their simple faith, vulnerability, lowliness, and humility children are not only welcome in the kingdom but are also special models of the kingdom that all disciples must emulate in following Christ. All the disciples are “*little ones*” (Jesus’ special term for them in **10:42; 18:6, 10, 14**) as the lowest in society. Their greatness will be found not in their accomplishments but in their servanthood (**18:4; 20:26–28**).

Richard Gardner: Most interpreters today agree that the passage does not address the topic of infant baptism one way or the other. The text, nevertheless, invites the church to ask: How might we symbolize what Jesus himself signified when he blessed the children? Some believers church bodies, in response to the text, conduct a **service of dedication** for infants and parents. Indeed, one Anabaptist, Pilgram Marpeck, provided instructions for infant dedication in the congregation (**Klaassen:** 124-125). In such a service, the community has an opportunity to receive children, to embody God’s blessing, and to affirm its role in the faith development of the young. Similar blessings for children older than infants are sometimes celebrated at milestones of life and spiritual development. Equally important are the occasions the church provides for children to contribute their gifts to the community—and thereby know that **their presence is valued**.

J. Ligon Duncan: And there are a couple of good tests that we can apply to ourselves to evaluate how we are doing with regard to **gospel humility**. The first one is this: do you love, or do you resent the gospel? When someone comes to you and tells you that you’re a sinner and that you deserve the condemnation of God, but that God in His love and mercy sent His Son to bear your sins so that by His grace through trust in the Lord Jesus Christ you can be made a child of God, does that offend you? Does it offend you for someone to say, yes, you’re a sinner and you deserve to be condemned? Does that sound a little old fashioned? Does that sound a little out of date? Does that sound offensive to the good person that you are? If so, you may not yet have tasted of the gospel humility that Jesus says is necessary for His kingdom. Or do you love the gospel? When you hear that message that you are but a sinner saved by grace does it thrill you again? Do you love to hear that message realizing that your salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and none of your deeds contributed towards it? If that message thrills you then it is very, very probable that gospel humility has taken root in your heart and is growing. And you’ll never get tired of that story of God’s grace.

There's a second test. What about when difficulties come into your lives? Do you find yourself resenting God and thinking of God as someone who is treating you unfairly. Someone who is doing you wrong. Someone who is an ogre in the sky, raining on your parade, destroying your life without compassion? Then, that shows that you do not have gospel humility. For gospel humility, even in the dark providences of life, recognizes that behind that frowning providence is the smiling face of the loving God and Father. And gospel humility accepts from the hands of the Lord the trials, the losses and crosses that He brings into our experience and asks His Holy Spirit to help us endure. Both of those would be good tests to ascertain whether we have gospel humility. Now that's the first lesson that Jesus teaches in this passage. Jesus uses children, in other words, as a metaphor to speak of those who are child-like in their humility. He's saying, my kingdom belongs to those who will humble themselves like these children, to those who will be child-like in their humility.

John Schultz: Mark states that Jesus did more than place His hands on the children. We read: "*And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*" The parents' intent had merely been for the children to be able to touch Jesus, but Jesus did much more than allow Himself to be touched. The hug of a father is an act of tender and protecting love that provides the essential elements for a well-balanced life in adulthood. Jesus always does more than we expect Him to do for us.

The placing on of hands speaks of **authority in connection with the future**. Little children usually evoke tender feelings in us. But Jesus sees more in them than rosy little cherubs. His imposition of hands stands for a sharing of authority and dignity which the Creator included in His image in man. Jesus sees in these children adult human being who are above the angels in the order of creation and who are predestined to rule as kings and to serve as priests. Jesus' laying on of hands has the same content as the Old Testament anointing of the kings, priests and prophets. It symbolizes the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. Jesus nowhere else imparted the Holy Spirit in such a direct way as here. Even the disciples who were the first recipients of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost did not receive Him by the laying on of hands. We read: "*And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*"

Jesus' blessing represents the fullness of everything God wants to give us. It is the crown of victory, the fulfillment of God's promises, and the inheritance in heaven. In this simple act, Jesus again reaches out in the future to the moment He will pay for it all with His own body and blood. None of these parents can have understood that this itinerant rabbi had the authority to impart God's riches to mankind, even to little children

John MacArthur: Jesus Loves the Little Children

A significant enough passage to have been given full involvement by all the synoptic writers. It appeared to the disciples that the whole idea of bringing little children to Jesus was rather an intrusion of a trivial nature, but not so, as we shall see. Parents in this scene wanted Jesus to touch their children, to bless their children, to pray for their children. . .

There are many words in the New Testament for children. The word here is *paidía; paidia*. It means **little children**, but it doesn't tell us how little. But if we were to compare the other passages, we would find the term *brepfos*, and that word means a suckling, a **nursing baby**, an infant. They were bringing in their arms their infants, and we know they must have been infants by our Lord's response, because the Bible says in Mark that He took them in His arms, and blessed them. They were bringing babies to Jesus. They wanted Him to pray for them, with His

unique divine power, with His unique proximity to God, they felt they wanted His prayers on the behalf of their little ones. . .

It says nothing about the faith of their parents, nothing about any rite or ritual or baptism, nothing about them being elect or non-elect. He just says, *“Those who are like these belong in My Kingdom.”* And I believe grace is extended to them. That’s why I believe with all my heart that if a baby dies, that baby goes into the presence of Jesus Christ, because they are uniquely in the care of the King. Now, I don’t know how God dispenses that grace to them, other than by a sovereign act on His own part.

I do know that it is dispensable to them, by virtue of the death of Jesus Christ for their sin. It is applied to them by the sovereignty of God in their behalf, because they cannot choose on their own. . .

Now, just to be theological for a moment, I don’t think that means necessarily that all little babies are saved. I just think they’re under special protection, and if they die, at that moment, they’re redeemed. If they were all saved, then when they got to be old enough, they’d lose their salvation, and I’d have theological problems with that. So, I just believe they’re all under special protection, and if, in fact, they die, the Lord gathers them to Himself. It’s a wonderful confidence. . .

Whoever comes into the Kingdom in adult life, comes, when they come, like a little baby. So, the Kingdom is populated, folks, by just two kinds of folks: those who are babies, and those who come in like babies. And **what does He mean by that?** We went into that in **Matthew 18:3** in detail; I’ll just remind you. He means the simplicity, the openness, the honesty, the lack of pretention, the lack of hypocrisy, the dependency, the weakness, the simplicity. The humility that casts oneself, in utter humility and dependence, on the strong arms of the Lord.

Brother Rory: Jesus Loves the Little Children

Children are vitally important to God.

They are a massive part of His world.

- They should be loved
- They should be cherished
- They should be trained
- They should be disciplined
- They should be protected

And here we learn that **they should be brought to Jesus.**

<https://fbcpur.org/jesus-loves-little-children-matthew-1913-15/>

Brian Evans: Salvation of Infants

What does the Bible teach? What have solid theologians believed down through the ages?

2 Samuel 12:19–23 (ESV)

19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “He is dead.” 20 Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” 22 He said,

“While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ 23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”

I thank God that when I was searching for truth to share with those who had lost children that He led me to Calvin, and other Reformed Theologians and to **John MacArthur**’s book called, *Safe in the Arms of God*

A. All People are Born with a Sin Nature

Babies and infants are born with the **bent toward sin** and as soon as a child reaches an age of moral understanding, the child will choose sin. The Scriptures speak in multiple places that we are born into sin.

Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

*5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Isaiah 48:8 (ESV)

*8 You have never heard, you have never known,
from of old your ear has not been opened.
For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously,
and that from before birth you were called a rebel.*

Genesis 8:21 (ESV)

21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

What we cannot say is that **babies go to heaven when they die because they are innocent** but that babies die and go to heaven **because God is gracious**.

B. Salvation is a Matter of God’s Grace Not Man’s Works

Listen to what **Charles Spurgeon** once wrote... *We hold that all infants who die are elect of God and are therefore saved, and we look to this as being the means by which Christ shall see the travail of His soul to a great degree.*

Charles Hodge agreed. He wrote, “All who die in infancy are doubtless saved, but they are saved by grace” (Systematic Theology, ii, 11).

John MacArthur writes, *There is no clearer manifestation of this truth (speaking that salvation is by God’s grace) that the gift of eternal life is given to a helpless infant. The saving grace given to an infant who has no part whatsoever in his salvation is a perfect example of salvation, which is always wrought sovereignly by God through grace.*

The Westminster Catechism argues that infants who die are in glory (ch. 10, sec. 3 says those “dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ”).

Loraine Boettner explained why the doctrine of infant salvation must be uniquely Calvinistic: *“The doctrine of infant salvation finds a logical place in the Calvinistic system; for the*

redemption of the soul is thus infallibly determined irrespective of any faith, repentance, or good works, whether actual or foreseen.

C. We are Saved by the Sacrificial Work of Jesus Christ on the Cross

Salvation comes by the atonement of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on behalf of His elect. His blood was shed for His own whether they die at 110 years old or in the womb, His blood has washed them clean. **God chooses those who will be saved and those who will die as an infant.**

The great reformed theologian **BB Warfield** wrote speaking of infants who die, *Their salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls, through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action on their own proper wills...That is but to say that they are unconditionally predestined to salvation from the foundation of the world.*

John Calvin condemned Servetus' theology. He said that *Servetus' theology was so twisted that it stressed free will to the point that if you followed him, you would be forced to conclude that even infants who died were damned to hell because they were not able to exercise their will to believe in saving faith (Institutes IV, 16, p 31).* In that same section, Calvin addresses John 3:36, and argues that it points to infant salvation, as infants were not able to **exercise willing unbelief, so they do could not possibly stand condemned.**

D. We are Saved by Grace but Damned by Works

Revelation 20:11–15 (ESV)

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Scripture teaches **eternal punishment is the wage due those who have willfully sinned.** The inhabitants of hell are those who willfully sin against God.

Galatians 5:18–21 (ESV)

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Infants who die have **no willful sin against God** to pay for. They have **no rebellion or unbelief, no works of the flesh to pay for.**

Jonah 4:10–11 (ESV)

10 And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I

pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Infants have not suppressed God’s truth through disobedience...

Romans 1:18 (ESV)

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Infants cannot nor have they been given the opportunity to believe. They are not intellectually capable of saving faith nor are they intellectually capable of unbelief. **Salvation is entirely by grace apart from works. Damnation is completely by works, apart from grace.**

Review...

So, children need a Savior

God has provided a Savior, Jesus Christ for them

All children who die before understanding sin and corruption so that their sins are deliberate are graciously saved by God through Jesus Christ.

Every baby who has died in the womb whether from miscarriage or from abortion and every infant that has died after birth has been immediately brought to the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Calvin, the Westminster divines, Hodge, Spurgeon, Warfield, and Boettner. In our own life time, it has been ably defended by John MacArthur and John Piper. I want to give you confidence in God’s goodness, and assure you that your confidence is not false and **not coming from sentiment, but rather it has its foundation in the deep and saving nature of God.**

So, Jesus tells His disciples and us *do not hinder but let the children come to Me for such is the Kingdom of God.*

<https://gccwaverly.net/2022/02/23/sermon-the-children-are-brought-to-jesus-matthew-1913-15/>

TEXT: Matthew 19:16-26

TITLE: RICH YOUNG RULER -- SALVATION IS FOR THOSE WHO FORSAKE EVERYTHING AND FOLLOW JESUS

BIG IDEA:

LOVERS OF WEALTH MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN FOLLOWING CHRIST OR CLINGING TO THEIR MATERIALISTIC VALUE SYSTEM (THE IDOLS OF POSSESSIONS)

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: The narrative now turns to the story of a young man whose great riches kept him from the full and unreserved commitment required of one who would become a disciple. This in turn leads to a brief discussion of the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom (vv 23–26) and the rewards of sacrificial discipleship (vv 27–30). The **absolute value of the kingdom** provides the underlying unity of these passages. If the kingdom demands one's all, the **rewards more than compensate for the sacrifices**.

Grant Osborne: (:16-30) This passage on wealth reverses that of becoming like a child in vv. 13–15 and yet at the same time tells how to become “*like a child*.” It turns to a major barrier against doing so—the **riches and rewards of this world**. The rich young man embodies this **anti-kingdom perspective** as he **chooses wealth over following Christ**. As **Blomberg** says, “The children turn out to be nearer to the kingdom than most might have suspected; the rich man demonstrates that he is further away than most would have guessed.” This passage also continues the emphasis on the household affairs of everyday life, now turning to the subject of money and its proper place. Finally, this story is in a sense an illustrative vignette of the saying in 6:19–21 (**seek treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth**).

Walter Wilson: As Jesus had explained in 6:24, it is not possible to serve both God and mammon. Wealth may not be an impediment to keeping the commandments (19:18–20), but it can be an impediment to following Jesus (19:21–22). . .

Much like the first pericope of the unit (see 19:3–9+19:10–12), this pericope has two parts, an exchange with a non-disciple about the law (19:16–22) being continued (and commented upon) by an exchange with the disciples about the kingdom (19:23–30). Each pericope begins (19:3, 16) with the non-disciple(s) approaching (προσέρχομαι) Jesus and asking him a question, to which Jesus responds with a counter-question (19:4–5, 17a). The first part of the second pericope (19:16–22) is organized around a series of three questions posed to Jesus by the rich young man (19:16, 18a, 20), while the second part (19:23–30) is subdivided by a question posed to Jesus by Peter (19:27). Besides casting Jesus in the role of a teacher fielding questions, the two parts are united by the catchwords “*follow*” (19:21, 27) and “*eternal life*” (19:16, 29), the latter creating a frame around the entire pericope. Indeed, by the time they reach the end of the pericope, the readers will have encountered an array of images for depicting participation in divine redemption: not only eternal life but also treasure in heaven, entering the kingdom, sitting on thrones, being “*first*,” and being “*saved*.”

I. (:16-22) GOOD INTENTIONS CAN'T GUARANTEE SALVATION – ENCOUNTER WITH THE RICH YOUNG RULER

A. (:16) Desire for Eternal Life

1. Coming to the Right Person = the Source of Truth

“And behold, one came to Him and said,”

2. Asking the Right Question = How to Obtain Eternal Life

“Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”

Daniel Doriani: Clearly, this man wants to know how he can fulfill the conditions that will let him obtain eternal life. He wants to know what he owes God. Better yet, what can he do so that God is obligated to him, so the Lord owes him eternal life?

Michael Wilkins: The “god” of a person’s life is whatever rules his or her values, priorities, and ambitions. The lack this young man sensed could not be filled with his wealth or his own religious efforts. It could only be filled with the perfection that comes through entering the kingdom of heaven and experiencing the inner transformation of heart; those two things will set him on the path to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The inner change will produce a transformation from the inside out.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The young man’s desire was right and his question revealed that he understood the purpose of Jesus’ message. Jesus was offering eternal life. However, the young man did not understand how to receive it. He was thinking works: *“What good thing can I do?”* Matthew’s readers know that humble belief, not works, is required (**18:6**) for entrance into the kingdom (**21:31-32; 13:19; Lk. 8:12; Jn. 1:12; Eph. 2:8-9**).

B. (:17-21) Discipleship Challenge

1. (:17a) Redirecting the Conversation to the Absolute Nature of Goodness

“And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good;’”

This young man comes to Jesus already evaluating himself as relatively a good person who still lacks something in his spiritual makeup. He is looking with great respect to Jesus to reveal that one secret aspect of performing righteousness that will put him over the top and secure eternal life. Clearly he needs to completely revamp his perspective on **goodness**.

J. Ligon Duncan: And Jesus’ response to this young man, in the very first words He says to him, shows us both Jesus’ deity and His ability to look into the hearts of men. I want you to look at **verse 17** at what Jesus says when He responds to the young man. The young man says to Him, *“What good thing must I do in order to obtain eternal life?”* Jesus’ first response is to say, *“Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good.”* Now I want you to stop right there. And I want you to recognize what Jesus has done. In a few moments, this young man is going to claim to be good. When Jesus asks him to keep the commandments, this young man is going to say, *“I’ve done that. I am a good person”*. And I want you to notice what Jesus has already said to him before he ever says that. *“No one is good except God.”*

Do you realize what the Great Physician of our souls is doing here? He is diagnosing this man’s spiritual condition before the conversation ever begins. And He is saying, *“Your fundamental problem is that you think that you are good. You think that you are spiritually wealthy before the*

Lord. You do not recognize your own poverty. No one is good except God.” And then He says, “*Now, keep the commandments.*” The Lord Jesus in this passing comment before He ever gives an answer to the man’s direct question is telling us that no one is good. . .

I want you to also see that Jesus in this passage zeroes in on the question of the **nature of goodness**. The nature of holiness. What does it mean to be good? That is a very important question. Over and over Jesus has said it means more than to be outwardly moral. Because our actions are not only seen in the outward things that we do, the reality of the goodness of our actions is not only seen in the outward things that we do, but in our heart attitude and why we do them. Goodness begins in the heart. And it is implanted there only by God’s grace. And so Jesus is zeroing in on the crucial issue here of what it means to be good.

Charles Swindoll: I like how Jesus didn’t let the man have control of the conversation for an instant. If we read Matthew, Mark, and Luke together, it seems that the man was engaging in a bit of flattery as well as self-justification. In response to being called “*good*” (**Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18**), Jesus suggested that the man didn’t know what he was saying: “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone*” (**Luke 18:19**). Matthew’s account notes how Jesus turned this flattery into an exposé of the man’s insufficient notion of “*good*” (**Matt. 19:17**). In the rich man’s eyes, moral or ethical goodness was measured on a horizontal scale —comparing righteousness among people. In the man’s worldly eyes, Jesus was pretty high on the “goodness scale.” Jesus blasted that whole concept of horizontal righteousness and replaced it with a divine standard: “*There is only One who is good*” (**19:17**). The standard for goodness and righteousness is not how much better we are than the people around us but how we measure up to God’s perfect holiness. . .

On the one hand, this is a valid offer. Theoretically, if a person had innate righteousness and goodness, he or she would keep all the commands perfectly, with a willing heart and humble spirit, as an act of loving worship toward God. Such a person —if they ever existed —would please God in every respect and would merit eternal life. Theoretically. In reality, the only person with such innate righteousness and goodness is the God-man, Jesus Christ. He alone was born without the total depravity and fallen sinful nature that characterizes humanity. He alone is “*good*” in the absolute sense. And He alone could live a perfect life in obedience to God’s commands and please Him in every respect. So, while Jesus stated the truth that keeping the commands could open the door to eternal life, He didn’t bother to tell the rich young ruler that it was **impossible for anybody to do it but Himself!**

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus forced the young man to think seriously about the word *good* that he had used in addressing Jesus. . . If Jesus is only one of many religious teachers in history, then His words carry no more weight than the pronouncements of any other religious leader. But if Jesus is good, then He is God, and we had better heed what he says.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus is diverting attention from the young man's inadequate criteria for entering into life and focusing on the standard of divine goodness.

D. A. Carson: In the absolute sense of goodness required to gain eternal life, only God is good (cf. **1Ch 16:34; 2Ch 5:13; Ps 106:1; 118:1, 29**). Jesus will not allow anything other than God’s will to determine what is good. By approaching Jesus in this way (esp. **vv.16, 20**), the young man reveals simultaneously that he wants something beyond God’s will (**v.20**) and that he **misconstrues the absoluteness of God’s goodness.**

Donald Hagner: The issue in Matthew, however, concerns the **definition of the good**. God has given the commandments precisely to define righteousness, and Jesus, loyal to the law, stands behind them. While Jesus interprets the meaning of those commandments, they themselves are the beginning point for the definition of righteousness. One who seeks eternal life should accordingly look to the commandments.

2. (:17b-19) Relationships Viewed through the Prism of the Law Reveal Hidden Sin

“but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.

He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’

And Jesus said, ‘You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery;

You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; 19 Honor your father and

mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Stu Weber: The man's next question revealed his misunderstanding still further. He did not understand that God required **absolute perfection**. He seemed to presume that God graded on a curve and that his “goodness” was better than many. Jesus let this man know that anything less than perfection is no “good” at all. A righteous man would have to keep all of the commandments perfectly. The man, grasping for possibilities, assumed that there must be some special set of commandments that made a person particularly righteous.

Daniel Doriani: We are tempted to question Jesus’ judgment here. When the rich man asks what he should do to gain eternal life, we expect Jesus to present the standard evangelistic reply: “You cannot do anything. You need to repent and believe and trust Jesus to do it for you. He offered God his perfect obedience all through his life, and he offers his obedience to you if you trust in him. Further, he died on the cross for you to atone for all of your sins, and he rose again to gain the victory over death.”

The standard reply is absolutely true, but Jesus said no such thing. He told the man who trusted in his strength to be strong and obey the law. Then, when the man asked, “*Which ones?*” Jesus surprises us again. We expect him to lead the man to the first, vertical commandments, “Have no other gods; cherish no idols; love the Lord of Israel.” But Jesus takes him to the horizontal or social laws: do not murder, steal, bear false witness. That, of course, is the sort of command the man thinks we can keep. Among the social laws, Jesus even neglects to say “*You shall not covet*” (**Ex. 20:17**)—the commandment that would have forced the man to examine his motives. So Jesus’ reply seems only to toss fuel onto the flame of the man’s inflated self-confidence. . .

Jesus does not quibble. He accepts the man’s self-judgment and moves on. It is as if he says, “Ah yes. Sorry. I was not aware of your achievement. You have perfectly fulfilled God’s law and want to do something more? Very well then, perhaps there is just one more thing you could possibly do: ‘*If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me*’” (**19:21**). . .

Of course, the Lord does not ask everyone to sell his goods and so to live as a disciple. If wealth is not our god, something else is. But the Lord asks everyone to give up something. **There is a cost to discipleship for everyone; everyone must give up the god he worships. . .**

Observe the way Jesus reaches hearts, then and now. When the man said he had perfectly obeyed God’s law, Jesus let the claim pass, without comment. He said nothing of the small, private sins

that we commit every day: boasting and pride, envy and lust, self-pity and anger, gossiping and complaining. Instead Jesus gave him the great work he sought, because the command would become a mirror to the man's soul, so he could see himself as he was. He would see that he was not quite the servant of God that he imagined. He was the flag on the rope as two teams—two gods—played tug of war for his soul. The rope danced back and forth as the claims of God and the claims of money tugged at his soul.

Stanley Saunders: When pressed to identify **which commandments** he has in mind. Jesus points the man toward the Ten Commandments, especially those which focus on **human relationships**, which he underlines by adding to the list the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (**19:19**; cf. **22:39**; **Lev 19:18**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus may have used these particular commandments to show the young man his sin. The law promised life (**Lev. 18:5**; **Dt. 30:11-20**; **Rom. 7:10**; **10:5**) to all who obeyed it but because no one was able to obey it fully (**Rom. 8:3**), the law only brought condemnation and death. As Paul later taught in **Romans 7:7-8**, one function of the law is to show sinners their sin and sinfulness (also 3:20). Jesus may have referred this man to the law, then, to convince him of his sin.

William Barclay: Jesus cites one commandment, as it were, out of order. He cites the command **to honour parents** last, when in point of fact it ought to come first. It is clear that Jesus wishes to lay special stress on that commandment. Why? May it not be that this young man had grown rich and successful in his career, and had then forgotten his parents, who may have been very poor? He may well have risen in the world, and have been half-ashamed of his family back at home; and then he may have justified himself perfectly legally by the law of Corban, which Jesus had so unsparingly condemned (**Matthew 15:1-6**; **Mark 7:9-13**). These passages show that he could well have done that, and still have legally claimed to have obeyed the commandments. In the very commandments which he cites, Jesus is asking this young man what his attitude to other people and to his parents is, asking what his personal relationships are like.

Grant Osborne: In v. 17 he turned the man's focus **from self to God**, now he turns that focus also **from self to others**. The basic problem is that **he has lived only for himself and his possessions**. The Decalogue makes it clear that one can only find "life" by centering first on God (the first table) and then on others (the second table). "*As yourself*" (ὡς σεαυτόν, see further on **22:39**) means to love those around you as deeply and as sacrificially as you love yourself. . .

The man needs ethical completeness, true obedience to all God has said in his revealed Word. So Jesus turns to the **primary problem** in the man's life. His possessions have clearly become his god and have thus replaced God in his life. Therefore, the only recourse is to do what must be done with all idols: get rid of them. Moreover, if he is truly to "*love his neighbor*," he must sell the idolatrous possessions and then give the money "*to the poor*." This does not mean he had never engaged in almsgiving; he could not have said he had kept "*all*" the commands if he had not. Jesus is not talking about almsgiving but about **idolatry**.

3. (:20-21) Repentance Hinges on Total Abandonment to Follow Jesus

a. (:20) Spiritual Blindness

"The young man said to Him,

'All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?'"

- b. (:21) Specific Discipleship Test Geared for the Rich Young Ruler
“Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’”

Charles Swindoll: When the young man claimed that he had kept all those commandments, Jesus let it go. I’m sure He could have poked and probed, revealing some area of neglect, a secret lust or hatred, a disrespect of parents, or some other blind spot. But instead, Jesus once again went straight for the jugular: in this case, the source of the man’s pride, power, and self-confidence — his riches.

J. Ligon Duncan: All of us have different sins that vex us. **All of us have pet sins.** And they’re different in each. Each of us have different temptations. Each of us have **different inclinations.** And those sins, those root sins, those grand sins which are the cause the source, the fountainhead of other sins, those sins give us a clue to the state of heart. We may look outwardly moral to everyone around us, but when we deal with ourselves in the quietness of our own room, and we look at our own hearts, and we know the things that we struggle with that maybe even those closest to us don’t know about, we know in our heart of hearts **we are not good.** We know that we cannot earn our way to salvation, because our hearts are in a state of rebellion. And Jesus is zeroing in on this man. He wants to get to his root sins. When Jesus says to him, “*keep the commandments,*” Jesus is not telling this young man salvation is by work- salvation is by earning it- salvation is by your good works- Jesus is using that statement as a spiritual diagnostic tool in order to force this man to look at his own heart and recognize that he hasn’t kept the law.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus was specific about how the young ruler could possess eternal life, requiring three things:

- (1) The young man was to dispose of his wealth. He was to liquidate everything.
- (2) He was to give the proceeds to the poor. This was one way he could love his neighbor as himself, and his almsgiving would be transformed into eternal riches (**Lk. 12:33**). Ridding himself of his possessions would also free him of his worship of mammon (**6:24**) and the deceitfulness (**13:22**) and snare (**1 Tim. 6:9**) of riches. Then
- (3) he would follow Jesus.

Jesus’ words were imperatival and called for a decisive exercise of the will: “*Go!*” “*Sell!*” “*Give!*” “*Come!*” “*Follow Me!*” Jesus did not choose for the man. He presented the requirements and encouraged the young man to make the right choices. “*Sell*” and “*give*” are decisive and denote urgency (Greek ingressive aorist). “*Go*” and “*follow*” denote positive commands that expect continuing action (Greek present). To “*follow*” Jesus is not a single event as when a person receives Him as Savior but an ongoing action beginning at conversion and continuing through life in a disciple-Lord relationship.

William Barclay: Here is the key to the whole passage. The young man claimed to have kept the law. In the legal sense, that might be true; but in the spiritual sense it was not true, because his attitude to other people was wrong. In the last analysis, his attitude was utterly selfish. That is why Jesus confronted him with the challenge to sell all and to give to the poor. This man was so shackled to his possessions that nothing less than surgical removal of them would suffice. If people look on their possessions as given to them for nothing but their own comfort and convenience, those possessions are a chain which must be broken; if they look on their possessions as a means to helping others; those possessions are a crown.

The great truth of this story lies in the way it sheds light on the meaning of eternal life. Eternal life is **life such as God himself lives**. The word for eternal is *aiōnios*, which does not mean lasting forever; it means *such as befits God*, or such as belongs to God, or such as is characteristic of God. The great characteristic of God is that **he so loved and he gave**. Therefore the essence of eternal life is not a carefully calculated keeping of the commandments and the rules and the regulations; eternal life is based on an **attitude of loving and sacrificial generosity to other people**. If we would find eternal life, if we would find happiness, joy, satisfaction, peace of mind and serenity of heart, it will not be by piling up a credit balance with God through keeping commandments and observing rules and regulations; it will be through reproducing God's attitude of love and care to our neighbours. To follow Christ and in grace and generosity to serve the men and women for whom Christ died are one and the same thing.

In the end, the young man turned away in great distress. He refused the challenge, because he had great possessions. His tragedy was that he loved things more than he loved people; and he loved himself more than he loved others. Those who put things before people and self before others must turn their backs on Jesus Christ.

Richard Gardner: The demand is a symbolic test of loyalty, a test that confronts every would-be disciple in one form or another: Will we serve God and seek first his kingdom, or will we serve wealth and status in pursuit of our ambitions (cf. **6:19-34**)? When the rich young man goes away sorrowful (**v. 22**), he mirrors the tragic plight of all who choose the second option.

Leon Morris: It would seem that the young man was somewhat **disappointed**. He had come to Jesus looking for a brilliant new insight into the ways of God, a challenge that would stir the blood, some great deed to be done, after which his claim on eternal life would be certain. Instead all that had happened was that he had been referred to the commandments, old stuff that he had been keeping for years ("*from my youth*" is added in the other two accounts). . .

This does not mean that getting into heaven is a matter of rewards for meritorious acts. It means rather that the young man of this story was quite unaware of his failure to keep the commandment to have no other God but the one true God. **He had made a god of his wealth**, and when faced with the challenge he could not forsake that god. If his attitude to the true God had been such that he could have dispensed with his riches, then he would have had treasure in heaven, whether he gave them all away or not. But the challenge to get rid of them all showed that he did not have the right attitude to God. God demands **undivided loyalty** from those who would be his. "*Come, follow me,*" Jesus went on. This is the challenge he had previously made to the fishermen as they were at their nets (**4:19**) and to Matthew as he sat at his place of work (**9:9**). They did not have the riches of this young man, it would seem, but they left what they had and followed Jesus. They were prepared to sacrifice everything; that is the path of the service of God.

D. A. Carson: Many have taken these verses to indicate a two-tier ethic. Some disciples find eternal life, and others go further and become perfect by adopting a more compassionate stance (e.g., **Harrington**; NIDNTT, 2:63). But **G. Barth** ("Matthew's Understanding of the Law," 95ff.) convincingly disproves this exegesis. In particular the young man's question in **v.20**, "*What do I still lack?*" clearly refers to gaining eternal life (**v.17**), and Jesus' answer in **v.21** must be understood as answering the question. A two-tier Christianity is implicitly contradicted by **23:8-12**, and the same word ("*perfect*") is applied to all of Jesus' disciples in **5:48**. Matthew shows no

strong tendency toward asceticism. Therefore, the basic thrust of v.21 is not “*Sell your possessions and give to the poor*” but “*Come, follow me.*”

R. T. France: The young man’s request for some “*good thing*” to do has brought him face to face with goodness at a level which will prove too high for him. The “*goodness*” of keeping commandments is, as v. 17 has reminded us, always relative; Jesus now replaces it with a demand which is absolute, **the demand of the kingdom of heaven.**

The practical outworking of the man’s search for perfection thus takes an unexpected direction. Rather than some spiritual exercise or mystical pilgrimage Jesus first prescribes a very practical action. But this is no token gesture, but the total disinvestment and irrevocable disposal of everything that has provided the basis for his “*good*” life so far. He has no doubt, like all pious Jews, made regular and generous contributions to the relief of the poor and disadvantaged within his community (that is at least part of what he would understand by “*loving your neighbor as yourself*”), but Jewish charity operated within prudential limits, whereas Jesus puts no limit to his demand. To follow it will place this self-sufficient young man in the same position as the birds and the flowers in **6:25–32**, depending directly on the provision of a heavenly Father for the essentials of life.

But even this radical action of dispossession is not simply another “*good thing*” to do; it is the prelude to something even more far-reaching. The imperatives “*sell*” and “*give*” are followed by “*come*” and “*follow*,” the essence of Jesus’ demand is **not disinvestment but discipleship**. So the giving up of possessions is not presented as a sacrifice desirable for its own sake, but rather as the means to something far better—**treasure in heaven**. . . The release from material preoccupation is not in itself the secret of eternal life; it is the **introduction to a new way of life** as a disciple of Jesus: “*follow me.*” It is in this, rather than in the act of renunciation and generosity alone, that the eternal life which the man is looking for will be found. This is the treasure in heaven.

C. (:22) Decision to Cling to Possessions Rather than Abandon All and Follow Christ

1. Best Gospel Message from the Best Messenger Doesn’t Guarantee the Best Results

“But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved;”

S. Lewis Johnson: Someone has said that **the rich young ruler came to the right person, asked the right question, got the right answer, but made the wrong decision.** That is true. It is sometimes said by young men, even in theological seminaries, that when love is felt the message is heard. We often hear people make a stupid comment that if we really love people they will respond to the ministry of the word of God. That is not true. No one ever loved more than Jesus Christ, and yet this man did not come. No one ever loved more than the Apostle Paul who was human, and yet men did not always respond to the apostle’s messages. As a matter of fact they did not generally respond. The Lord Jesus loved perfectly and only a small remnant of men responded. When love is felt the message may be heard or the message may not be heard.

Michael Wilkins: The young man knows that Jesus has correctly pinpointed what is lacking in his life. His “*great wealth*” (lit., “*many possessions*”), which include money, but also his houses, land, animals, and so on, has **captivated his heart**, and he cannot exchange this god of his life for Jesus (cf. **6:21–24**). So he goes away with great distress (cf. **26:22, 37**), because he knows deep in his heart that he has made a decision that will have eternal consequences.

2. Earthly Possessions Can Prove More Enticing than Kingdom Treasures

“for he was one who owned much property.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew’s syntax, literally “*was having*,” may suggest that this young man had possessed this wealth for some time. He was accustomed to wealth. **Hagner** (33B:558) thinks the words suggest that he was **preoccupied with his wealth**. Apparently, wealth was so important to him that he would not do as the Lord required and he walked away. In exchange for his soul (16:26), he chose wealth. He chose his present possession over the one pearl of great value (13:46) and over the treasure in the field (13:44). He did not get past the first requirement of discipleship (16:24). The young man whom Jesus loved walked away from the one who was on His way to the cross to save his soul.

This is the only person according to the Gospel records that Jesus told to sell everything. The Twelve “*left all*” to follow Him (v. 27), but even they had not given away their properties (Mt. 8:14). This means that complete obedience to Jesus is required of all, but the individual orders are not always the same. All who would follow Jesus are required to repent and trust Jesus as Savior and Lord. How that is lived out will be different for each person and can mean selling all, leaving family (Mt. 8:22), leaving occupations (Mt. 4:18-22; 9:9), staying home and witnessing (Mk. 5:18-20), or whatever He directs (Mt. 16:24-25; Jn. 21:22).

Robert Gundry: In telling why the young man went away sorrowing, the explanation “*for he had many acquisitions*” illustrates Jesus’ having said that “*where your treasure is, there will be your heart too*” (6:21 [see also 6:24; 19:23–24]). “*He had many acquisitions*” contrasts both with the selling he’d told the young man to do and with Jesus’ having told the Twelve, “*You shouldn’t acquire gold or silver or copper [coins] [and so on]*” (10:9–10a). “*Acquisitions*” defines the young man’s possessions as things he’d gotten as a result of **coveting** in violation of the commandment **left conspicuously unquoted**. This youth’s going away from Jesus therefore presents a sad contrast with the little children who came to Jesus in 19:13–15. But just as that earlier passage threw open the church to youth, the present passage calls on youth to renounce affluence in order to become true disciples of Jesus.

David Turner: Jesus alone determines what is genuine Torah obedience. His demand for total commitment to the kingdom is in reality a gracious gospel offer that calls the man to rely not on wealth but on Jesus and the values of the kingdom (cf. 6:21, 24; 13:22). The young man walks away from Jesus in a very sad frame of mind. Jesus has identified the inadequacy that haunts him, but he is not yet willing to obey Jesus. . . .

At this point Jesus gets to the heart of the problem by commanding the man to give his wealth to the poor and become a disciple. In effect, Jesus asks the man to reprise a role previously scripted in two parables (13:44–46). The man will lose everything, but he will gain Jesus and the kingdom, which he has lacked all along (16:24–26). His sorrowful departure demonstrates he has not loved his neighbor as himself (19:19) and thus he has not kept all the commandments after all. Jesus did not directly cite the tenth commandment, “*You must not covet*” (Exod. 20:17), but the man’s response clearly shows that he has broken it. Finally the man implicitly acknowledges what he lacks. **His wealth has become an idol**, and he is violating the first commandment (Exod. 20:2–3). His refusal to do a good thing—to divest himself of wealth and follow Jesus—shows that he does not acknowledge God’s goodness. He serves money, and so he cannot serve God (Matt. 6:24). “Jesus demands not alms but everything” (W. Davies and Allison 1997: 46; cf. Calvin 1972: 2.256–57). But **materialism prevents him from seeking the kingdom first**

(6:33). His sorrow indicates not only that he is not ready to follow Jesus but also that now he knows what he lacks. Perhaps he eventually will follow Jesus's instructions, since "*with God everything is possible*" (19:26).

II. (:23-26) SALVATION DEPENDS ON THE POWER OF GOD

A. (:23-24) Difficulty of the Rich Entering the Kingdom

1. (:23) Statement of the Difficulty

*"And Jesus said to His disciples,
'Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'"*

R. T. France: The story of one man's spiritual failure becomes the model for a general and emphatic pronouncement by Jesus (see on 5:18 for "*I tell you truly*"), which picks up and takes further the warning in the interpretation of the parable of the sower that "*the worries of this world and the false lure of wealth [can] choke the message [so that] it cannot produce a crop.*" (13:22) Whatever the specific pressures faced by the young man, his experience is now universalized as the danger which faces "*the rich*" in general.

Grant Osborne: The wealthy have so much power and control over this life that they perceive little need for the heavenly realm, as exemplified in the young man in the previous encounter. It is "hard" for such a person to turn to God.

2. (:24) Illustration of the Difficulty

"And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Grant Osborne: Jesus' analogy for the **degree of difficulty** has been long misunderstood. Many still say that it refers to the Needle's Eye Gate in Jerusalem, a low opening that would be hard for a camel to get through. However, no such gate existed in Jesus' time! Others have said "*needle*" simply refers to a low opening like the narrow door of 7:13-14 or they see it as a "*rope*" (κάμιλον as opposed to "*camel*" [κάμηλον] in the text). Such attempts to water down the imagery are unnecessary; this is **rabbinic hyperbole** (e.g., "*straining the gnat but swallowing the camel*" in 23:24), a stylistic device Jesus uses often. It depicts the largest animal in Palestine (a camel) going through the smallest hole (the eye of a needle) to illustrate how "*difficult*" it is for the wealthy to know God.

William Barclay: Riches have three main effects on people's outlook:

- 1) Riches encourage a false independence.
- 2) Riches shackle people to this earth.
- 3) Riches tend to make people selfish.

B. (:25-26) Possibility of Salvation by the Power of God

1. (:25) Difficulty Astonishes the Disciples

*"And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said,
'Then who can be saved?'"*

Grant Osborne: Here the **astonishment** is caused by the general Jewish belief that riches actually signified favor with God, who blessed the piety of the family with earthly rewards. So for them the rich young man with his superficial piety was in reality one of God's chosen. His wealth

“provided the possibility of both deeds of charity (almsgiving) and leisure for the study of Torah and the pursuit of righteousness.” If it is impossible for such a one to enter the kingdom, **who can?**

Warren Wiersbe: We cannot follow the King and live for worldly wealth. We cannot serve God and money. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (**1 Tim. 6:6-10**). Jesus Christ demands of all who will follow Him that they love Him supremely.

Donald Hagner: The fact that the young man was unwilling to respond to Jesus’ invitation to discipleship raises the question of the salvation of the wealthy. Granted the perspective of Jesus in the preceding pericopes, **is it possible for the rich to be saved, and if so, how?**

2. (:26) Difficulty Overcome by the Power of God

“And looking upon them Jesus said to them,

‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

Daniel Doriani: The rich are prone to trust in their wealth and connections. Their savings become their security. The poor may find it easier to see that they must trust in the Lord and no one else. But what is impossible for us is possible with God. It may be harder for a rich man to humble himself like a child, but God can touch and change any heart.

R. T. France: The young man exercised his freedom to decline God’s invitation, and it seems that the God for whom everything is possible is not prepared to override that decision. The pericope taken as a whole thus offers a salutary warning: anyone can be saved by God’s grace, but this does not remove **human responsibility**. The possible only becomes actual when Jesus’ call to “*follow me*” is freely obeyed.

Stanley Saunders: Jesus’ statement that only God, not humans, can make this happen is not meant as reassurance to the rich that God will find a way to get them in despite their baggage. He means, rather, that salvation is dependent on God, not on the things humans accumulate—whether possessions, power, honor, or security—in order to justify themselves and, they suppose, complete and perfect their lives. The prophets persistently warn against the corrosive power of wealth and its uselessness in the face of divine judgment (e.g., **Amos 6:4–8; Ezek. 7:19–20**). While God promises to bless faithful Israel with wealth (**Deut. 28:1–14**), God does not bless those who build up wealth at the expense of others.

Charles Swindoll: Wealth encourages **false independence** and **blind arrogance**. This is illustrated well in Jesus’ message to the church in Laodicea recorded in the book of Revelation. In His words of rebuke to that lukewarm church, He said, “*You say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*” (**Rev. 3:17**).

Again, Jesus turned the Jews’ socioeconomic world on its head. Rather than being a blessing, wealth is seen as a **heady intoxicant**. It leads people into thinking they don’t actually need God. Unlike children, who have no power, no defense, no resources, and no ability to accomplish what they want in life, the rich are blindly self-sufficient, independent, and proud. Truth be told, being rich has a way of luring our eyes away from the Lord and onto the things of this world. It creates a stubborn resistance against humble and helpless dependence.

Left to himself in his state of self-centered pride and self-justifying piety, the rich young ruler was hopelessly lost. In such a condition, the man's salvation wasn't merely difficult—it was impossible. Jesus' image of squeezing a large camel through the tiny eye of a needle was meant to communicate the **utter impossibility** of stripping oneself of pride and working oneself to heaven. The disciples understood this well when they asked, "*Then who can be saved?*" (**Matt. 19:25**).

Jesus' answer cleared up the matter and taught an essential lesson on the biblical doctrine of salvation (**19:26**). **Self-effort of any kind does not result in salvation.** That is, salvation is impossible by human effort. But when God does a work in a person's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, He brings that person to humble faith in Christ, repentance from self-reliance, and submission to His authority. **With God, any heart can be changed.** What's impossible for people to accomplish is entirely possible for God. The rich young ruler's problem wasn't his riches per se, but the deceptive self-importance that accompanied his wealth. Just as the man may have earned extreme prosperity by human effort, he wanted to earn eternal life by doing good things. Impossible! Eternal life can't be earned and can't be bought. It can only be received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (**Eph. 2:8-9**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would some modern day evangelism methods differ from the approach that Jesus took with the rich young ruler?
- 2) How did Jesus expose the false confidence that this man had in his own demonstrated morality?
- 3) What is the role of the law in exposing sin and bringing a sense of condemnation that prepares a heart for the good news of the gospel?
- 4) How does this encounter encourage us in our witnessing to be faithful to the message and loving in our presentation but to leave the results with our sovereign God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Wilson: The perfection of commitment entails the **perfection of love**, that is, the love of neighbor (cf. **5:43–48**), which in the case of the rich young man entails selling his possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor. In retrospect, the man's claim to have "*kept*" the law demanding love of neighbor (**19:20**) rings hollow. As the conclusion to **19:21** indicates, the commitment demanded by the Messiah also entails a commitment to the Messiah himself, that is, a life of discipleship, of becoming Jesus's follower. As Peter reminds Jesus in **19:27**, his disciples have left "*everything*" to follow him (cf. **4:18–22; 8:19–22; 9:9; 10:37–39; 16:24–26**). In his inability to heed such a call (**19:22**), the young man becomes a symbol of those whose reception of the word is choked off by "*the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth*" (**13:22**).

R. T. France: The disciples' astonishment arises from the common Jewish assumption (reflecting an important strand in the OT, especially in the Wisdom tradition but also in the seminal passage **Deut 28:1–14**) that **wealth is a sign of God's blessing** and his reward for faithful service, so that when Jesus instead declares it to be an impediment to salvation he is undermining a fundamental part of their religious worldview. It is true that the OT prophets and psalmists had spoken against the oppressive rich and championed the pious poor, and such hostility to the wealthy continues to be expressed especially within the apocalyptic tradition but it seems unlikely that in popular thought material possessions as such were distrusted. This pericope does not say, however, that this young man was guilty of oppression of the poor, and Jesus' demand on him, while it includes giving to the poor, is expressed in terms of his own "*perfection*," "*treasure in heaven*" and discipleship. **It is his actual wealth, and his attitude toward it**, that is in focus rather than his social behavior; his affluence is a danger to the owner himself, rather than a threat to others.

Donald Hagner: The pericope (esp. v. 17c) should not be taken as teaching that salvation can be gained by simple obedience to the commandments. This is already evident in that although the young man was able to answer that he had kept the commandments, he was nevertheless conscious of falling short of entering, or being able to enter, eternal life. Jesus' conversation with the young man is designed from the start to bring him to the understanding that participation in the kingdom, through becoming Jesus' disciple, is the only way to the eschatological blessing of eternal life. Genuine obedience to the commandments—i.e., as interpreted by Jesus!—is possible only through participation in the kingdom. But the earlier teaching in the Gospel concerning the discipleship of the kingdom has shown repeatedly the absolute claim of the kingdom upon the disciple's life. It is just at this point, as Jesus knows, that this young man was most vulnerable. So attached was he to his great wealth that he was unwilling to part with it. Such is the insidiousness of riches that, as **Bengel** notes, "If the Lord had said, Thou art rich, and art too fond of thy riches, the young man would have denied it." He had to be confronted with all the force of a radical alternative. The seeming inevitability of the young man's decision raises the question whether any rich people can participate in the kingdom—a question that is addressed in the pericope that follows.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now of course this first request is a request that suggests that he is a person who is afflicted with a form of **Pelegian legalism**. He does say, good master, what good things shall I do that I may inherit eternal life or get eternal life? Now that in itself lets us know that he is a kind of person who thinks that **life comes by the things that we do**. There is in human nature, by reason of the fall of man, this fundamental string that we all think that we get to heaven by the things that we do. It is part of our fallenness; it is part of what has happened as a result of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden.

Now today, as we think of the people with whom we do business, day by day, or with whom we have relationships day by day, I don't have to tell you that the world thinks we get to heaven by the things that we do. There are great numbers of citizens who think that you get to heaven by **good citizenship**, they think if you are a member of the Rotary or Kiwanis, or the League of Women Voters, of the John Birch Society, or some other significant human work, that that in itself gets you membership into the kingdom of God. And if you are a member of the American Civil Liberties Union, that means that you form part of the nobility in heaven.

Then there are those that think you get to heaven by virtue of your **morality**, that is, by hard work. You are kind, you do not cheat on your income tax, you give to the cancer fund and other types of endeavors such as that, and you will get to heaven.

And then of course there are the great numbers of people who think you get to heaven by **religion**. They think that church membership means that you are a member of the heavenly citizenship. That if, furthermore, you learn the catechism or you have been baptized and attend regularly Sunday school, if you have signed the pledge card and if you have become a part of the every members canvass, that surely you will get to heaven. And if you do not do something during the season of lent and have a St. Christopher's medal in your automobile, everything is sure to be alright.

There are even those that think that one gets to heaven by virtue of **culture**. You have attended a university, even an Ivy League university, or perhaps you are a member of the Junior League, or at least you have been a member of the Junior League, maybe even some think that because you are a member of the historical society of the Panhandle, you are sure to get to heaven. Or you are a member of the local country club. You are just a general good person who has been brought up in good Texas culture.

Well I know that these may seem ridiculous to you, but I am sure that there are a lot of people who just under the skin really feel like this. I imagine there are even some that say that we get to heaven because we are good and gentle, we wouldn't even squash a rollie pollie bug, as one of my friends likes to say.

You see we have all of these concepts of relative human righteousness by which we think that we shall get into heaven, failing to realize that the Scripture set forth for us an absolute righteousness, and we must possess this absolute righteousness if we are to ever enter into heaven. It is not sufficient to have human righteousness, it is not sufficient to be admired by human beings. God demands a perfect righteousness before we shall enter into heaven. We have to present him with a righteousness which he approves and the only righteousness which he approves is a perfect righteousness. And if we do not have that perfect righteousness, *homo sapiens* shall not enter into the kingdom of God.

John MacArthur: How to Obtain Eternal Life

Luke 14:33 says this: "*So likewise, whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be My disciple.*" Now that is a very straightforward truth. Unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be the Lord's disciple. Salvation is not for people who pray a prayer necessarily, or people who think they need Jesus Christ, **it is for people who forsake all**. There is **an abandonment of everything in genuine salvation**. And that, I think, is the essence of what our Lord is teaching us through His encounter with the young man in **Matthew 19**. . .

I guess I have to say this has got to be the **hottest evangelistic prospect** in the gospel so far. I mean this guy is really ripe. He is ready. But the amazing thing is he goes away without ever receiving eternal life. And the reason he goes away is because he is **not willing to forsake everything**.

Jesus actually set up an insurmountable barrier for the man. Instead of taking him where he was and just getting him to make the quote/unquote "decision," Jesus stops him dead in his tracks and makes it impossible for him to get saved on those terms, which he had already had come to.

Now you say, "What kind of evangelism is this? Jesus would have flunked the evangelism seminar. He doesn't know how to get closure. He doesn't know how to draw the net. He doesn't

know how to sign the guy up. I mean you get a guy coming along saying, 'I want eternal life,' you've got a hot one. You don't want to lose it."

But, oh, do we need the truth that's in this text. **We have so many contemporary, unbiblical modes of evangelism.** Our mass evangelism with its decisions, statistics, and its aisle-walking, and its "hurry up and come to Jesus," and "just believe and there's nothing else" kind of approach is leading all kinds of people into the delusion that they're saved when, in fact, they're not. And so we must go to this passage for its very important instruction. . .

Eternal life means the ability to **permanently respond to your environment.** And eternal life carries with it the divine environment. In physical life, we can respond to a physical environment. In eternal life, we have the ability to respond to the divine environment. In other words, we respond to the life of God. That's why when we're saved, Paul says we enter into the heavenlies. Our citizenship takes on a divine character, and we all of a sudden come alive to God, and that's unending.

But it is a **quality of existence**, not a quantity of existence. It is the idea that I am sensitive to God, that I can respond to God. Before I was saved I was dead in sin, utterly unresponsive to the divine environment. When I became a Christian, I became capable of responding to the divine environment, and I shall always be capable of responding to the divine environment. . .

So he knew what he wanted. And I think that when we preach or evangelize, we're trying to get people to understand what they should want. We're trying to get them to see that they don't have eternal life, and they should have eternal life. That's part of it. And so he was on track.

The second element that comes through here is that not only did he know what he wanted, but **he felt deeply the need.** . .

That takes us to the third element. In obtaining eternal life, it is also necessary to **seek diligently,** to seek diligently. . .

That takes us to the fourth element of obtaining eternal life, and that is he **came to the right source.** You know, there are lots of folks looking for eternal life and looking real hard, but they're looking in the wrong place. . .

Fifthly, in moving through our outline, and we're still in **verse 16**, he **asks the right question.** He really did. Now a lot of people have sort of knocked the guy for the question he asked. They say he's saying, "*What good thing shall I do?*" and that he's asking some works-oriented question. Well, certainly he was works-oriented. Certainly he was raised in a Pharisaic system of tradition. Certainly he was trained to think that you did things religiously to gain divine goals and divine ends.

But I still think with all of that obviously in the background, the question's a fairly fair question. I mean I don't think we ought to knock him for the question: "*What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" That's a fairly simple question. . .

The problem with this man is that by the time we get to the end of **verse 16**, there's something that hasn't been mentioned. What is it? **His sin.** There's been no mention of that. And the young man has no sense that he's offended a holy God. His desire for eternal life is purely wrapped up

in his own anxieties and his own personal needs, and has no thought for the affront that his life is to an infinitely holy God. And that is a necessary element in understanding the truth of salvation.

All evangelism must take the imperfect sinner and place him up against the perfect law of God so he can see his deficiency. That's an utterly essential element. And evangelism which deals only with men's needs, only with men's feelings, only with men's problems lacks the true balance. And that is why the churches are jammed full of people who aren't really saved, because they sought and gained some kind of psychological affirmation and not transactional redemption. . .

Now this is the barrier. "Young man, you're incomplete. You've got to see yourself as living in violation of holy God, and you've got to be willing to acknowledge that and abandon that." And the Lord puts up a barrier, a pre-salvation barrier is what it is. . .

You know, this is the way self-righteous religion works, by the way. It's very self-deceiving; it's very self-convincing. This guy actually believed this. He believed he was righteous, he really did. He believed he'd kept the law, he'd kept the code, and he just couldn't figure out what else he ought to do. For him it wasn't, "Oh, I know I've fallen short." For him it was, "You know, I've done everything good. What other good thing could I think to do?" That's an incredible approach.

Now, the Bible says at this point, in **Mark 10**, "*Jesus looked at him, and loved him.*" It's a very kind of pathetic statement: "Jesus looked at him, and loved him." The guy was sincere. There was something genuine in him. He really was a religious person. And Jesus loved him. And Jesus is not willing that any should perish. And the Lord Jesus Himself was about to die for the sins of this man, and He wanted this man in the sense that He longed for the soul of that man. But He would still not take him on his own terms. You understand? . . .

So I say again that the sixth point in our outline in obtaining eternal life is **confession and repentance**. Confession of sin, and repentance – turning from sin. And this is where this guy went out. I mean he wouldn't do it. And this is a necessary element. . .

This is the seventh element: **Submit to obey the Lord**. Here is a pre-salvation test for this guy. Jesus, in effect, is saying, "Are you going to do what I want you to do? **Who runs your life?** Do you or do I?" and He gives him a test. He gives him a command, and says, "When you're done with this first command, come right back here, and keep on following Me."

True salvation, I believe, includes confession of sin, repentance; and true salvation includes a submission to obey the Lord. Now let me say this. I don't think a person coming to Christ understands fully all that that confession may mean, and I don't think they understand necessarily all that that submission to the lordship of Christ may mean. But all the Lord is asking for here is the **willingness**; and He'll unfold the fullness of what it means.

Jesus really hit the sin of this guy. The sin of this guy was a **sin of covetousness**, it was a sin of indulgence, it was a sin of materialism, wealth and all that stuff. And he was indifferent to people who were poor and people who were in need, and He nailed him on that thing. And He said, "I want to give you the ultimate test. Will you do what I say? Will you obey My lordship?" . . .

Now salvation, I think, demands these two things. “Will you acknowledge your offense to God, and turn from your sin?” That’s what He’s saying. And the guy wouldn’t do it. He just wouldn’t acknowledge his sin.

And the second thing, “Will you leave your present perishing priorities and follow My commands though they cost you what is dearest to you?” That’s what He’s saying. I don’t know how else you can interpret the passage. **Salvation is a commitment then to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ at all costs.** And if you’re not willing to do it on those terms, Jesus doesn’t take you.

Donald Hagner: **Preoccupation with their wealth** is a notorious fault of the rich. The wealthy are generally **held captive** by their wealth. Exactly for this reason Jesus warned that “*wherever your treasure is, there too will be your heart*” (6:21). And it was also for this reason that the young rich man of vv 16–22 was required to part with his fortune. **Discipleship is a matter of total, undistracted, and unqualified commitment.** When Jesus said “*you cannot serve God and money*” (6:24), he also indirectly indicated the **difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom.** On the other hand, it seems clear that Jesus had a few relatively wealthy followers (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea, Lazarus, Zacchaeus, and perhaps Matthew) and was happy to take advantage of their hospitality (cf. **Luke 8:3**). If it is not theoretically impossible that the rich can be saved (i.e., without giving up their wealth), it is practically the case that only a relative few are able by the grace of God to live with their riches in a way that does not compromise their full, undivided commitment to Jesus in discipleship. But to live with wealth in this way is **tantamount to giving it all away.** It remains generally true that wealth “is a stumbling block to those who are avid for it, and every fool will be taken captive by it” (Sir 31:7). We should recognize that by the standards of first-century Palestine, most upper-middle-class Westerners and those on the Pacific rim would be considered wealthy. For all such persons the questions of wealth, discipleship, and the poor cannot be sidestepped if following Christ and his teaching means anything at all.

TEXT: Matthew 19:27 - 20:16

TITLE: REWARDS FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE

BIG IDEA:

RATHER THAN INSECURITY OR ENVY REGARDING REWARDS FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE, BELIEVERS SHOULD FOCUS ON GOD'S GRACE IN GRANTING ETERNAL LIFE AND HIS JUSTICE AND SOVEREIGN DISCRETION

INTRODUCTION:

This passage raises a number of difficult interpretative questions?

- Is the issue varying rewards in either the millennial kingdom or heaven or is the main point that every believer is treated alike in terms of inheriting eternal life by the grace of God [e.g. **John MacArthur**'s position below in the Notes]?
- What type of foil is the rich young ruler in this context?
- Who is represented here as the "*first*" vs. the "*last*" when it comes to **role reversal** reflected in the fundamental principle repeated in **19:30** and **20:16**?
[MacArthur reduces this principle to a mere statement of **equality** = everybody is in the same state of receiving eternal life – but the principle seems to be one of reversal rather than of leveling.]

Certainly the apostles are both being assured that following Christ is worth it and being warned not to concern themselves with accumulating the greatest rewards or the most prominent positions in the kingdom. There is the emphasis on humility throughout this context rather than selfish ambition.

- To what extent is it legitimate to seek heavenly rewards?
- If the parable speaks of the common eternal life God's grace grants to each believer, why is it couched in a works-oriented story? We have to be careful not to seek some type of symbolic significance for each detail of the parable. The goal is to capture the main lesson from Christ's teaching.

Stanley Saunders: The parable explicates the statements of reversal that frame it (**19:30; 20:16**). The "*For*" with which **20:1** begins also links the parable to what has preceded, where Jesus has lifted up eunuchs and children as models of those who belong in the kingdom of heaven (**19:12; 19:14**), and challenged the disciples' notion that the rich and pious are guaranteed salvation before all others (**19:16–26**). The disciples have left everything to follow Jesus (**19:27–29**). Yet Jesus is also aware that his disciples' spiritual pride can yield a form of self-righteousness that imperils their participation in God's empire no less than does the rich man's riches. The parable, then, forms part of Jesus' response to Peter's claims about the disciples' faithfulness to him (**19:27**). . .

God's justice reaches out to include the least, the last, the little ones, the children, the poor, the weak, and the suffering. God's justice consists of forgiving debts, restoring relationships, and making the creation whole. Justice ordered around "merit" or differentiation of status, on the other hand, preserves a world of division and alienation. If God does act as the landowner has, then the parable points to the radical, disruptive, even offensive character of God's free and unmerited grace toward humankind. The problem with such grace is that it "makes them equal to us," whoever "they" might be in our various systems of differentiation. Throughout its history,

the church has often functioned in ways that confirm and preserve differences, whether economic, social, spiritual, or racial. This is precisely what the parable subverts.

William Hendriksen: The “point” or main lesson of the parable is therefore this: *Do not be among the first who become last.* This may be subdivided as follows:

- a. Avoid falling prey to the **work-for-wages spirit** with respect to matters spiritual (besides **20:2, 13** see also the context, **19:16, 22, and 19:27**).
- b. Do not fail to recognize **God’s sovereignty**, his right to distribute favors as he pleases (in addition to **20:14b, 15a** see again the context, **20:23**).
- c. **Be far removed from envy** (see not only **15b** but also the general context, **18:1; 20:20-28**). Was not each disciple’s yearning to be the greatest a next-door neighbor to gruesome soul-destructive envy?

Jonathan T. Pennington -- Tabletalk: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard

Big Idea: In the parable, Jesus reminds them that all that they have is from God, that all their blessings are from God’s generosity, not their own doing.

In the history of the church, there have been many attempted explanations of this parable. Some suggest the five different hirings represent five stages of world history during which God has called people to Himself, or different stages in life that one may become a Christian. The point, then, is that God is gracious to all and welcomes all into His kingdom, no matter when they were called. Some say the parable is a picture of God’s future kingdom where all saved people receive heaven, no matter how much they have worked for God. The broadest and maybe most popular interpretation is that this parable is simply a picture of God’s incredible and marvelous grace and generosity—the gospel in a nutshell.

Each of these interpretations has some truth in it. But there is something more to be seen. The key is to pay attention to the **context** that Matthew gives us for this parable. The story that precedes our parable is about a rich synagogue leader who ends up not following Jesus because his love for his possessions was too great (**19:16–22**). In response to this, the disciples are shocked. Jesus then promises them staggering rewards for giving up everything they had to follow Him (**vv. 23–30**). This promise that the disciples will sit on twelve thrones consumes the disciples’ thoughts so much that shortly thereafter, James and John are angling to be the ones to sit on the thrones closest to Jesus (**20:20–28**).

This context shows us that the parable is hitting right at our hearts, at the twin issues of **self-congratulation** and **envy**. When the young ruler goes away empty-handed but then the lowly disciples are promised to be rulers, it was impossible for the disciples not to be a little self-congratulatory, to take a little pride in their wise accomplishment, their better choice to follow Jesus. In the parable, Jesus reminds them that all that they have is from God, that all their blessings are from God’s generosity, not their own doing. The disciples are no better than the rich man. At the same time, Jesus presses right into our hearts, which are prone to envy. Jesus challenges His disciples not to look to what others have and become bitter and jealous. **Rivalry is soul-destructive because all of life is a gift from God.**

So, this parable gives us a vision for God’s **generous grace** toward us and toward others. Life is found when we fix our eyes not horizontally on what others have but vertically on the generosity of the whole-earth landowner, King Jesus, who calls us friends and who gives wisely and generously.

I. (19:27-30) PROMISE OF REWARD (ABUNDANT BUT ALSO SURPRISING) – REASSURANCE AND WARNING

David Thompson: ANY BELIEVER IN ANY DISPENSATION, WHO SACRIFICES FOR JESUS CHRIST, WILL BE ABUNDANTLY REWARDED ONE DAY BY JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus qualifies the time when the disciples will be rewarded. **19:28c** -- It takes place when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne. In other words, the disciples would experience the fullness of their rewards for following Christ **when Christ comes to reign as King**. This is when and where the outworking of rewards will take place.

A. (:27) Mercenary Question Exposes the Insecurity of the Apostles

“Then Peter answered and said to Him,

‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?’”

Grant Osborne: This verse provides a transition, concluding vv. 23–26 and introducing vv. 28–30. In typical fashion Peter speaks for the group (cf. 14:28; 15:15; 16:16, 22; 17:4; 18:21), and as usual he shows his **misunderstanding**.

Stu Weber: Believers should not feel guilty about anticipating **eternal reward**. If it were a shameful thing, God would not have promised it so prominently throughout Scripture. The truth is that we need motivation, something to press on toward (**Phil. 3:12-14**). The eternal perspective, seeking God's prize, is the only mature perspective (**Phil. 3:14**).

Ray Fowler: Peter asked Jesus, “*What do we get?*” Jesus said, “Don’t worry about what you will get.” Why not? Because God is perfectly just. He is wonderfully merciful. He is incredibly gracious. Perfect justice. Wonderful mercy. Amazing grace. That’s who God is. Once again, think good thoughts of God.

R.V.G. Tasker: The fact that Peter could ask such a question was evidence that he had not fully grasped that God promises rewards to those who obey Him without thought of reward, for in the kingdom of God all reward is the result of God’s grace and not of human merit.

B. (:28-29) Manifold Rewards Climax in the Common Goal of Eternal Life

1. (:28) Significant Positions of Privilege and Power in the Millennial Kingdom

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”

John Walvoord: This is clearly a picture of the **millennial earth**, not heaven. Late in Christ’s ministry, He supports the concept that the kingdom, while postponed as far as human expectation is concerned, is nevertheless certain of fulfillment following His second coming.

2. (:29) Sacrifices in Spiritual Service Will Have Been Worth It

a. Abundant Blessings in This Life

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or

*mother or children or farms for My name's sake,
shall receive many times as much,”*

Matthew Henry: *A hundred times as much in this life*; sometimes in kind, in the things themselves which they have parted with. God will raise up for his suffering servants more friends, who will be so to them for Christ's sake, than they have left that were so for their own sakes. The apostles, wherever they came, met with those who were kind to them, and entertained them, and opened their hearts and doors to them. However, they will receive a hundred times as much, in kindness. Their graces shall increase, their comforts abound, they shall have signs of God's love, and then they may truly say they have received a hundred times more comfort in God and Christ than they could have in wife, or children.

b. Eternal Life in Heaven = Ultimate Inheritance for All Believers
“and shall inherit eternal life.”

Van Parunak: The parallels in Mark and Luke make clear that **the reward here promised is not in the coming kingdom, but now:**

Mar 10:29 *And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, 30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

Luk 18:29 *And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, 30 Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.*

How can this be “*in this present time*”? The answer must lie in the love and care of believers for one another. Recall our Lord's words at the end of **ch. 12**, where he gives an example of giving up “*mother and brethren,*” and **receiving far more in return.**

Grant Osborne: Jesus expands the focus from the Twelve to “*every*” follower. Since Peter said they had “*left everything,*” Jesus picks up on that and names two main types of things that various followers have had to surrender—loved ones (brothers, sisters, father, mother, children) and possessions (“*fields*”), with “*homes*” referring to both. The promise is that in eternity they “*will receive*” (from God) a hundred times as much, referring to the incredible family and home in heaven (cf. John 14:2–3).

David Turner: The prospect of a gloriously enthroned Jesus anticipates **25:30–31**. The terminology focusing on the twelve tribes of Israel is remarkable (cf. **Luke 22:30; Rev. 21:12; J. Baumgarten** 1976), as is the description of the eschaton as a time of regeneration. Eschatological renewal of the transitory present world (**Matt. 5:18; 24:35**) is part of the messianic salvation accomplished by Jesus (**1:21; 20:28; 26:26–29**; cf. **Rom. 8:18–23**). Cosmic eschatological renewal is linked to Jesus's previous stress on the priority of the created order in **Matt. 19:4, 8**. The moral disorder of the present world is contrary not only to God's past creation but also to God's future renewal of that creation. The end will renew the beginning; eschatology restores protology. The judgment of Israel probably implies both sharing in final judgment and ruling in

the world to come. The striking teaching that the disciples will share with Jesus the rule of the coming kingdom may be based on **Dan. 7:9, 13–14, 18, 22, 27** (cf. **Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21; 20:6; Wis. 3:8**). . . The **eschatological reward** of Jesus’s followers will far outweigh their present sacrifice and should motivate them to suffer with Jesus in the present (**16:24–28; Rom. 8:18–25**).

C. (:30) **Fundamental Principle: Some Surprising Reversal of Expectations**

“But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.”

Grant Osborne: This is often called “the **reversal of roles**” and is a frequent theme in Luke. It will be repeated at the end of the next pericope in reverse order (**20:16**), with the inclusion forming a **chiasm**. The parable of the workers in the vineyard (**20:1–15**) is intended as an illustration of this very principle, so it is a dominant theme here. Those like the wealthy young man who seek primacy in this life will suffer the greatest loss eternally, and those like the disciples (claimed in **19:27**) who surrender everything will have the **greatest reward**. As in **18:1–5; 19:13–15**, followers must be willing to take the lowly place and humble attitude of a child to be “*greatest*” (**18:1, 4**) in the kingdom.

Leon Morris: All this points to a **reversal of the generally accepted order of things** (cf. **20:16**). Those who are highly esteemed and held to be first in this world’s order of things will end up last, in the worst possible position. The point is that they have put their whole effort into earthly success without reference to the more worthwhile **life of service** to which Christ is calling them. Inevitably when the time comes that earthly success is seen for the tawdry and temporal thing it is, they will rank with the last. That is what they have qualified for, and that is where they will be. The corollary of that is that those who are last here and now will often be found to be among the first in the life to come. They have not accepted the false values of the world but have set their sights on the service of God and of their fellows no matter what the cost to themselves, and they reap the consequences accordingly. The words are a strong warning against being deluded by earthly ideas and standards and shutting one’s ears to the call of God.

Stu Weber: Many people who seem to be deserving of reward will receive less than is expected (though no less than they deserve). And many whom we might judge as undeserving will prove, in God’s economy, to be first, receiving great reward.

David Turner: The disciples can be **encouraged** that their sacrifice will be rewarded, but they also are **warned** against presuming on the grace of God. The promise is that although they are presently “last,” they will be “first” in the eschaton. The warning is that although their prospect is to be “first,” they could yet be “last” if they forget the way of the cross and God’s sovereignty in dispensing reward. The unfortunate chapter division at **20:1** obscures the fact that the parable of the landowner in **20:1–16** continues the answer to Peter’s question, as did the parable of the unforgiving servant in **18:21–35**.

The description of the future kingdom in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel appears to justify belief in the **eschatological conversion of the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus as the Messiah**. This would be in keeping with Matthew’s overall emphasis on the fulfillment of Scripture preeminently through the words and deeds of Jesus the Messiah. The followers of Jesus, the ultimate teacher of the Torah, constitute Israel within Israel, the eschatological remnant (cf. **Rom. 9:6**). In the end they, not the faithless shepherds who presently lead God’s flock (**Matt. 9:36; 10:6; 15:24**), who will judge or govern the nation as a whole (**21:43; Gundry 1994: 393–**

94; Overman 1996: 285). A different approach views this language as indicating that the gentile church, which is understood to supersede Israel, will rule over the nations as a whole (Blomberg 1992a: 301; France 1982: 65–67; Hendriksen 1973:730). This understanding anachronistically renders Matthew’s Jewish language as **symbolic** and dissolves Jesus’s distinction between the disciples’ rule over Israel (19:28) and the reward of all who sacrifice to follow Jesus (19:29). If the church supersedes Israel, this distinction would be meaningless.

John Walvoord: By this, Jesus meant that God’s estimation of worthiness for reward may be entirely different than man’s estimation. Those prominent in this life may not necessarily be first in reward in the life to come. The widow who gave her two mites but had nothing else to give may be ahead of those who have given much. Those who labor merely for reward may miss it. His discussion of this point is illustrated in the next chapter.

R.V.G. Tasker: The last verse of the section indicates that late-comers into the kingdom of God will be treated on an equality with those who have come in first, a truth which Jesus proceeds to illustrate in the parable which follows.

[Therefore, Jews have no advantage over the Gentiles who are grafted in to the people of God later in time; people who are saved in infancy have no advantage over people saved in old age; etc.]

I. (20:1-16) PARABLE OF THE WORKERS – GOD REWARDS IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS JUSTICE, DISCRETION AND GRACE

A. (:1-7) Hiring of the Laborers

1. (:1-2) Initial Hiring in the Early Morning for Set Wage

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

Grant Osborne: It was normal in the first century to work twelve-hour days during harvest (though it must be admitted that the same was true of sowing the seed—the text does not say), and so ἅμα πρωῒ refers to “*sunrise*,” the beginning of the workday. So this reflects harvest season, when the owner would need to hire extra workers to take the grapes off the vine and to do various other tasks (e.g., guard the crops, drive the donkeys). **Day laborers** (the lowest social group outside of slaves) would gather in the marketplace of towns and wait to be hired. It was a precarious existence, but they had little choice. Many were “freedmen,” former slaves. . . . So in the story there are five groups, hired at 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon, 3 p.m., and 5 p.m.

Stu Weber: We should be careful in our attempts to discern who these full-day workers (or any of the other four groups) represent. We may be tempted to think this first group represents those who have been Christians for most of their lives, whereas the later groups are those who come to Christ later in life. Or we might think the full-day workers are those who are especially faithful in their lifetime as a Christian, while the later groups are not so faithful. Such interpretations distract us from Jesus' main point—that **God's way of compensating for righteous working may differ from what we expect**. God's sense of “fairness” is not the typical self-serving human perspective. He does not compare us to one another but to our fulfillment of our own stewardship (see **1 Cor. 3:3-5**). . .

Jesus revealed here the way we as humans think about what is fair and just. When we see rewards handed out in heaven, we are sure to be in for some **surprises**. Some of the people and ministries that we have deemed insignificant will be celebrated, while many of the more prominent people and their ministries will receive little recognition. It is not Jesus' purpose here to explain the criteria he uses for such decisions, but only to warn us against false assumptions and expectations.

Ligonier.org: Grapes were one of the most valuable commodities in ancient Israel because they could be transformed into fine wines. So important were the vineyards that the prophets often describe the salvation of God's people as including the restoration of the vineyards of the Promised Land (for example, **Amos 9:14**). Vinedressers and vineyard owners know, however, that the profitability of their vineyard depends on harvesting the grapes at just the right time. Wait too long, and the wine produced from the grapes will not be as good and will not command as high a price as it could. Consequently, when the time of harvest comes, vineyard owners often employ many **day laborers** in addition to their regular staff so that all of the grapes can be picked before it is too late. That is the setting of today's passage, wherein the master of the house must find "*laborers for his vineyard*" (**Matt. 20:1**).

2. (:3-4) Additional Hiring at the Third Hour for Discretionary Wage

“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, 'You too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went.”

3. (:5) Additional Hiring at the Sixth and Ninth Hours

“Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.”

4. (:6-7) Final Hiring at the Eleventh Hour

“And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into the vineyard.’”

B. (:8-12) Payment of the Laborers

1. (:8-9) Last Group Paid First

“And when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.”

Keith Throop: Notice that the order in which the workers are paid is reversed from the order in which they were hired. They are paid beginning with the last to the first (**vs. 8**). This reflects Jesus' earlier statement that “*many who are first will be last, and the last first*” (**19:30**). Thus Jesus is clearly identifying the theme He wants to emphasize.

<https://reformedbaptistblog.com/2014/02/15/parable-of-the-workers-in-the-vineyard-matthew-201-16-teaching-outline/>

2. (:10-12) First Group Expresses Displeasure

a. (:10) Inflated Expectation

“And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius.”

Grant Osborne: When “*even they*” receive the denarius promised in v. 2, it is not that this would be unfair, since that was the contract. Rather, it was the master’s generosity to the final group that has everyone confused. As **Nolland** says, “Despite a dramatic contrast in work done, there is no difference in wage received. Not only in the ancient world would such behavior cause resentment but today as well.”

b. (:11-12) Grumbling Response

“And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’”

C. (:13-15) Principles of God’s Justice, Discretion and Grace

1. (:13) Strict Justice of God -- Referencing the Legal Contract

“But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?’”

Stu Weber: This parable highlights both the **justice** and the **grace** of God. Neither is to be taken for granted. When God chooses to reward or punish according to what is justly due a person, no one has a right to complain. On the one hand, his rewards are “recompense” or “pay back” (**Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:24-25**). On the other hand, the God of Scripture is a God who delights to lavish blessing on his children (e.g., **Eph. 1:3-14**). But we must be careful not to presume upon his generosity. His gifts are not something we deserve; they are given freely at his discretion. If anyone receives the “raw end of the deal” (by our reasoning), it would be God, who gives much more than he “owes.”

2. (:14) Sovereign Discretion of God

“Take what is yours and go your way, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.”

Ray Fowler: In the parable the earlier workers **boasted in their works**. They said, “*We bore the burden of the work and the heat of the day!*” But that’s the problem. **Those who trust in their works receive God’s justice, but they forfeit God’s mercy and grace**. If you want justice, you will get justice. I don’t recommend it, because we are all on the wrong side of God’s law. If you want justice, you will get justice, but if you want mercy and grace, then you need to put your faith in Jesus.

We can also apply this to heaven and eternal rewards. On the one hand we all receive differing rewards depending on what we have done for Christ. But on the other hand, we all get the same reward, in that we all inherit eternal life with God forever. Because **once you have eternal life, what do all the other rewards really matter?**

3. (:15) Surprising Grace and Generosity of God

“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?”

Grant Osborne: The “*good*” (ἀγαθός) generosity of the landowner is the antithesis of the jealous, angry heart of the complainers (“*evil*” [πονηρός]).

Daniel Doriani: So then, as Jesus says, he is **fair to everyone**, whether one works all day or one hour. To be precise, there are three lessons, one for each character in the story:

- The early workers must know that God treats no one unfairly. If they stumble, they stumble over God’s grace and generosity, not his injustice.
- God is generous to those who deserve nothing. It is his sovereign pleasure to give good gifts to his children.
- All believers receive the same gift, eternal life with the Lord.

D. (:16) Fundamental Principle: Some Surprising Reversal of Expectations

“Thus the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Richard Gardner: The purpose of these sayings is not to establish a new order of precedence, but rather to tell us to **stop calculating**. As noted earlier, the riches of the kingdom are God’s to distribute—and God is full of surprises!

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In the context of **Matthew 19-20**, who would have regarded themselves in the category of the “*first*” and would have expected greater amounts of God’s blessing?
- 2) How does this section of Scripture serve as both an **encouragement** and a **warning** to the twelve apostles?
- 3) Are there Scriptures that teach that there will be **varying degrees of rewards** based on faithful service?
- 4) What is the significance of all the workers in the parable being paid the **same amount** at the end of the harvest day?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Rewards

While we do not serve the Lord for the reward we will get, Jesus wants us to know that God will indeed reward us for our life of piety. We do not want to fall into Peter’s error of asking, “What’s in it for us?” That is a veneer of piety turned into self-interest. Yet at the same time Jesus wants us to know that God will vindicate us for our sacrifices and suffering. In fact, “*reward*” occurs seven times in **6:1–18** (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18) and is a central theme of the entire Sermon on the Mount (e.g., the eschatological promise in each of the beatitudes of **5:1–12**). The key is our **motivation** and **priorities**—earthly or heavenly (cf. **6:19–21**). Do we live for the glory of God or for self? Do we strive for the things of this world or the things of God? That will determine our true destiny.

David Turner: All in all, taking **19:30** as a **promise to disciples** and **20:16** as a **warning** anticipating **20:20–28** seems best. Yet there are many specific contextualized approaches to this fecund imagery. The reversal spoken of here has been understood as a warning to many different “in” groups that they should not despise “out” groups. **Bruner** (1990: 723) gives several potential examples of such interpretations. Three approaches to the reversal described in the crucial bracketing saying (**19:30; 20:16**) are particularly noteworthy:

1. Religious reversal: The tax collectors and sinners who enter the kingdom last are preferred by God to the Jewish religious leaders (Beare 1981: 404; Hagner 1995a: 573; Hare 1993: 230–31; Hill 1972: 285). No doubt this is a key Matthean theme (9:11–13; 11:19; 21:31).

2. Redemptive-historical reversal: The workers hired at different times represent successive epochs in history. Gentiles instead of Jews eventually come into prominence (Barclay 1975: 2.224; Gundry 1994:399). In many places, Matthew indicates that, surprisingly, many Jews reject the kingdom, and many Gentiles receive it (e.g., 8:10–12; 15:22–28). This may well be the most prominent view throughout the history of the church (Irenaeus, Haer. 4.36.7; Augustine, Homilies on the Gospels 37; Hauerwas 2006: 176–77).

3. Ecclesiastical reversal: Those among the disciples who wish to be prominent will be humbled, but those who are humble will be considered truly great. At least two important texts underline this point (18:1–4; 20:25–28; Barclay 1975: 2.224).

The problem with all the above approaches is that they are **not supported by the immediate context**, which places the parable’s promise and warning in tension: although Peter and the disciples will be rewarded, they must not presume upon God’s grace and seek rewards (**Schweizer** 1975: 395). They are in danger of grumbling against God (cf. **Exod. 16:7–12; Num. 14:27; Deut. 1:27**) when others who come into the kingdom (**Matt. 19:29**) are rewarded. They must **accept whatever reward God graciously gives them** without comparing themselves with others (cf. **m. ’Abot** 1.3, 13; 4.5; **Hultgren** 2000: 42–43). This parable anticipates the problem of Zebedee’s sons—**ambitiously seeking the greatest status** in the future kingdom (**20:20–28**).

John MacArthur: Equality in the Kingdom (19:30 – 20:16)

Now when it comes then to the blessings of salvation, God give to all equally, equally. All of us who come to the Lord Jesus Christ receive the same salvation. No matter what the circumstances of our coming, no matter how diligent or faithful our service, it is God’s pleasure to give us the same glorious salvation.

1) The Proverb (19:30; 20:16)

Everybody’s the same.

2) The Parable

You see, they weren’t in a negotiating position; they had no choice. If they didn’t work, they didn’t eat, they’d have to take whatever they could get. Consequently, they were often taken advantage of. But apparently they trusted this man. And so without negotiating any price, they went their way. . .

The issue here is not whether the householder is fair, the issue is the jealousy of the people who

worked the longest, right? Don't impugn God, impugn them. They got what was right and fair. But they were filled with envy, and they griped. And they give this little speech, "You made them equal unto us. And we borne the burden and heat of the day." And they get real, you know, kind of expressive here. The word they used for "heat" is the word for "burner." It's the word that's often used of the scorching east wind that parches the lips and cracks the skin when that hot east wind blows. I mean they were really dramatizing their plight. . .

Jealousy is a part of our fallenness, isn't it? You see, it wasn't that they didn't get a fair wage. They got a very fair wage, a generous wage. It's that they couldn't stand somebody else getting the same thing without working as hard as they did. Instead of saying to themselves, "Isn't it wonderful that he's so generous to those who have the same need we have, but weren't hired early. Isn't it wonderful that even though they had to wait all day to be hired, their need wasn't any less; and he gave them according to their need, not according to their effort, not according to their work."

Instead of saying that – that's what the magnanimous heart says: "I rejoice that you received as much as I did, because that's what you needed, even though you didn't work as hard as I worked." That's the magnanimous heart. Well, that's the parable. And he says, "I have the right to give whatever I want. Are you going to be jealous if I give it?"

3) The Point of the Parable

The man is God, the householder. The vineyard is the kingdom, the sphere of God's rule. It is the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of salvation. The laborers are those who come into salvation; they come into the kingdom; they come into the service of the king, the service of God. The day, the day of work is lifetime. The evening is eternity. The denarius is eternal life. And maybe you could even say the steward Jesus Christ, to whom has been committed all judgment.

So what's it saying? It's saying this: No matter how long you worked in the kingdom, no matter how hard or how easy your circumstances were, no matter how difficult the task, when you get to the end, you're all going to receive the same eternal life. Isn't that a great truth? That's really what He's teaching. . .

So you see, it was this selfish, indulgent, envious, confused perception of the disciples that I think our Lord was dealing with. And all He's saying in this wonderful parable is, "Look, salvation and eternal life isn't something that you earn, it's a gift that I give according to My sovereign will." And it is not a question of when you came in, and it is not a question of how long you worked, or how hot the day was, or how hard you worked. There's nothing in that parable about how hard anybody worked, nothing; because eternal is not something you – what? – you earn. "And I'm going to give everyone the same reward."

You say, "Well, now wait a minute, John. Doesn't the Epistles tell us something about **rewards** for service and crowns for service?" Yeah, that's a different issue. You get to that a little later in the Scripture. That's not the issue here. There will be differing rewards the Lord is pleased to give His children. That's not the issue here. **The issue here is the equality of eternal life.**

4) The Principles

1. God initiates salvation sovereignly.
2. God establishes the terms.

3. God continues to call men into His kingdom.
4. God is redeeming those who are willing.
5. God is compassionate to those who have no resources.
6. All who come into the vineyard worked.
7. God has the sovereign authority ability to keep His promise.
8. While He always gives what He promised, He also always gives more than we deserve.
9. Humility is the only right attitude.
10. All that we receive from God is a matter of His grace.

Henry Mahan: What About Rewards in Heaven?

When you want to study a parable in the Scripture you find out

- what was said,
- the occasion,
- the people who said it,
- what was said before our Lord spake the parable. . .

Now this parable; (now you listen) this parable is a **rebuke** to those who fall into a legal spirit of works and merit and reward. This parable is a rebuke to people who begin to calculate what their reward ought to be in heaven in exchange for their works here on this earth.

Degrees of punishment in hell are based upon opportunity, are based upon works, are based upon light, and are based upon sin. But my friend; there can be **no degrees of glory** for glory does not depend upon opportunity or works or sin. It depends upon the **grace of God**, totally on the grace of God. . .

Now, you can't have degrees of glory and degrees of reward if it's based not on what I did, but what somebody else did. His grace will be our reward. The crowns will be at His feet. The crowns will be on His head. Do you see what I'm saying? There may be degrees of punishment in hell based upon what I did but there can be no degrees of reward in heaven because heaven is not based on what I did. It's because of what He did. "*Not by works of righteousness which we've done but according to His mercy hath He saved us,*" His mercy. . .

It's disturbing to me that any believer would want a higher seat than somebody else. I really can't connect that with humility or grace or love. It's disturbing to me that any believer, that any child of God who says "*I'm the chief of sinners. I'm less than the least of all the saints,*" would want a brighter crown than somebody else or a greater reward or a bigger house; this is a denial of everything we preach.

And when we render the best we can; you just say this; "*I'm still an unprofitable servant, an unprofitable servant. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. And he that would be greatest among you; let him be your servant!*"

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/830717837.pdf>

GotQuestions.org: The first group of workers in the vineyard resented receiving the same wage as the last group. Their attitude was similar to that of the Pharisees, who were incensed at Jesus' teaching that others could inherit a heavenly kingdom they thought was reserved for them alone. They despised Jesus for offering the kingdom to poor, oppressed, weak sinners whom He made equal to them. In **verse 15**, the landowner asks, "*Is your eye evil because I am good?*" The "*evil eye*" was a Hebrew expression referring to **jealousy** and **envy**. God's goodness and mercy produced in the self-righteous Pharisees the evil eye of envy. The rest of the workers received their wages without complaint or envy of others. In the same way, as Christians, we should rejoice when others come to the Savior, as we should rejoice in the service others render to Him. He is faithful to reward us for our service as He has promised, and how He rewards others should be of no consequence to us, nor should it affect our devotion to Him.

The message in **verse 16**, "*the last will be first, and the first last,*" is that no matter how long or how hard a believer works during his lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to all—an eternity of bliss in heaven in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The thief on the cross (**Luke 23:39-43**), whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of eternal life as the apostle Paul. Of course, Scripture also teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but **the ultimate reward of eternal life will be achieved by all equally.**

TEXT: Matthew 20:17-19

TITLE: JESUS'S THIRD PROPHECY OF HIS PASSION AND RESURRECTION

BIG IDEA:

JESUS CONTINUES TO PUT THE FOCUS ON HIS UPCOMING BETRAYAL, CRUIFIXION AND RESURRECTION (WHILE HIS FOLLOWERS ARGUE OVER WHO IS THE GREATEST)

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus is aware of his destiny and deliberately chooses the cross, while the disciples, aware of nothing, are consumed with their own desire for greatness.

David Turner: The third passion prediction is the most lengthy. New details include the involvement of the Gentiles in mocking, flogging, and crucifying him. Jesus's focus on his coming suffering in this unit is in stark contrast to his two disciples' focus on their future reigning in the next unit.

Stu Weber: It is no accident that Jesus' third formal prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection followed immediately after the extended explanation of the principle that "*the last will be first, and the first will be last*" (see **19:30-20:16**; cf. **16:21**; **17:22-23**). He told of the humiliation of his betrayal, the mockings and beatings he would endure, and his death. He who was supremely first over all creation would submit to being treated as the lowest of criminals. (This is the first specific mention of crucifixion, which was a punishment of ultimate humiliation, reserved only for the most despised criminals.) But out of the "*lastness*" of apparent defeat, the king would rise triumphant over death. **Philippians 2:5-11** describes this **dual paradox** in greater detail: The One obedient to "*death on a cross*" would be the One who has a "*name that is above every name.*"

Stanley Saunders: Have the disciples understood the kind of justice set forth in the preceding parable and what it requires of them? Are they ready for what will happen in Jerusalem? The stories in this section suggest that **envy, competition, self-interest, and blindness** are still problems that Jesus must address as he prepares his disciples for their entry into the city. For the final time before he enters Jerusalem, Jesus warns the disciples of his impending passion. The new information supplied in **20:19** makes this the most detailed prediction yet (cf. **16:21**; **17:12**; **17:22-23**): he will be mocked and beaten, and his death will be by crucifixion. For the first time "*the Gentiles*" also enter the picture as participants in Jesus' death. When Jesus had first predicted his death (**16:21**), Peter had openly rebuked him. The second time (**17:22-23**) the disciples were "*greatly distressed.*" This time Matthew records no reaction of the disciples, but instead tells about the request of the mother of the "*sons of Zebedee*" and the conflict it generates. Mediterranean mothers are expected to advocate for their sons' advancement (see, e.g., Bathsheba's manipulations on behalf of her son, Solomon: **1 Kgs. 1:11-31**). Like King David's sons, the disciples are now positioning themselves for the succession. But they still misunderstand the nature of Jesus' kingship. The succession to power in this empire will be through suffering.

Warren Wiersbe: In contrast to this announcement of suffering and death, we have the request of James and John and their mother, Salome. Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown. They wanted reserved seats on special thrones! We get the impression that the mother, Salome, was the real inspiration behind this request, and that she was interested in promoting her sons.

Donald Hagner: This prediction makes a particularly **sharp contrast** with both the preceding sections, where the disciples seem preoccupied with rewards (19:27–30), and the following pericope describing the overt ambition of the sons of Zebedee (vv 20–23). Jesus again affirms the cross as his goal and thus serves as the model according to which the disciples must learn to pattern their own lives. But while he is “*last*,” his disciples compete for being “*first*.” This prediction serves the function of building up the tension prior to the momentous events that will happen in Jerusalem, where the earthly work of Jesus will find its climax. . .

For the third time Jesus predicts his imminent suffering and death in Jerusalem. This time the prediction includes **very specific details** meant to convey the **sovereign direction of God** in these events. Jesus’ fate in Jerusalem will be no tragic accident of history but the outworking of God’s saving purposes for humanity. This is the **preeminent work of Jesus**—not his powerful deeds and words, nor his ministry among the Jews of Galilee and Judea, but his death on the cross. Although the meaning of that death has not yet been addressed in the Gospel (it has been hinted at more than once, however: e.g., 1:22; 3:17), the next pericope will culminate in a statement that can leave no doubt concerning it (v. 28). Jesus goes the way of the cross **for the sake of others**.

(:17) PROLOGUE – OCCASION FOR THE THIRD PASSION PROPHECY

*“And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem,
He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them,”*

Grant Osborne: The centrality of the journey to Jesus’ destiny (note this only relates to “*Jesus*,” not the Twelve) continues (as in Mark and Luke). It is stated twice that Jesus is “*ascending*” (see v. 18), and they are “*on the road [way]*” (cf. Mark 9:33–34; 10:32, 52; Luke 9:51–53, 57) to his appointed hour. The “*way*” (ὁδός) defines the journey to true discipleship as well, and here it is implied (as in 16:24) that Jesus is on the road to the cross; the passage is framed with the model of Jesus (20:17–19, 28).

This is the first time the disciples are called “*the Twelve*” (cf. 26:14, 20, 47), and apparently they are traveling with a larger group, because Jesus “*takes [them] aside privately*” to give them his third passion prediction (a brief fourth prediction occurs in 26:2).

Stu Weber: At this point in the journey, Jesus and his companions were about to go up to Jerusalem. The tension between Jesus and the religious establishment, headquartered at Jerusalem, had been building throughout Matthew's Gospel. Before long the conflict would come to its tragic but triumphant end.

The word *up* alludes to the fact that Jerusalem was situated on a ridge at 2,550 feet above sea level. From any direction, Jerusalem was “*up*.” But especially from the crossing of the Jordan River, near its entrance into the Dead Sea, at about 1,200 feet below sea level, **the climb was substantial**. This would have made for at least a 3,700-foot elevation gain. Perhaps Jesus and his

disciples had just crossed the Jordan, or perhaps they were at Jericho, on the way to Jerusalem (see **20:29**).

I. (:18) BETRAYAL – DELIVERY TO CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES FOR CONDEMNATION

A. Destination

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem;”

B. Betrayal

“and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes,”

John MacArthur: And He was turned over the *chief priests* – the chief priests among the priests, and there were thousands of them. The chief priests were the upper echelon ones. There were the Levites; they were at the bottom of the priestly totem pole. And then there were the normal course of priests. And there was the guy who was the head of the daily course, the guy who’s ahead of the weekly course. And then there was the sort of the captain of the temple, and then there was the high priest. And the guys at the top of the ladder were known as the chief priests. And so these chief priests were the hereditary aristocracy. They were in the priestly line; they got their rank by heredity.

They were also accompanied by the *scribes*, who got their rank not by heredity, but by knowledge. They attained to knowledge by studying the law. They were the lawyers, and nobody could interpret anything without them. Very much like today, if you want to interpret any kind of law, you get into any kind of legal situation, you have to have a lawyer. Well it was that way then. In trying to interpret the Mosaic economy, they had to have “lawyers,” quote/unquote, who really were the scribes who could come along side and explain the meaning of the law, and interpret the law, and so forth.

C. Condemnation

“and they will condemn Him to death,”

II. (:19A) CRUCIFIXION – DELIVERY TO THE GENTILES FOR SCOURGING AND CRUCIFIXION

“and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him,”

Stu Weber: For the first time, Jesus gave the **details of his passion**. Jesus' remarks were painful for the disciples, but they pointed out Jesus' sovereignty in all these things. He was going into a difficult time, but he went as a king and never as a victim. He would be mocked and flogged (using a whip of leather thongs, with jagged bits of metal or bone that would rip the flesh of the victim's back) and crucified. The disciples would have cringed at all three of these words, but especially at crucifixion. This was a slow, torturous death which usually lasted for days—the most humiliating punishment used by the Roman Empire. It was reserved only for the lowest criminals. And crucifixion was also a sign of God's curse (**Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13**).

R. T. France: There is, however, no suggestion that it is really all the fault of the Romans, since Jesus is to be handed over by the Jewish authorities to the Romans in order to be mocked, flogged and crucified, in pursuance of the verdict that the Jewish leaders have already reached.

This corresponds to the historical reality (expressed in **John 18:31**) of the limited judicial competence of the Sanhedrin under Roman occupation. Previous predictions have spoken in more general terms of Jesus' "*being killed*," but now that the Romans have been explicitly brought into the scene the means of execution can be specified as crucifixion (for which see on **10:38**). The careful reader will not be surprised, since Jesus has already called his disciples to "*carry their cross*" after him in **10:38; 16:24**. After this comprehensive portrayal of rejection (both by his own people and by their imperial rulers) and of brutal suffering and humiliating death the almost matter-of-fact concluding statement (already familiar from **16:21** and **17:23**) that he will be raised on the third day reads even more incongruously.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew says no more about this. However, **Luke 18:34** says the disciples did not understand what Jesus meant because the meaning was hidden from them. This means that for some reason the Father kept the disciples from understanding this plain statement about Jesus' death (**Marshall** 691).

Charles Swindoll: The disciples clearly weren't on the same page as Jesus! They were neither ready nor willing to hear anything about His upcoming betrayal, arrest, suffering, and crucifixion, nor, for that matter, were they able to grasp the significance of His resurrection. What in the world were they thinking?

The answer to that question becomes clear in the next scene. They were thinking about themselves!

III. (:19b) RESURRECTION ON THE THIRD DAY

"and on the third day He will be raised up."

David Turner: All three of the passion predictions conclude with the resurrection of Jesus, which becomes the central focus of the preaching of the early church (**26:32; 27:63; 28:6; Acts 2:24–36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33–37; 1 Cor. 15:4–28**).

William Barclay: Even at such a time, that was not the end of his words, for he finished with the confident assertion of the resurrection. Beyond the curtain of suffering lay the revelation of glory; beyond the cross was the crown; beyond the defeat was triumph; and beyond death was life.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Jesus keep repeating this prophecy?
- 2) What new details are revealed in this pronouncement?
- 3) Does our gospel preaching faithfully reflect the appropriate focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus?
- 4) How does divine predetermination mesh with the roles spelled out here for the *chief priests and scribes* and for the *Gentiles*?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Turner: Jesus's Three Passion Predictions

Matt. 16:21	Matt. 17:22–23	Matt. 20:17–19
21 Ἀπο τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς δεικνύειν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ	22 Συστρεφομένων δε αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς·	17 Καὶ ἀναβαίνων ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παρέλαβεν τοὺς δώδεκα [μαθητὰς] κατ' ἰδίαν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·
ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἀπελθεῖν	μέλλει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου	18 ἰδοὺ ἀναβαίνομεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα , καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
καὶ πολλὰ παθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ ἀρχιερέων καὶ γραμματέων	παραδίδοσθαι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων,	παραδοθήσεται τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσιν καὶ γραμματεῦσιν,
		καὶ κατακρинуσιν αὐτὸν θανάτῳ 19 καὶ παραδώσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ ἐμπαῖξαι
καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι	23 καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν,	καὶ μαστιγῶσαι καὶ σταυρῶσαι,
καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθῆναι.	καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθήσεται.	καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθήσεται.
	καὶ ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα.	
21 <i>Apō tote ērxato ho Iēsous deiknyein tois mathētais autou</i>	22 <i>Sustrephomenōn de autōn en tē Galilaia eipen autois ho Iēsous:</i>	17 <i>Kai anabainōn ho Iēsous eis Hierosolyma parelaben tous dōdeka [mathētas] kat' idian kai en tē hodō eipen autois:</i>
<i>hoti dei auton eis Hierosolyma apelthein</i>	<i>mellei ho huios tou anthrōpou</i>	18 <i>idou anabainomen eis Hierosolyma, kai ho huios tou anthrōpou</i>

<i>kai polla pathein apo tōn presbyterōn kai archiereōn kai grammateōn</i>	<i>paradidosthai eis cheiras anthrōpōn,</i>	<i>paradothēsetai tois archiereusin kai grammateusin,</i>
		<i>kai katakrinousin auton thanatō ¹⁹kai paradōsousin auton tois ethnesin eis to empaixai</i>
<i>kai apoktanthēnai</i>	²³ <i>kai apoktenousin auton,</i>	<i>kai mastigōsai kai staurōsai,</i>
<i>kai tē tritē hēmera egerthēnai.</i>	<i>kai tē tritē hēmera egerthēsetai.</i>	<i>kai tē tritē hēmera egerthēsetai.</i>
	<i>kai elypēthēsan sphodra.</i>	
²¹ From that time Jesus began to make known to his disciples	²² And as they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them,	¹⁷ Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve [disciples] aside by themselves, and on the way he said to them,
that he must go to Jerusalem,	“The Son of Man is about	¹⁸ “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man
and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes,	to be handed over into the hands of men;	will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes,
		and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked
and be killed,	²³ and they will kill him,	and flogged and crucified,
and on the third day be raised.	and on the third day he will be raised.”	and on the third day he will be raised.”
	And they were deeply grieved.	

Daniel Doriani: Because he knew his fate, Jesus predicted it, to prepare his disciples for it. But they loved and admired him too much to take it in. Now as they ascend toward Jerusalem for the last time, he tells them, one more time, what lies before him. Earlier, he said he must “*suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life*” (**Matt. 16:21**). He said that they would treat him as they had treated John the Baptist; they would do “*to him everything they wished*” (**17:12**; cf. **17:22–23**; **10:38**).

Now Jesus tells his disciples, in more detail than ever, what will befall him when he arrives in the great city: “*We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!*” (**Matt. 20:18–19**). Jesus will be betrayed, condemned, mocked, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised to life.

In the next few days, Jesus will challenge the religious leaders for corrupting the temple. In anger, they will try to trick him so as to turn the crowds against him, or to trap him into saying something they can tell the Romans. When that fails, they will resolve to arrest him in secret so as to kill him (**Matt. 21–22**; **John 11:45–57**). Jesus will reveal their hypocrisies. He will predict the downfall of their city and its false religion (**Matt. 23–24**). Rather than repent, they will hate Jesus all the more and take their plots to their end, the death of Jesus.

The crucifixion will kill Jesus’ body, yet Jesus will not simply die. He will do what he planned so long ago—he will bear the punishment that his people deserve. When it is finished, his spirit will leave his body (**27:45–50**) and go to the Father (**Luke 23:46**). Certain disciples will take his body and bury it, and Romans will guard the sealed tomb. Yet his body will rise and break through the tomb, for death cannot hold him (**Acts 2:24**).

Jesus knew all this. As a man, he confessed that some aspects of the future were hidden from him. In his humanity, he did not know the precise hour of his return (**Matt. 24:36**). This ignorance is consistent with his full and true incarnation. Nonetheless, Jesus knew he would die, and knew it in two ways. He knew the hearts and minds of men (**John 2:24–25**). He saw that they envied his popularity, that their increasingly implacable opposition made them suspect his every move. He knew that the priests and Pharisees thought he was a sinner, because he violated their traditional interpretations of the law. He knew that they feared his power and that they thought he might use it to lead the nation to follow him—so they thought—into sin. He knew they wanted to put him to death.

More than that, Jesus knew he would die because it was God’s set plan. It was the goal of his incarnation. Near the midpoint of his ministry, Jesus “*set his face to go to Jerusalem*” (**Luke 9:51** ESV). Matthew says that “*as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside*” to tell them what awaited him there: betrayal, condemnation, abuse, and death (**Matt. 20:17**).

Yet, the Bible says, God used those acts of cruelty and injustice to accomplish our salvation. Jesus, the one innocent man, suffered death, but not for his sins. The wages of sin is death, but since Jesus committed no sin, God would be unjust to let Jesus die undeservedly. But God is just, for Jesus died not for himself but for our sins. As a willing substitute, he bore the punishment our sins deserve. So then, Jesus both suffered the sins of wicked men and fulfilled his divine calling

as the Savior of the world. On that first Easter Sunday, the Father raised him from the dead. This, the apostle Paul says, is “*the gospel of God,*” that “*through the Spirit of holiness [he] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord*” (**Rom. 1:4**).

Walter Wilson: With regard to the prediction’s internal composition, it is significant that the events of Jesus’s passion are framed by elements formulated as **divine passives**, namely, “*will be handed over*” (παραδοθήσεται) and “*will be raised*” (ἐγερθήσεται). His fate, then, accords with God’s will. The same can be said of the suffering servant, to whom our passage probably alludes. Thus **Isa 53:6** and **53:12** speak of him being “*handed over*” (παρεδόθη) to death, **Isa 50:6** speaks of him receiving floggings (μάστιγες), and **Isa 52:13–15** and **53:10–12** speak of his ultimate vindication. Such texts not only create a background for the prediction in **20:17–18** but also prepare the way for the servant imagery to which Jesus has recourse later in the pericope (**20:26–28**).

John MacArthur: The Sufferings of Christ

Now it is obvious to anyone who knows anything about the Christian faith that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the center of biblical revelation, that it is the most important Christian truth, and so we are dealing with very crucial material here. The theme of this particular announcement, however, takes us beyond the earlier two, which simply talked about Him dying and rising; and this one seems to stress the nature of His suffering and the details of it. He doesn’t just say He will die and rise. He doesn’t just say He will be crucified and rise. But rather He explains detail by detail that He will be betrayed, He will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn Him to death, then hand Him over to the pagans where He will be mocked, scourged, and finally crucified. And following that, He will rise from the dead. Tremendous amount of detail is given. . .

Now I believe He wanted the disciples to understand this. They were so honed in on the glory of the kingdom, they were so in tune with the glories of the Messiah; those prophecies they seemed well to understand. It was the suffering Messiah they didn’t understand. And we don’t want to be too hard on them, because Jews today with all that they know still don’t understand that. You see, the disciples were looking for a lion, they didn’t know they needed a lamb. But Jesus knew that. And so our Lord calls them aside for the third time and tells them this. . .

So Jesus going to suffer is no accident. It is not a bad turn in a nice revolution. It is no shock. This was foretold by myriads of prophets. And people who accuse Jesus of being some misguided patriot or some well-meaning peacemaker whose revolution went array, not only do they not understand Jesus, but they don’t understand the Old Testament either, and all they do is demonstrate their ignorance. This is the culmination of the redemptive plan of God. And you can go back into the Old Testament, and you will find passage, upon passage, upon passage predicting all of the factors of Jesus Christ’s life. . .

Different dimensions of the sufferings of Christ:

- Suffering of the body
- Suffering of rejection
- Suffering of sorrow and grief
- Suffering of bearing the pain of others
- Suffering of loneliness
- Suffering of false judgment and prison

- Suffering of being stricken by God to bear sin
- Suffering of the pain of disloyalty
- Suffering of humiliation
- Suffering of unjust guilt

And the greatest suffering is not physical, the greatest suffering is the suffering of the soul. And the proportions of Christ's suffering, as I think **Isaiah 53** is trying to tell us, by almost to a point of being criticized from the literary standpoint, repeating over and over and over and over and over different words to say the same thing, is an act on Isaiah's part by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give us a little bit of an understanding of how wide, and broad, and vast the degree of His suffering was.

J. Ligon Duncan: The King Must Die

The first 16 verses of this great chapter contain the **parable of the landowner**. When we studied it a couple of weeks ago together, we said that that parable is basically a gigantic illustration of the very last verse of Matthew chapter 19, **verse 30**: *Many who are first will be last and the last first*. Jesus uses that story to explain to His disciples the principle that in His kingdom the last are first and the first are last.

Now that means a lot of things, but we learned from the parable at least these things. We learned first of all that **we shouldn't work in the kingdom with the spirit of a hireling**, thinking that we've got to do certain things in order for the Lord to bless us. Thinking that somehow He's going to shortchange us. If we serve in the Lord's kingdom like that, not only will we be miserable, but we are endanger of missing the kingdom itself. Our Lord is generous and gracious, and He promises to reward His children far more than we deserve, and we need to work with that spirit in mind.

But it also teaches us, that parable also reminds us that **God's reward are not according to human and earthly measure**. The human and earthly measure would expect those who worked longer in the day in the parable of the landowner to get more than those that had only worked an hour. But human measurements don't apply in the kingdom of heaven. God is sovereign, all His gifts are gifts of grace, and therefore we need to bow before that and acknowledge that. And so it's important for us as we serve in the kingdom not to serve with the spirit of wanting to get more honor and more recognition and more authority given to us than to our brethren. And so Jesus in this great story is really getting at an issue that He has been discussing with the disciples for many chapters, **the issue of what true greatness is**. And it's no mistake, is it, if you'll cast your eyes on **verse 20** of Matthew chapter 20, that they go right back to that same issue of what greatness is in the kingdom after the passage we're going to study today. And so though this passage highlights what Jesus is going to do in Jerusalem, it also tells us something very important about how we ought to respond to the example that Jesus has given us in His life and death.

I. Christ manifests His love for His people even in the manner of His truth-telling.

II. Christ's prediction is a living illustration of "the last shall be first"

III. Christ predicts the cross.

IV. Christ always holds before us the glory on the other side of the cross.

TEXT: Matthew 20:20-28

TITLE: SQUASHING SELFISH AMBITION

BIG IDEA:

TRUE GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM DERIVES FROM HUMBLE SERVICE AS MODELED BY JESUS, NOT THE SELFISH AMBITION OF THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: After the immediately preceding announcement of the suffering and death that await Jesus, the two disciples' quest for **power** and **status** in the present pericope seems all the more **shocking** and **objectionable** (note Matthew's *τότε*, "*then*" [v. 20]). It provides the occasion for yet further teaching from Jesus concerning the nature of greatness and priority in the kingdom. The sons of Zebedee are thus shown to be completely wrong in their concept of greatness. They demonstrate that they have not understood Jesus' teaching in the preceding material about the first being last and the last being first (**19:30; 20:16**). True greatness, the greatness of the kingdom, is reached only through **service** and **self-sacrifice**. Jesus is himself the **supreme model** of that kind of greatness.

Stu Weber: Our human efforts at earthly greatness display our ignorance and misunderstanding of **kingdom greatness**.

R. T. France: The question "**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**" was raised and answered in **18:1–4** and in the portrayal of the "*little ones*" which followed in **ch. 18**; it was more obliquely addressed in the passages about the blessing of the children (**19:13–15**) and the rich man (**19:16–26**), and has come to the fore again in the discussion of rewards in **19:27–29**, especially in the repeated slogan "*The first will be last and the last first*" in **19:30** and **20:16** together with the illustrative parable which comes between them. Now the same question arises in its most memorable form in the request of the sons of Zebedee and is dealt with definitively by Jesus in **vv. 25–28**; it will be broached again in **23:8–12**. The natural human concern with status and importance is clearly one of the most fundamental instincts which must be unlearned by those who belong to God's kingdom.

David Thompson: THOSE WHO WILL END UP GREAT WHEN CHRIST REIGNS AS KING WILL HAVE BEEN THOSE WHO SERVED OTHERS WITH THEIR LIVES AS HE DID.

Van Parunak: Her request reflects two failings on the part of the disciples, failings that we must be careful to avoid.

- First, in spite of the Lord's gentle introduction of the gruesome suffering that awaits him, the disciples still don't get it. The only thing they hear is "*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem,*" and their minds are so preoccupied with the coming glory of the kingdom that they miss his detailed prediction of his passion. He has just told them, twice, that those who would be first must be the last (**19:30; 20:16**), and reminded them of the repeated OT teaching that the saints who will rule the kingdom must first suffer. But they cannot see the suffering, and think only of the glory. It is wonderful and good for us to

contemplate the glory that the Lord has in store for us, but we should not be surprised when the road to that glory must lead through suffering and tribulation.

- Second, in spite of his example of humility, they continue the error of **18:1**, seeking to be the greatest. They have not caught the lesson he has twice presented (**18:1-4; 19:13**) that they must be like little children.

The Lord gives two answers: clarifying what their request involves, and pointing them to the one who has the authority to make such appointments. Then, in **vv. 25-28**, he exhorts all the disciples once more concerning humility, presenting himself as the central example.

I. (:20-23) THE ARROGANCE OF SELFISH AMBITION

A. (:20-21) Selfish Ambition Seeks Positions of Prominence

1. (:20) The Approach

“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him.”

Charles Swindoll: Although their mother was the mouthpiece of the request, James and John were the originators and instigators. The Gospel of Mark makes this clear, leaving the mother out of the account completely and noting that the request came from the two brothers (**Mark 10:35-37**). **R. V. G. Tasker** notes, “It is clear that, in fact, the request emanated from the brothers themselves, for the remaining ten apostles, when they hear about it, do not in Matthew’s narrative any more than in Mark’s turn in indignation upon the mother but upon her sons.”

2. (:21) The Ask

“And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.’”

Scott Harris: How could this woman be so bold to ask such a thing. One reason, other than sheer audacity, is her relationship to Jesus. By comparing the accounts of the crucifixion we know that her name is Salome, and she is the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is Jesus’ aunt, and James and John are Jesus’ first cousins. This **closeness of relationship** explains to some degree the boldness she has in coming to Jesus with this request. . .

James, John and their mother desired to gain the prominent positions from Jesus. It was a wrong thing to seek that for several reasons, among them

- the inappropriateness of asking for this right after Jesus had told them He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die;
- they had not considered the price that would have to be paid;
- it was not Jesus’ place to appoint those positions; and most of all,
- it was wrong because it demonstrated that they – and the other disciples – were still largely infected with the world’s values.

Donald Hagner: The request is not merely that the sons might rule with Jesus (a promise already granted in **19:28**) but that in that glorious manifestation of the reign of Jesus, they might enjoy the most exalted positions of importance, first and second in the kingdom, on his right and left hands, respectively (in keeping with the custom of ancient monarchs; cf. **Jos.**, Ant. 6.11.9 §235).

ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου, “*in your kingdom*,” means the overt and thus eschatological manifestation of that kingdom (cf. “*your glory*” in **Mark 10:37**), which the disciples apparently associated with Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. The kingdom is referred to as Jesus’ kingdom also in **13:41; 16:28** (both referring to the Son of Man; cf. **Luke 22:29; 23:42**).

R. T. France: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, have featured alongside Peter as, with Andrew, the first disciples called (**4:18–22**) and as the core group whom Jesus singled out to accompany him up the mountain in **17:1**, as he will again in Gethsemane (**26:37**); Mark adds two further such occasions (**Mark 5:37; 13:3**). In **10:2** their names follow Peter (the “*first*”) and Andrew at the head of the list of the Twelve. But only one of that leading group, Peter, has featured prominently in the story so far, and has been given a special accolade in **16:17–19**, while James and John have not received any individual attention. Their open bid for leadership now is therefore a **direct challenge to Peter’s leading position**: if James and John are at Jesus’ right and left, where will Peter be? It may be that the brothers have detected in **19:30** a rebuke of Peter’s assumption of a leading role in the kingdom of heaven, and regard this as a good opportunity to press their counterclaim. Peter’s gaffe in **16:22** and Jesus’ sharp rebuke of him in **16:23** may also have raised their hopes of supplanting him. At any rate, the egalitarian picture of the “*twelve thrones*” in **19:28** is now challenged by the brothers’ concern for personal status.

Grant Osborne: There may well be a deliberate irony, since Matthew changes Mark’s wording slightly (cf. **Mark 10:37**) to conform to **27:38** (the two thieves at the cross “*on his right and on his left*”). This produces a sense of **irony**; the place of honor they sought would be fulfilled in an entirely different way by the two criminals.

D. A. Carson: What the sons of Zebedee want and their mother asks for is that they might share in the **authority** and **preeminence** of Jesus Messiah when his kingdom is fully consummated—something they think to be near at hand without the cross or any inter-advent period.

B. (:22-23) Selfish Ambition Displays Presumptuous Ignorance and Unrealistic Expectations

1. (:22) Presumptuous Ignorance

*“But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?’
They said to Him, ‘We are able.’”*

Charles Swindoll: My guess is that they thought Jesus was talking about some kind of festive banquet, or the spoils of victory associated with the crown and the kingdom. But He was actually talking about the suffering He was facing with the agony of the Cross ahead (see **26:39**). Had they fully grasped the point of Jesus’ repeated warnings of His coming death and resurrection, they would have known that to follow Him as a disciple meant that suffering comes before significance, brokenness before usefulness, humility before authority, the bitter cup of pain before the sweet glories of promotion!

Craig Blomberg: “*Cup*” was a common Old Testament metaphor for suffering, especially that caused by God’s wrath (e.g., **Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17**). Jesus asks if John and James are prepared to experience rejection and persecution for their faith. They may not literally die for their discipleship (James did— **Acts 12:2**; reasonably strong church tradition suggests that John did not), and they will not experience God’s wrath (only Jesus could atone for the world’s sins), but they can expect to encounter a variety of hostilities in response to their Christian testimony

(recall **10:16-25**). Their affirmative reply, that they can “*drink the cup*,” simply shows that they still do not understand (v. **22b**).

Donald Hagner: It is questionable, however, whether the brothers understood at this point that drinking Jesus’ cup meant their own **martyrdom**. Their easy answer, δυνάμεθα, “*we are able*,” comes too quickly to conclude that. When they heard the metaphor, they probably thought only of a limited suffering prior to glory (cf. **26:56c**).

Grant Osborne: The Cup of Suffering

We must be willing to drink the cup of Jesus’ suffering (see on **10:17–31**), but the clear message here is that we seek no greatness but the path of Christ, which will often involve suffering and persecution. As Jesus said in **16:24**, we must “*take up [our] cross*,” and that means a willingness to die if God so wills. In **Phil 3:10** Paul talked about “*participation in his suffering*,” and in **Col 1:24** Paul discussed filling up “*what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions*.” Paul meant that suffering was a participation in Christ’s life and a special eschatological event connected with the eschaton.

2. (:23) Unrealistic Expectations

“He said to them, ‘My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.’”

Robert Gundry: James died an early martyr (**Acts 12:2**); and though John died a natural death according to tradition, he first suffered exile on the island of Patmos (**John 21:22; Revelation 1:9**).

Charles Swindoll: Jesus then attempted to set the record straight regarding those coveted high positions in the future kingdom. Those places of honor would be given to those whom God the Father chose. A high position in the kingdom isn’t something that can be earned. And it certainly isn’t something that can be inherited through close family connections. Those are the ways of the world. Jesus’ words suggest that those places “*have already been assigned*” in the plan and purpose of God. Therefore, the way the disciples were wrangling and jostling among themselves over such positions was utterly **futile**.

II. (:24-28) THE ANTITHESIS TO SELFISH AMBITION

A. (:24) Cancer of Competitive Jealousy

“And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.”

Grant Osborne: It is a **jealous anger** on the part of those who are upset that James and John thought of it first and got to Jesus before they could. They are upset that the two are “acing them out” and getting ahead of them in the race for greatness (as also **18:1**).

B. (:25-27) Contrast between Worldly and Spiritual Leadership Styles

1. (:25) Worldly Leadership Style = Domineering Power

“But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.’”

R. T. France: Human society needs properly structured authority, of course, but Jesus' emphasis here is on **the way that authority is exercised**. . . If there is to be ambition in the service of God (note the repeated "*whoever wants*"), it must be the **ambition to serve others** (cf. Paul's similar challenge in a different context, **1 Cor 14:12**).

Stu Weber: In the unbelieving world, it is assumed that **power** and **authority** define greatness. The rulers and high officials were examples of worldly greatness. The way they demonstrated their "greatness" was to lord it over others and to exercise authority. Jesus was not criticizing authoritative or hierarchical structure but the "strutting." Such behavior is born out of **insecurity** and **pride**. The person who "bosses" others around is trying to prove to himself that he is as great as he hopes. It is only an illusion, for such a person is actually fearful and weak.

Scott Harris: While it may be common practice for those that do not know the Lord to use their power in a tyrannical manner to push around those under them, Jesus tells us in **vs. 26** that it is not to be that way among believers. It is a great tragedy in the church when a person comes to power, whether that is by position or by a charismatic personality, and they view themselves as superior and they use people for their own advantage.

2. (:26-27) Spiritual Leadership Style = Humble Servant

a. (:26) First Example of Path to Greatness

*"It is not so among you,
but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,"*

Grant Osborne: "*It must not be this way among you*" (οὐχ οὕτως ἔσται ἐν ὑμῖν). "*Must be*" (ἔσται) is an example of the future with imperatival force (cf. **5:21, 27, 33, 43; 23:10**). The citizens of the kingdom must never be like the Gentiles in a **lust for power**.

b. (:27) Second Example of Path to Greatness

"and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;"

Charles Swindoll: You could have probably heard their jaws drop when Jesus uttered those words. The words were **revolutionary**. They turned the world's ways on their head. Once again, Jesus was unpacking the meaning of His statement that "*the last shall be first, and the first last*" (**20:16**). And with each pass at this confusing teaching, He hoped the disciples would get closer and closer to understanding His mission, which would become their own mission when He departed this world. Only when they fully grasped this mission would they understand what true greatness in the kingdom of heaven really is. He concluded the lesson by pointing to Himself as the ultimate example of what He had just been trying to teach them.

William Barclay: Therein is greatness. The world may assess people's greatness by the number of people whom they control and who are at their beck and call; or by their intellectual standing and their academic eminence; or by the number of committees of which they are members; or by the size of their bank balances and the material possessions which they have amassed; but in the assessment of Jesus Christ these things are irrelevant. His assessment is quite simply: **how many people have they helped?**

C. (:28) Commendation of the Example of the Son of Man

*"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Donald Hagner: But although following Jesus' example may entail drinking the cup that he must drink (v. 22), the specific way the Son of Man is to serve, as spelled out in the final clause (the καί, lit. "and," is thus exegetical and should be translated "that is"), is **unique**: καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν, "that is, to give his life as a ransom for many." "Ransom," although drawn from the background of purchasing the freedom of a slave or captive (i.e., to free by payment), is here used in a metaphorical sense for a setting free from sin and its penalty at the cost of the sacrifice of Jesus. This is the service performed by the suffering servant of **Isa 53** (see esp. **Isa 53:10–12**, where the servant [v. 11] gives himself up to death as an offering for sin and bears the sin of "many" [v. 12]). Jesus has already been identified with that servant by the quotation of **Isa 53:4** in **8:17** and **Isa 42:1–4** in **12:18–21**.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus himself provides the perfect example of servant leadership (v. 28a; cf. esp. **John 13:1-17**). Few models are more desperately needed in an **age of celebrity Christianity**, high-tech evangelism and worship, and widespread abuses of ecclesiastical power for self-aggrandizement or, more insidiously, in the name of "attracting" more people to the gospel—a "gospel" that is thereby badly truncated. **D. A. Carson** observes: "One of the ironies of language is that a word like 'minister,' which in its roots refers to a helper, one who 'ministers,' has become a badge of honor and power in religion and politics."

Scott Harris: Proud, boastful Simon was changed into the Apostle Peter who wrote, "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time*" (**1 Peter 5:6, 7**). The truly great follow Jesus' example and seek to serve, not be served; to sacrifice of themselves, not seek others to sacrifice for them. If you want to be great, you do not need to exalt yourself. In all humility be the slave of Christ and serve Him and His people and let God be the one that exalts you.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do our churches exhibit these characteristics of suffering and self-sacrifice as intrinsic to our model of leadership?
- 2) Where have you seen selfish ambition operating in church politics?
- 3) Why didn't Jesus contest their presumptuous overconfidence as they claimed to be able to drink the "cup"?
- 4) What are some of the ways that churches wrongly employ Gentile concepts of governance and leadership?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stanley Saunders: Jesus, the Son of David, rules in **service** and **suffering**. To the world, this kind of leadership is **upside down**. This kind of leadership means that in the community of disciples

there are no rulers, masters, rabbis, kings, or Caesars (cf. **23:8–12**). How is leadership expressed in our congregations and ecclesiastical structures? What **models of power** does the leadership we see in the church draw upon? To what reality does it bear witness? In the stories in Matthew 19–20, Jesus has already taught his disciples that marriage, celibacy, childlikeness, and poverty are forms of witness to God’s rule and power. Now he names service and death as a slave for the sake of others as crucial forms of that same witness. This means that the church’s vocation also necessarily entails suffering and death, because precisely this form of witness is required to reveal that the powers of violence and death are impotent, and to display the true nature and reach of God’s presence, mercy, and power. Is this a cup the church today is willing to drink? Will we drink the cup of suffering only when, or if, it is forced on us? Or will we do so knowing the true nature of our calling as disciples of Jesus and trusting God’s power to redeem and vindicate?

Richard Gardner: According to Jesus, the sign of stature in his community (note the three occurrences of the phrase *among you* in **vv. 26–27**) differs radically from that recognized by the world. In the world, greatness is measured by the degree of domination, but in the church by the degree of one’s service to fellow members. The twin statements that make this point (**vv. 26b, 27**) exhibit a paradox that builds in force from one line to the next:

To be great, become a servant.

To be first, become a slave!

Equally forceful is the language in the final saying (**v. 28**), which cites Jesus’ own ministry as a model of servanthood. Instead of lording it over persons, he chose to serve their needs and seek their wellbeing at considerable expense. The word for *ransom* (Greek: *lutron*) denotes a price paid to free captives such as slaves, those in debt, and prisoners of war. Here the bondage in question is the grip of evil, and Jesus’ role as a deliverer is the role of the servant in **Isaiah 53**: He sacrifices himself to bring forgiveness to many (**Isa. 53:10, 12**), to all whose lives are linked with his life (cf. **Matt. 26:27–28**).

Daniel Doriani: JESUS OUR RANSOM, OUR EXAMPLE

There are two aspects to Jesus’ declaration that he came to serve. The *first* declares his **unique work**. When Jesus says he “*came to serve*,” he hints at his preexistence and his divine mission. Before Jesus came to us, he was somewhere else. He came here to accomplish something, a God-given mission.

- He came “*to call . . . sinners to repentance*” (**Luke 5:32**).
- He came “*to seek and to save what was lost*” (**Luke 19:10**).
- He “*did not come to judge the world, but to save it*” (**John 12:46–47**).
- He “*came into the world to save sinners*” (**1 Tim. 1:15**).

We must explore the claim that Jesus came to “*give his life as a ransom for many*” (**Matt. 20:28**). A ransom (or redemption—the terms are interchangeable) is a purchase price paid to obtain the release of a captive. In antiquity, a king might pay a ransom to set free a general or a son who was captured in battle. A commoner might pay a price to set a slave free. But these concepts, well known both in Israel and in the Roman Empire, are merely the starting point of a metaphor that points to something far deeper: Jesus offered himself—not money—to deliver us from bondage to sin, its power, and its consequences.

In the Old Testament, God acted as Redeemer by delivering his people from captivity. He said: “*I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you*

from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Ex. 6:6–7). Psalm 130 expands the concept, saying the Lord “will redeem Israel from all their sins” (130:8).

Matthew introduces the ransom concept with a question: “*What can a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (16:26). The answer is “A man can give nothing.” But Jesus, the God-man, now promises that he will “*give his life as a ransom*” (20:28). That is what he does on the cross. Jesus did not do this with money, with gold or silver. The Bible never hints that God pays anyone anything. No man, no fallen angel, can own a person so that Jesus has to pay them off. As Peter says, “*It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect*” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Here in 1 Peter and throughout the New Testament, the Lord places our ransom in the context of the **substitutionary atonement** Jesus accomplished when he offered himself as a sacrifice for us on the cross (Matt. 20:17–19). In **Romans 3** Paul links justification by faith and redemption. Through the work of Christ, God granted to godless, unrighteous, sinning people an alien righteousness, a righteousness that “*comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*” (Rom. 1:18; 3:21–23). Now we are “*justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*” (3:24–25 ESV).

So then, ransom or redemption is an aspect of the work of Christ when he offered himself as a blood sacrifice to atone for our sins. Yet “*ransom*” is more than a synonym for “sacrifice” or “atonement.” The term elicits specific aspects of Jesus’ work.

First, the concept of ransom compares the human condition to slavery or captivity from which we cannot extricate ourselves. We cannot liberate ourselves from our predicament. Our only hope is an outside intervention. Jesus alone can secure our release from sin, its power, and its consequences, which include guilt, condemnation, and both physical and eternal death. The only contribution we make to our salvation is the sin that made it necessary.

Second, a price is paid. The payment is not monetary, but it is real. We often speak of great sacrifices with monetary metaphors, saying that people “pay a price” to get into medical school or to start a business. The price Jesus paid is far greater than these; it was his “*precious blood*” (1 Peter 1:19).

Third, we belong to a new master. Acts says Jesus “*obtained*” or “*acquired*” us. First Corinthians says we “*were bought with a price*” (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23 ESV). By paying this price, the Lord liberates us from sin and its power. Whatever our outward circumstances in this world, we are never spiritual slaves. We are free, heirs of a new life. Yet as the metaphor suggests, we are not absolutely free. We belong to the Lord, who purchased us not only to liberate us from a malign master, but to place us in his household. We are liberated from an evil servitude and gain a noble service.

THE OBJECT OF THE RANSOM

Jesus pays that price “*for many*.” The many, in this case, are the people, the children, **the elect of God**. This use of the term “*the many*” was common in Jesus’ day, but the idea is grounded in **Isaiah 53.7** As he described the work of God’s Suffering Servant, Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, said, “*My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities*” (Isa. 53:11).

Romans says the same thing. By the sin of one man, Adam, Paul declares, many died and suffered condemnation. But now the death of the one man, Jesus, brings life and justification to many (**Rom. 5:12–17**). Jesus came to give his life in the place of many, as a substitute and exchange for many. He drank the cup we were scheduled to drink.

Jesus came to teach, to heal, and to reveal the Father. But above all, he came to deliver us from the grip of sin and Satan. He came to drink the cup that was set at our table. He drained the cup of the wrath of God. That is his gift. To receive it, we need to recognize that we cannot drain that cup. If it is ever to empty, Jesus must drink it to the last—for us.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

This act of Jesus is **unique** and **unrepeatable**. Yet Jesus also says **we should serve** “*just as*” the Son of Man came to serve. Thus, while Jesus’ work is unique, **his life is still a pattern for us**. In fact, Jesus often says this. For example, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, then said we should “*wash one another’s feet*” (**John 13:14**). Before he went to the cross, he also said, “*Take up [your] cross and follow me*” (**Matt. 16:24**). In **Matthew 20** Jesus says we must serve others as he has served us.

It is so easy to be abstract here, to say “I want to serve” while we take care of ourselves. Jesus’ service was concrete. He cured people who needed healing. He went to the cross for sins that needed to be atoned for. So let us be concrete. Let us get up and help clear the table instead of looking for a way out. If a coat is on the floor, the milk is out, a towel is in a heap, put them away, quietly, without telling anyone. **When a job truly needs to be done, we should find a way to do it.**

Grant Osborne: **Servanthood is the only path to greatness in the kingdom.** Jesus makes absolutely clear that the kingdom values and lifestyle are the exact opposite of the surrounding pagan world. This is exemplified in **Luke 16:1–13**, in the parable of the shrewd manager (**vv. 1–8a**) and Jesus’ interpretation of it (**vv. 8b–9, 10–13**). The world “gets ahead” by taking, but the “people of light” by giving.” Following Jesus, who was “in very nature God” but who in his incarnation took on “*the very nature of a servant*” (**Phil 2:6–7**), the disciple must seek humility but leave the glory up to God (the message of **Phil 2:6–11**).

Servanthood must exemplify every Christian leader, indeed every Christian. We will never be Christlike until we serve rather than manipulate others to serve us (cf. **Phil 2:3–4**). As **Wilkins** says, “Because of the impact of God’s love in our lives, we can now love (**1 John 4:19**). And because of the transforming impact of God’s gift of grace in our lives, **we can now give ourselves to serve others.**”

Warren Wiersbe: There were several things wrong with their request. To begin with, **it was born in ignorance**. “*Ye know not what ye ask,*” Jesus replied. Little did Salome realize that the path to the throne is a difficult one. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred, and John had to endure hard days on the isle of Patmos. These three believers **wanted their will**, not God’s will, and they wanted it their way.

Another factor was **their lack of heavenly direction**. They were thinking like the world: James and John wanted to “*lord it over*” the other disciples the way the unsaved Gentile rulers lorded it over their subjects. Their request was fleshly (sensual), because they were selfishly asking for

glory for themselves, not for the Lord. No doubt they felt relieved that they had gotten to Jesus with this request before Peter did!

Finally, the request was not only of the world and the flesh, but it was also **of the Devil**. It was **motivated by pride**. Satan had sought a throne (**Isa. 14:12-15**) and had been cast down. Satan had offered Jesus a throne and had been refused (**Matt. 4:8-11**). Satan magnifies the end (a throne) but not the means to that end. Jesus warned Salome and her sons that the special thrones were available to those who were worthy of them. There are no shortcuts in the kingdom of God.

Michael Wilkins: Sacrifice is a readily understood concept when we think of it in terms of our own benefit. “**No pain, no gain**” is an old adage that communicates a well-known and appreciated value among those who must sacrifice the present pleasure for personal gain, whether that means experiencing the pain of exercise for the gain of a healthy physical heart or the pain of sacrificing a periodic night at the movies to save enough for that long-anticipated skiing vacation.

Jesus would not overturn that principle completely, but he would reverse the focus to say, “**My pain, others’ gain.**” Jesus’ sacrificial servanthood was not directed toward his own personal gain, but for the gain of all those who would believe on his atoning work on the cross and gain forgiveness of their sins. As such his servanthood provides us with the example we now must display toward one another. We sacrifice for the sake of empowering others.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Cup of the King

What does it mean to be great? Perhaps that’s a question that we don’t allow ourselves to ask out loud, at least pertaining to ourselves. We may engage in a discussion about who was the greatest basketball player of all times, we may engage in some question of which was the greatest team of all time in some particular sport, and we ask questions of greatness about sports all the time, but I’m asking this question about our own lives, our own agendas, our own vocations, and maybe we don’t quite phrase it that way when we’re discussing this matter. Maybe we ask the question this way: what does it mean to be successful? What does it mean to be significant? What does it mean to be respected or influential? Maybe that’s how we would put the question of greatness. This is a standing issue for us today, because we ask ourselves things like this. We compare ourselves with others to see how we’re doing. We wonder sometimes if we have risen to the top of our class. We are interested in being respected and we are interested in being noticed and successful.

And in this passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples about **what it means to be great in His kingdom**. True kingdom greatness, He is going to teach us here, true kingdom greatness is a gospel grace. That is, you cannot achieve greatness apart from the grace of God, in fact you can’t even see what true greatness is until the Lord has opened your eyes. And, furthermore, He teaches us that true kingdom greatness manifests itself, not being perceived by all those around us as influential and respected and important, but instead it manifests itself in our willing service of the brethren for the sake of Christ. And so Jesus gives us a contrast between our views of worldly greatness and importance, and spiritual greatness and importance. And that’s what I’d like to look at with you today in this great passage. I’d like for you to look at two or three things.

I. Our pride and sinful ambition blinds us to the true nature of greatness.

II. Humility is demanded when we pledge to take Christ's cup.

III. Kingdom greatness is measured by kingdom service.

John MacArthur: How to be Great in the Kingdom

We live in a Christianity now that thinks God's only design for us is to be healthy, wealthy, prosperous, happy, satisfied, fulfilled, and so forth. We know very little about sacrifice. We know very little of the pain of suffering. All we want to do is eliminate all that so that we can get on to **self-fulfillment**. We're consumed with the creature comforts, pleasure, vacations, travel, you name it, for the self-satisfying feeling that we get by fulfilling what we believe to be deep needs.

And in the process, we have begun to **exalt pride**. We've given place to pride, to self-fulfillment, to self-glory, to self-promotion, and we've begun to forget the whole subject of humility. People are not interested in that. There was a time in the church, you go back, and there were many who were teaching and preaching on humility, and there was a certain brokenness in the church. You look around the time of the Reformation, or the time of the Puritans, and you find there was a dominant sense of brokenness, of contrition. There was a trembling at the Word of God. There was a humility, a meekness within the church that gave it great power. But now the church wants to be proud, and fulfilled, and indulgent, and so forth; and it has fallen prey to **flip-flopping the sin of pride and the virtue of humility, and making pride a virtue and humility a weakness**.

Now the lesson of **honor through humility**, of **glory through suffering**, we need to learn. And we're not alone; the disciples needed to learn it, too. And that is the essence of verses 20 to 28. They too sought self-glory. They were into the self-esteem cult, up to their proverbial ears. They were into self-promotion, self-glory, seeking to be somebody special, to be recognized, to be esteemed. They sought the high places. And the Lord needed to correct that; and He does correct that in this passage. Unfortunately, He taught a lot better than they learned; and He has to reteach this lesson just a few days after teaching here on the way to Jerusalem. . .

They should have forsaken all, followed Jesus without ever asking, "What's in it for me?" But they kept asking, "What's in it for us? What's in for us?" In fact, back in chapter 19, verse 27, "*What shall we have?*" said Peter. "What shall we get? What do we get out of this self-abandoning thing?" Oh, the treachery of the human heart. Selfishness is incurable in this life. It only can be brought under control, it can't be eliminated. . .

Now we need to reexamine then this whole idea of humility as a path to glory; and I think we can in this passage. Let's look at it right now. Two points: **how not to be great**, verse 20 through 25; **how to be great**, 26 to 28. We'll take point one today.

I. How not to be great (:20-25).

Four wrong, worldly ways to seek greatness are given in this – two by example and two by instruction of our Lord. And there are earthly means to greatness in men's eyes. And men pursue greatness through those means, but they are not adaptable to God's kingdom. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not" – what? – "of this world." And the principles for the world's kingdom do not operate in His kingdom. Here are the ways not to be great in God's kingdom.

Number one is “political power play.” Now the world will tell us if you want to get something, it all depends on who you know, right? If you want to go up the ladder, you’ve got to get next to the people who’ve got the influence. And so in exceeding to places of prominence and glory in the world, political power play is a common approach. You manipulate people and circumstances to find your way in with those you want to get in with, and they’ll pull you to the top. . .

There’s a second wrong road to honor. In **verses 22 to 24**, I call it **audacious ambition**. This is just mindboggling, this passage: “Jesus answered and said, ‘You don’t know what you’re asking. Lady, you don’t even know what you’re talking about. You’re asking for glory; and what you don’t realize is that the path to glory is suffering. You don’t know what you’re asking. You’re saying, “I want my boys on the right,” – you don’t know what you’re asking. The highest places of glory are reserved for those who went through the deepest places of suffering.’” . . .

And so the Lord says, “I think I need to teach you a lesson.” And He gives them two more wrong ways – ways that men get greatness, but not in God’s kingdom. The first is in **verse 25** is **dominant dictatorship**, dominant dictatorship. Look at verse 25: “Jesus called them unto Him and said, ‘You know that the princes of the Pagans’ – the rulers of the Pagans – ‘exercise dominion over them.’”

That word is a very interesting word: *katakurieuō*. It means to *lord it over*. They lord it over them. And this is dominant dictatorship. This is the world’s way. Not only does the world seek greatness through its political power play and its audacious ambition, but the world seeks prominence by dominating as dictatorship. . .

And then there’s a final one; we’ll call it **charismatic control**. **Verse 25** says, “*And they that are great*,” – megaloi, the chief ones, the leaders – “*exercise authority over them*.” That’s *katexousiazō* for you Greek students — *exousiazō* has to do with authority: *down*. It’s to throw your weight around colloquially; and it is the idea of vaunting their power.

And it seems best to see this in the comparison also with the other passages as the power of personality. The dominant dictatorship is the power of position, this seems to be the power of personality. And so I call it charismatic control: the charm, the charisma, the wit, the verbiage, the ability to speak with glibness and so forth, gives them a certain power to sway and move people. And there are people who achieve greatness in the world by virtue of their charismatic ability to control people.

I. How to be great (:26-28).

So, if we pursue greatness, we pursue it on the path of humility. If we pursue greatness, we pursue it on the path of service; we pursue it on the path of slavery. And that takes us, then, to verses 26 to 28.

There are two things to notice in these three verses: the exhortation and the example, or, if you will, the precept and the pattern. The exhortation comes in verses 26 and 27, and the example is given in verse 28. . .

Jesus never promotes a sinful ambition, and Jesus dealt with the sinful ambition of James and John. But He reaffirmed that it wasn’t wrong to seek to be great; it was only wrong to seek it for

the wrong reason. That's all. I mean even John said, "*Look to your selves that you lose not the things that you've wrought, but that you receive a **full reward.***"

And Paul said, "*Run that you may win.*" And he also reiterated that we ought to be concerned that our works, when they stand the test of fire at the judgment seat of Christ are not wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stone. And that we so live, according to 2 Corinthians, that when we come to that day and face the Lord Jesus Christ, we may receive reward for the things done in the body, whether they be good or worthless.

And John reminds us, at the climax of the whole Bible, that the Lord said, "*Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is in my hand to give you, according to your work.*" And so, it's not wrong to seek glory in eternity. It's not wrong to seek exaltation. The Lord has given us that as a goal. It's not wrong to seek that. **It's only wrong to seek it for the wrong reason.** It's only when you're motive isn't right. When like James and John you seek it so you can lord it over the others, or you see it so you can be more esteemed than others in this life, or you seek it so that you can have for yourself greater authority, greater power, greater comfort. It's not wrong to seek it; it's wrong to seek it for wrong and selfish reasons. . .

Greatness in the kingdom, capacity for glory in the kingdom is in direct proportion to humility and selfless service rendered. Simple and yet profound truth.

Ray Pritchard: Christ Speaks to the Problem of Misguided Ambition

Let's face it. Life is about winning and losing. That's why we keep score. That's why we love sports and board games. We want to know who's up and who's down, who's hot and who's not.

And that's why this mother came to Jesus. In the great game of life, she wanted to make sure her boys came out ahead. If that meant asking for a favor from the Lord, she was glad to do it because she felt like her boys deserved it. She had big dreams and her sons had large ambitions.

And despite what you may think, ambition itself is not evil. If you don't have any ambition, why bother getting out of bed in the morning? You might as well roll over and sleep all day. Ambition is merely a strong desire regarding the future. As such, it can be positive or negative, good or bad, righteous or evil. It can be very useful if we are ambitious for the right things.

I. High Ambition (:20-21)

II. High Cost (:22-23)

III. High Standard (:24-28)

TEXT: Matthew 20:29-34

TITLE: RESTORING SIGHT TO THE BLIND

BIG IDEA:

BLIND PEOPLE CAN HAVE THEIR SIGHT RESTORED BY CALLING UPON JESUS FOR HIS COMPASSIONATE MERCY

INTRODUCTION:

D. A. Carson: It reminds us that the one going up to Jerusalem to give his life as a ransom for many is the Messiah, the Son of David, whose great power, used mercifully (v.30) and compassionately (v.34), is not used to save himself.

Robert Gundry: For Matthew and his audience, their shouting “*Lord*” two times puts a double emphasis on Jesus’ divine lordship, and their shouting “*Son of David*” two times puts a double emphasis on Jesus’ human kingship. Their double plea for mercy (the second one implied) asks him to exercise the mercy that he commanded others to exercise (9:13; 12:7 [compare 5:7]). The greater loudness of their shouting a second time and its coming despite the crowd’s reprimand strengthen the plea.

Craig Blomberg: Matthew 19:1 - 20:34 has now concluded the way it began—with Jesus on the road, surrounded by great crowds and healing people (cf. 19:2). Matthew is building up to the climactic entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with which chap. 21 begins. Jesus seems to have a great host of followers and admirers, but they will soon turn fickle and abandon him.

Donald Hagner: Just before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus performs a striking miracle in the healing of two blind men, who appeal to him using the title Son of David. This is the same title with which Jesus will be greeted on his entry into Jerusalem (21:9). In the temple Jesus will again heal the blind and the lame too (21:14). The present passage thus at once rounds out the preceding main section of the Gospel and serves as a transition to the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem and the events to occur there. The present miracle has the effect of confirming the messianic identity of Jesus as the Son of David. With sovereign power he brings sight to the blind, and they respond by following him in discipleship—all this in strong contrast to the way he will be received by the Jerusalem authorities. . .

Jesus on the way to his death in Jerusalem does not cease being the Messiah who meets the needs of individuals. The giving of sight to the blind is a dramatic miracle that points to the dawning of the era of messianic fulfillment. The Son of David is present among his people. And as he compassionately delivers them from their literal darkness, so he continues on his way to Jerusalem, where in his sacrificial death he will deliver all of humanity from an even greater darkness—that of the bondage to sin and death. . . This healing pericope thus may be seen as the gospel in a microcosm.

Grant Osborne: Jesus takes the blind living in darkness and gives them the light of God so they can see spiritual truth. In Jesus, God is ever open to bring sight to those who call out for divine mercy and open themselves up to his healing presence in their lives.

(:29) GEOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION

“And as they were going out from Jericho, a great multitude followed Him.”

D. A. Carson: Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was “*leaving*,” Luke that he was “*entering*,” Jericho. . . Many avoid geographical contradiction by noting that in this period there were two Jerichos—an older town on the hill, largely in ruins, and the new Herodian town about one mile away (cf. **Josephus**, J.W. 4.459 [8.3]). In this view, Matthew and Mark, under Jewish influence, mention the old town Jesus was leaving; Luke the Hellenist refers to the new one, which Jesus is entering. This may well be the explanation. But there is no certain evidence that the old town was still inhabited at this time, and we do not know the local names of the two sites. . .

Jericho was not only the home of Jesus’ ancestor Rahab (**1:5**) but was also a day’s journey from Jerusalem. The “*large crowd*” implies more than messianic excitement; it also reflects the multitudes of pilgrims from Galilee and elsewhere heading to Jerusalem for the feast.

Michael Wilkins: Jesus leaves Jericho for the **final approach to Jerusalem**, which lies ahead on a winding road for fifteen miles as it ascends three thousand feet through dry desert. It would take some six to eight hours of uphill walking, so he and the disciples are naturally eager to make it to their destination before nightfall, because the road was infamous for highway robberies (cf. **Luke 10:30ff.**).

I. (:30-31) PERSISTENT PLEA FOR MERCY BY TWO BLIND MEN

A. (:30) Seizing the Opportunity to Petition Jesus for Mercy

1. Incident

“And behold, two blind men sitting by the road,”

Grant Osborne: Matthew frequently uses “*look*” (ἰδοῦ) to add a dramatic emphasis to a scene (see on **19:16**). These men are “*sitting alongside* [παρά] *the road*,” probably the trunk road to Jerusalem in order to beg alms from pilgrims passing by (quite lucrative at this time of year). The presence of “*road*” (ὁδός) continues the road to Jerusalem theme (cf. **20:17; 21:8, 19**). The emphasis on “*hearing*” most likely refers both to the excited talk of the crowd that Jesus is approaching and to the previous stories the two blind heard about Jesus.

Bethany Bible Church: Our Savior was on His way at that very moment to accomplish the most momentous work of service in all of history—His sacrifice on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead for our justification. And yet—even at such an important moment as as that—Jesus willingly stopped on His course to the city to respond to the pleas of to two poor, miserable, blind men whom the rest of the world had largely ignored.

What an encouragement this ought to be to us to cry out to the Savior with importunity! He is never too busy to minister to those who genuinely trust Him and who cry out to Him in sincere faith.

<https://www.bethanybible.org/archive/2008/020308.htm>

2. Intelligence

“hearing that Jesus was passing by,”

Matthew McCraw: It's important to realize that life for blind people is much different today. There are resources, organizations, and advances in today's culture that are able to assist visually impaired people in a lot of ways. However, blind people in Jesus' day were often unable to receive any kind of genuine help and as a result, it left them in desperate situations. These two men needed help and they knew that they needed help. They needed mercy from Jesus and they knew that Jesus had mercy for them.

3. Importunity

"cried out, saying, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!'"

Daniel Doriani: Each element of their address merits reflection.

- "*Lord*" may be the Greek substitute for the name of Yahweh, the living God, or it may be a term for a leader (as in "lords and ladies"). Since most people thought of Jesus as a prophet (**21:11**) and since we can hardly expect these beggars to know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Second Person of the Trinity, it is the latter.
- Yet the next title, "*Son of David*," shows that the beggars knew Jesus was more than a mere man. "*Son of David*" refers to the king who fulfills the prophecy of **2 Samuel 7**. That Son of David would be the king, healer, and leader of Israel.
- Finally, the plea for mercy ("*Have mercy on us*") means they believe Jesus has the **power** to stop and heal them.

Jason Lim: These two blind men, they have 20/20 vision. They were physically blind, but they were spiritually sharp. They knew that this poor carpenter's son is the very Messiah, the everlasting King. Now many people didn't see it, especially the Jewish religious leaders. They were blinded! They saw, they heard about Jesus's great miracles. They heard about his great preaching, but they do not recognize Him as the Messiah. They were blinded by arrogance and pride. But these blind men, reduced to nothingness in society had perfect vision, seeing that Jesus is the Christ.

<https://gospellight.sg/sermons/blind-men-with-2020-vision-matthew-2029-34/>

Ray Fowler: There's a lesson here for us as well. **Don't let Jesus pass you by.** You never know whether this may be your only opportunity to come to Jesus. None of us has a claim on tomorrow. That's why the Bible says today is the day of salvation. Don't miss out on opportunities for salvation or Christian growth. Don't let Jesus pass you by. These two men were determined not to miss out on this opportunity, so they cried out for mercy in faith.

<https://www.rayfowler.org/sermons/matthew/what-do-you-want-jesus-to-do/>

B. (:31) Shouting over the Opposition to Persist in Asking Jesus for Mercy

1. Muzzled by the Multitude

"And the multitude sternly told them to be quiet;"

Daniel Doriani: A little earlier, the apostles had tried to keep little children away from Jesus. On this day, the crowd tried to keep the blind men away from Jesus. The crowd rebuked them and ordered them to silence.

Walter Wilson: In overcoming the attempt of a third party to block their access to the healer, the blind men bring to mind the tenacity of the Canaanite woman, who even utters a similar appeal: "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David*" (**15:22**). In contrast to **Mark 10:46**, **Matt 20:30**

mentions neither the names nor the occupation of the two men, thereby enhancing their representative potential (cf. **Matt 9:18** || **Mark 5:22**). In the same vein, no information is provided regarding how the men have come to know that Jesus is the Son of David, though perhaps the reader is meant to assume that, being blind, they are endowed with prophetic insight. In any event, when they hear that Jesus is passing by the spot where they are sitting alongside the road, they cry out to him (**20:30**). The response of the crowd, which rebukes the blind men (**20:31a**), strikes the interpreter as odd, since elsewhere crowds are depicted as following Jesus specifically for healing (cf. **4:24–25**; **12:15**; **14:13–14**; **19:2**), and in a short while they will be crying out something very similar (**21:9**). Perhaps the role of the crowd in this instance is simply to “act as a foil to the welcoming attitude of Jesus,” just as the disciples had done in **19:13–15** (also with ἐπιτιμάω). Note, too, how Matthew omits the mediating action attributed to the crowd in **Mark 10:49b**, thereby simplifying their role and making the contrast with Jesus more apparent.

2. Motivated to Shout Louder

“but they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’”

R. T. France: Matthew does not explain the source of their knowledge. No explanation is given for the crowd’s attempt to silence them, and perhaps none is needed: crowds can be like that! But the result is that the reader is shown the men’s persistence and is given a second chance to hear the title “*Son of David*,” and perhaps to reflect on the ability of these Judean beggars to discern who Jesus is when the religious leaders in Jerusalem will so signally fail to do so.

Matthew Henry: Here is an example of **importunity in prayer**. They cried out as men in earnest; men in need are earnest, of course. Cold desires only beg for denials. When they were discountenanced in it, they cried the more. The stream of fervency, if it is stopped, will rise and swell the higher. This is wrestling with God in prayer, and makes us the fitter to receive mercy; for the more it is striven for, the more it will be prized and thankfully acknowledged.

II. (:32-34) MERCIFUL MIRACLE – RESTORATION OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND

A. (:32) Perception of Jesus

“And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’”

B. (:33) Problem of Blindness

“They said to Him, ‘Lord, we want our eyes to be opened.’”

Daniel Doriani: In the Old Testament, there is no record that a prophet or servant of God ever heals the blind. But the healing of the blind is Jesus’ **most common miracle**. Why? Because the Bible says God alone gives sight to the blind (**Ex. 4:11**; **Ps. 146:8–9**). When God restores all things, when his Servant comes, then “*the eyes of the blind will see*” (**Isa. 29:18**; **35:5**; **42:7**). Thus Matthew **attests the deity of Christ**.

C. (:34) Performance of Miracle

1. Two Components

a. Motivated by Compassion

“And moved with compassion,”

b. Methodology of the Physical Touch
“*Jesus touched their eyes;*”

Grant Osborne: Jesus’ **compassion** and **touching their eyes** are not found in Mark and add to the centrality of the messianic miracle in Matthew. Jesus’ compassion is also found in **9:36; 14:14; 15:32**, all connected to his miraculous ministry to the crowds. Jesus had great pity for the human dilemma and always responded. Most busy teacher-rabbis, let alone messianic pretenders, would never have “stopped” in their rush to destiny to help the unfortunate, but Jesus does so every time. The use of “*touch*” for healing is also found in **8:3, 15; 9:29 (9:20–21; 14:36** of people touching Jesus) and stresses further the physicality of the miracle.

2. Transformation to Discipleship

“*and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.*”

D. A. Carson: Matthew’s account is simple but stresses that Jesus mercifully healed the men despite the opposition of the crowds (**v.31**) that, like the disciples (cf. **19:13–15**), wanted to bask in his glory but not practice his compassion. After this healing, unlike **9:30**, there is no command to be silent. That point in Jesus’ ministry has been reached when more public self-disclosure could not change the course of events. The two healed men joined the crowds following Jesus (**20:34**), pressing on to the Passover they expected and the cross they did not.

Daniel Doriani: By this miracle, Jesus demonstrated mercy in all of its forms.

- First, he acted in mercy by restoring their sight.
- Second, Jesus felt mercy and affection for the men, as we read, “*Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes*” (**20:34**).
- Third, Jesus entered a relationship with them and they followed him.
- Fourth, he entered Jerusalem where he would offer his life for them so he could grant them the mercy of forgiveness.

Matthew McCraw: How many of you all have been changed by Jesus? Now, you are followers of Jesus. Listen, church: Jesus has **transformation** for you and that transformation is life-changing. That transformation leads to **devotion to Jesus**. That transformation not only transforms your life, it also transforms you into a **Jesus follower**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which is easier to accomplish: the miracle of restoring physical sight or of **restoring spiritual sight**?
- 2) What **obstacles** did these two blind men have to overcome to receive mercy from Jesus?
- 3) Why did Jesus ask them “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” when He surely already knew the answer?
- 4) Have you been so transformed that you are now a **faithful follower** of Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Turner: When Jesus and the disciples leave Jericho, Jerusalem is only fifteen miles away, and the ominous events repeatedly predicted by Jesus will occur soon. But Jesus does not focus on his own concerns. He has just told his disciples that **true greatness is measured by service**, not power. He now compassionately uses his power to serve the blind men in their need. They respond to their healing by following Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus does not command the blind men to be silent (contrast **8:4; 9:30**), since Jesus's hour has come. Their cries to the son of David (**20:30–31**) will soon be echoed by others on the approach to Jerusalem, but the religious leaders do not join the chorus (**21:9, 15–16**).

Daniel Doriani: Jesus was **going to Jerusalem for the last time**. There he would meet the guardians of a decayed form of Judaism. He would meet the alleged protectors of Israel and its faith, and find that they were most interested in preserving their positions, even if it meant a fair measure of collaboration with Rome. The Jewish and Roman leaders were both intent on keeping the peace and keeping their place. As they saw it, Jesus disturbed the peace and threatened their place. Representatives of a distorted religion and a brutal state, they were willing to execute Jesus as a troublemaker in order to keep the peace. Jesus knew the authorities would kill him. He also knew that they would not simply take his life, he would give it up, as an atoning sacrifice for his people.

As Jesus left Jericho, Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the chief priests and elders of the people would fulfill their plots against Jesus (**26:1–5**). In Jerusalem, Judas would betray him with a kiss and the temple police would arrest him (**26:14–16, 47–55**). In Jerusalem, the disciples would desert him (**26:56**). In Jerusalem, Jesus would appear before the ruling Jewish council on false charges. They would condemn him to death and send him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator (**26:57–68**). Pilate would know Jesus was innocent, but lack the courage to acquit him. In Jerusalem, the chief priests would incite an angry mob to call for Jesus' crucifixion, and Pilate would capitulate (**27:11–26**). In Jerusalem, Roman soldiers would mock, flog, and crucify him (**27:27–44**). But from Jerusalem, Jesus would rise again, send his Spirit, and build his church.

All this Jesus knew. It was his secret burden as he traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover week that would soon begin. Along with many thousands of Israelites, Jesus wanted to be in the temple precincts for the feast. Northern Jews, living in Galilee, walked south to Jerusalem. To avoid walking through Samaria, which they considered a defiled land, they traveled east, to the Sea of Galilee, then south alongside the Jordan River. Jericho was an oasis city located at the southern end of the Jordan, where it emptied into the Dead Sea. At Jericho, worshipers turned west and walked one day, about fifteen miles, to Jerusalem.

Jesus walked with his disciples, but hundreds of others walked nearby. We can imagine the scene, the people streaming into Jerusalem. The disciples were nearest to Jesus, but hundreds more walked near him, as part of a larger mass of humanity that strode toward the city.

Walter Wilson: Because Jesus has already spoken about those who are unable to “see” the truth (**13:13–14**) as well as their “*blind*” guides (**15:14**), the reader will be inclined to interpret the experience of blindness in this story metaphorically. In something of a twist, however, the

imagery of blindness is applied not to unbelieving Israel (cf. **8:12**) but to Jesus's own followers. This much is suggested by the correlation of the redactional references to the "two" sons of Zebedee in **20:21, 24** and the redactional reference to the "two" blind men in **20:30**. There is also an interesting correlation between the question Jesus asks the two brothers' mother in **20:21** ("What do you want?") and the question Jesus asks the two blind men in **20:32** ("What do you want me to do for you?"). The intimation that James and John (serving as representatives of the group) are afflicted by **spiritual blindness** is countered by the hope that they can be "healed" by Jesus (cf. **4:16**). Indeed, it is only through such healing that they will be able to "follow" him at all (cf. **5:14–16**). The fact that **20:32–34** exhibits the basic features of a **call story** (bringing to mind examples of prophetic discourse) further encourages us to see the two blind men as somehow **representative of the disciples**. Note in particular how Jesus calls the men in **20:32** and they "follow" him in **20:34**, evidencing a pattern that can be compared to the call of James and John in **4:21–22**.

Stu Weber: The greatest in the kingdom will stoop to serve the least. . . Beggars were considered **outcasts** in Jewish society. Matthew, writing to Jews who desired two witnesses, mentioned both men. Mark and Luke referred only to one beggar, probably the speaker of the two. He was identified in **Mark 10:46** with the nickname "Bartimaeus," or "Son of Excrement." Even though Old Testament law provided for the needy in Israel, few holy men would have anything to do with beggars. They feared they might be made unclean if they associated with beggars. Jesus had already performed one healing similar to this in **9:27–31**. But this episode was unique in its purpose for Matthew's story. These two "low-lives" were among those whom the Son of Man had come to serve (**20:28**). . .

The Messiah-King was on the verge of entering "*the city of the Great King*" (**Matt. 5:35; Ps. 48:2**). He was about to ascend to the sanctuary of Yahweh, which only the blameless may do (**Ps. 15**). He was about to purify his own house, the temple (**21:13**), and was preparing to perform the central messianic act of salvation (**Isa. 53**). The crowd and the disciples were to know beyond any doubt who was entering Jerusalem and the source and extent of his authority.

God views all people—regardless of age, gender, social status, or nationality as of equal value. The greatest person in God's kingdom is the humblest servant toward fellow believers. We must follow Jesus' example by stooping to serve those considered least worthy by worldly standards.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Compassion of the King

God is teaching us one grand lesson in this passage. He is showing us **the greatness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ as a picture of what true kingdom greatness is**. As the disciples are jostling amongst themselves to be counted great, here is Jesus ministering to outcasts. It is a picture of what true greatness is in His kingdom. But, along the way there are several other important, valuable, relevant issues that are dealt with. And I'd like to look at those as well as we consider this passage before us today. There are three parts to the passage, and I'd like you to see two or three things.

I. We cry out to the Lord when we realize we need Him.

As Jesus is passing through Jericho, on the way to Jerusalem, He is encountered by two blind men. Now Jesus was being followed by a great crowd. And the blind men perceived that Jesus was coming. Perhaps, they heard Him. They heard people talking about the fact that He was in the vicinity. And so they immediately begin to cry out for mercy. And is it not a picture of those

who are the least fortunate, those who are the last those who are the outcast those who are unimportant in the society around them. And yet the Lord Jesus takes time to minister to them.

John Flavel, the old Puritan, once said, “Christ is not sweet until sin is made bitter to us.” And the fact of the matter is there are a lot of people who don’t think they need Christ’s grace, because they don’t see their sin and they don’t see their need. And this passage is a mirror to us. And it’s saying to us, if we are spiritual beggars, then we ought to be crying out for mercy to Christ. Do we realize what we are if we’re apart from Him?

II. A healthy prayer life flows from a sense of need and apprehension of the Savior.

Let me suggest to you that in verse 31 we also see a pattern for persistent prayer for believers. I know this passage isn’t ultimately about prayer. But don’t we see a paradigm for Christian prayer set forth in the attitude of these men. A healthy prayer life, you see, flows from a sense of need and a sight of the savior. If you sense your need, and you have seen the savior, you’ve got the essential ingredients needed to motivate you to a healthy prayer life. Look at how these men respond to Jesus Christ. They called out to Him, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.”

But look at the qualities of their request and what they teach us about prayer.

- These men were **earnest**.
- Notice also that these men were **humble**.
- Notice that they were **believing**.
- Their prayer was **simple**.
- Their prayer was **scriptural**.

III. Jesus’ compassion and power can make us whole.

John MacArthur: The Blind Who Saw

People who were nothing but an irritation and a distraction to the crowd were a cause for deep pain to Him – the pain of sympathy, empathy, and **compassion**. While the world wanted to silence these kind of people, Jesus wanted to hear what they had to say. While the world wanted to make sure they didn’t get in the way, Jesus wanted to be sure He stood with them. While the world wanted to be sure they didn’t interrupt anything by articulating their need, Jesus wanted not only to know their need but to meet it.

And so, at best, this wonderful little story is a demonstration of the **heart of God**, which is a **heart of compassion**. And that is to say, beloved, that God not only knows what pain we endure, He feels it. That’s right. He not only knows it, it is not just cognition, it is not God in heaven saying, “Oh, I understand. So-and-so is suffering.” It isn’t just that. It’s the feeling of that suffering; it’s the pain of that which touches His own great heart. And therefore, when God allows you to suffer, He allows Himself to suffer as well and be sure then that if, indeed, you’re suffering is not alleviated, He continues to suffer with you and must, therefore, have some great purpose in mind, for He Himself could eliminate His own suffering as well. . .

But even more common than physical blindness was **spiritual blindness**. And metaphorically, the Gospels and the epistles speak often of the blindness of the heart. In fact, it’s summed up in the words of **John 1**, which simply says, “*That was the true light which lighteth every man that*

cometh into the world. He was in the world. The world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Or in the third chapter, where it says that *men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil*. Or **Romans 11:25**, which says, "*Blindness in part is happened to Israel.*" Or **2 Corinthians 3:14**, "*Their minds were blinded.*" Or Jesus words in **Matthew 23**, "*Woe unto you blind guides, you blind Pharisee,*" He said. Blind to God. Maybe able to see physically, but blind to God.

Now, the case of these men is most interesting, because while they are physically blind, they appear to have unusually clear spiritual sight. Physically they see nothing; spiritually they see very well. And they will see even better when the Lord Jesus is finished with them. And they will also see physically. . .

And sometimes He gave physical sight to blind eyes. And I think He did that for three reasons.

- First of all, it was part of **messianic proof**. He was demonstrating that He was the Messiah.
- Secondly, it was part of **millennial preview**. He was showing them what it was going to be like in His kingdom when all of that kind of thing was turned over and there was glorious wholeness and healing in the kingdom.
- And thirdly, I think it was a matter of **symbol** or picture. It was a marvelous picture. Every time He healed someone of physical blindness, He was, in effect saying, "That's only a symbol of what I want to do to the soul."

I. Their Sad Plight.

II. Their Strong Persistence

III. Their Supernatural Privilege

IV. Their Submissive Pursuit

Bethany Bible Church: Lessons

One thing we should learn from these two blind men is that **we should never be ashamed to admit how disparately we need Jesus.**

Unbelieving people will always be inclined to mock us for being so "needy" as to cry out to Jesus for salvation. They'll condemn us for not being "self-reliant". They'll say, "You're just using Jesus as a crutch." And when they do, let's be real. Let's go ahead and freely admit that Jesus *is* our "crutch"—and that it's a good thing we found Him too, because we discovered that our souls are crippled by sin. There's no shame in using a crutch when you're crippled. We might even want to go further, and tell them that *their* soul has been crippled by sin too. It's just that they don't realize it yet. And we might also say that, when *their* eyes are finally opened as ours have been, and when *they* finally see how much *their* soul has been crippled by sin, that we're very happy to recommend Jesus to them as the greatest "crutch" a crippled soul can ever lean on.

Another thing we should learn from these two men is that **Jesus is abundantly merciful to every one of us poor, miserable, blind, crippled souls that has ever cried out to Him.**

As this story teaches us, He is never too busy for us. He stops in His tracks for us and hears our plea for mercy. He graciously asks us what it is that we want from Him—even if it is so great a thing as the restoration of our spiritual sight so that we can see the truth about our need—and even if it is so great a thing as the saving of our souls from the crippling effects of our sin. He graciously reaches out and touches us in our need. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. We can safely cry out to Him.

And finally, we should from these two blind men to **follow their example in their asking.** Because of how disparately we need Jesus, and because of how ready He is to show mercy to whoever cries out to Him, let's cry out to Him with all our being—and never care what the world thinks! For Jesus mercifully gives His attention to those who sincerely cry out to Him, in their deep need, with unrelenting importunity of faith.

<https://www.bethanybible.org/archive/2008/020308.htm>

Ray Fowler: Jesus' miracles always have a **spiritual meaning** as well. And on the spiritual level, we demonstrate faith by recognizing our spiritual darkness and need. We cry out for mercy. We call on Jesus as Messiah and Lord. We persist in faith by persevering through the obstacles in our way. We ask Jesus to **open the eyes of our heart** that we may see and follow him.

That phrase "*the eyes of your heart*" comes from a beautiful prayer in Ephesians 1 where Paul writes: "*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*" (**Ephesians 1:18-19**)

When you cry out for mercy, when you ask Jesus to open the eyes of your heart, he will have compassion on you. He will touch you. He will give you the sight you need. You will be able to sing those other words **John Newton** wrote in the hymn Amazing Grace: "**I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.**"

TEXT: Matthew 21:1-11

TITLE: PUBLIC ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM AS THE MESSIAH KING

BIG IDEA:

GRAND ENTRANCE OF THE MESSIAH KING INTO JERUSALEM ACCOMPANIED BY POPULAR PRAISE BUT BLIND PERCEPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Michael Wilkins: The crescendo of Jesus' messianic ministry occurs as he enters Jerusalem, the city of the great King (**Ps. 48:1–2**), the center of Israel's spiritual life and messianic hope. This initiates the "Holy Week" or "Passion Week." "*Passion*" comes from the Latin *passio* ("suffering"), which originally meant the suffering of a martyr. Early Latin translations of the New Testament adopted the term *passio* to point to the Gospel narratives of Jesus' suffering and its attending events. The earliest message about Jesus given by the apostolic band was the Passion, as we can see from the earliest preaching accounts in Acts. If we look at percentages of the Gospels given over to the Passion Week, it comprises from 25–48 percent of their materials.

Donald Hagner: Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem is an **important dividing point** in the Gospel. The Galilean ministry has come to an end, and the journey to Jerusalem has been completed. Now all that remains are the events, the deeds and teaching in Jerusalem, that are preliminary to the goal and climax of the entire Gospel narrative. We now meet in **chaps. 21–23** the final encounter between Jesus and Israel, consisting of a trio of parables (**21:28 - 22:14**), conflict stories (**22:15–46**), and the diatribe against the Pharisees in **chap. 23**. This pericope describing the actual arrival in the holy city presents a **poignant mixture of truth and irony**. Jesus is welcomed for what he in truth is, the Son of David, the Messiah of Israel, yet it is precisely as such that he will be rejected by the people. For the moment, however, Jesus will receive the acclaim of the people, and Matthew will record the impact of his arrival in Jerusalem. But when Jesus shows that he is a different kind of Messiah than that of the popular expectation, the people will no longer support him. Paradoxically they will send the one they now receive with such jubilation to his death on the cross. Thus **the triumphal entry is a prelude to the passion**.

Stu Weber: For a short time, the people would acknowledge Jesus' true identity as the sovereign Son of David, but they would fail to identify him also as the sacrificial Son of Abraham. They knew he had come to restore his kingdom, but they missed the fact that he was also here to redeem his people. They anticipated the sovereignty but overlooked the sacrifice. Jesus would not exercise the rule without the redemption.

Richard Gardner: The use of a **donkey** rather than a mighty war-horse says something about the character of the Messiah's reign. A ruler who comes to Israel on a donkey symbolizes a humble reign of serving the common good, not a kingdom of violence and military conquest. For Matthew, then, the scene of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey both proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah and conveys a picture of the servant role which defines his messiahship.

Daniel Doriani: The time of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, torment, crucifixion, and death will soon be upon him, but before his humiliation, Matthew provides Jesus' disciples with one more reminder that he is King and Lord. At that point in his ministry, his royalty and reign were

veiled, just as it is today, when the lordship of Jesus is often veiled. **Matthew 21** reminds us that things are not always as they seem and that symbolic acts often provide profound insight into hidden truths.

Walter Wilson: As the Messiah approaches Jerusalem, his royal status is manifested in a public way. When they reach Bethphage, Jesus sends two disciples to bring him a donkey and a colt, the implication being that their availability is a matter of **divine provision**. Matthew further shows his readers how Jesus's use of the animals took place in fulfillment of a biblical prophecy, one that praises the **humility** of the coming king. The crowds accompanying Jesus, meanwhile, praise him as the Son of David and the one who comes in the name of the Lord, that is, the one **sent by God's very self** (cf. **11:3**). Everything that transpires, then, follows a **divine plan**. The impact of the Messiah's actual entrance into Jerusalem is heightened by the scene of the entire city being shaken as though by an earthquake (cf. **27:51; 28:4**). To queries from the city's populace about the identity of the one whose appearance is creating such tumult, the crowd of pilgrims acclaims him as a prophet from Nazareth. Ironically, the citizens of Israel's capital **do not know that they are about to meet their king. . .**

Jesus is not a military conqueror or a distinguished visitor. His actions culminate not in legitimization but in **confrontation (21:12–16)**. For their part, the readers know that Jesus is in fact the king (**21:5**), and that in failing to receive him properly, the city's leadership is in fact dishonoring their king, a deed bound to have dire consequences. This triumph, then, is ultimately an act of judgment.

Warren Wiersbe: But the Jews still did not recognize Jesus as their King. What caused Israel's **spiritual blindness**? For one thing, their religious leaders had robbed them of the truth of their own Word and had substituted man-made traditions (**Luke 11:52**). The leaders were not interested in truth; they were concerned only with protecting their own interests (**John 11:47-53**). "*We have no king but Caesar!*" was their confession of willful blindness. Even our Lord's miracles did not convince them. And the longer they resisted the truth, the blinder they became (**John 12:35ff.**).

(:1a) GEOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION

"And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives,"

Stu Weber: The name *Bethphage* means "*House of Unripe Figs.*" This was a village on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The mountain was several hundred feet higher than Jerusalem, providing a spectacular view of the city.

William Barclay: It was the Passover time, and Jerusalem and the whole surrounding neighbourhood were crowded with pilgrims. Thirty years later, a Roman governor was to take a census of the lambs slain in Jerusalem for the Passover and find that the number was not far off 250,000. It was the Passover regulation that there must be a party of a minimum of ten for each lamb, which means that at that Passover time more than 2,500,000 people had crowded their way into Jerusalem. The law was that every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem must come to the Passover; but not only the Jews of Palestine, Jews from every corner of the world made their way to the greatest of their national festivals. Jesus could not have

chosen a more dramatic moment; it was into a city surging with people keyed up with religious expectations that he came.

Donald Hagner: [Bethphage] was apparently on τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν, “*the Mount of Olives*,” just overlooking Jerusalem and close to **Bethany**, with which it is linked in **Mark 11:1; Luke 19:28**. The village to which the two disciples were sent (v. 2) was probably this Bethany. **Zech 14:4** (a passage with messianic associations) speaks of Yahweh standing on the Mount of Olives in the time of eschatological fulfillment, and perhaps for this reason it is from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascends to heaven and to that site that he will return when the eschaton is fully and finally to dawn (cf. **Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:11–12**; Jos., Ant. 20.8.6 §169; J.W. 2.13.5 §§261–62).

I. (:1b-5) PREPARATION FOR PUBLIC ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM AS THE MESSIAH

A. (:1b-3) Donkey Retrieval Showing Divine Control

1. (:1b-2) Instructions Based on Divine Control

“then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me.’”

Charles Swindoll: The fact is, though two beasts of burden were present at the Triumphal Entry, Jesus didn’t ride on both animals at once. In no case would that be a believable scenario. Jesus **rode on the younger donkey**, upon which no one had ever ridden. Mark, Luke, and John focus full attention on the single animal, the colt, upon which Jesus rode. They saw no need to mention the other beast of burden that would have been carrying only excess baggage and clothing. . .

The **geography** of this event is important. Because of the journey through peaks and valleys from Bethany to Jerusalem, thousands of pilgrims on the road would have been able to see from a distance the man riding on a young donkey. The presence of the colt’s mother beside him would have been a clue that the rider was making some kind of statement. I’m sure that with that many devoted Jews seeing the scene from either above or below, several in the crowd would have made the connection with the messianic prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9**.

Donald Hagner: the two animals, which were kept so closely together, are conceptually regarded as a **single, inseparable unit** (which is probably also how Matthew understood the Zechariah quotation with its literally understood coming “upon” two animals; see **Frenz**), despite the plural language, which, as argued above, is kept by Matthew for the detailed coincidence with the OT quotation. Thus when Jesus sat upon “*them*,” we are probably to understand simply that Jesus sat upon the colt with the ass just beside it.

David Turner: Jesus’s supernatural knowledge and control of this situation are remarkable in light of Matthew’s emphasis on his humility. To stress the entry as an acted parable (**Hill** 1972: 290) of Jesus’s humility, Matthew cites **Zech. 9:9**, conflated with introductory words from **Isa. 62:11** (cf. **John 12:14–15**). The term “*daughter of Zion*” is a common biblical expression that refers to Jerusalem and its inhabitants (cf., e.g., **2 Kings 19:21; Ps. 9:14; Isa. 1:8; 16:1; 37:22; Jer. 4:31; 6:2; Lam. 1:6; Mic. 4:8, 10, 13; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 2:10**). **Zechariah 9:9** mentions that the coming king will be just, bring salvation, and be humble, but Matthew selects only the last characteristic, humility (cf. **Matt. 5:5, 9; 11:29**). Humility is commonly mentioned as a

characteristic of biblical kings: Saul (1 Sam. 9:21), David (2 Sam. 7:18–19), Ahab (1 Kings 21:29), and Josiah (2 Kings 22:18–20).

2. (:3) Insistence Based on Divine Control

“And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

Craig Blomberg: As again later with their preparation for the Passover (26:18), it is not clear whether the disciples' rendezvous stems from Jesus' prior arrangements or from his supernatural insight. “*The Lord*” is, more literally, their **Lord/Master** and also suggests a double entendre. The disciples will act as if they are servants of the donkey's owner. If anyone becomes suspicious of their behavior, their reply need mean nothing more than that the owner has asked them to bring him the animals. But Matthew undoubtedly sees Jesus as the true Master, not only of the donkeys but of all people's property, which he can rightfully demand at any time.

B. (:4-5) Prophetic Fulfilment Showing Humility of Mission

“Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 5 Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

Daniel Doriani: The prophecy has three elements.

1. First, Jerusalem must rejoice, for her king is coming.
2. Second, the king comes gently, in peace. He does not come to make war, but to remove the instruments of war—chariots, war horses, and battle bows.
3. Third, the king brings salvation, for his reign will extend from sea to sea.

R. T. France: Matthew (like John) explains Jesus' ride on the donkey as the fulfillment of **Zech 9:9**. Even without an explicit quotation of that prophecy in the text, any Jewish reader of the story could hardly fail to be reminded of it and of the royal ideology which underlies it. Zechariah's prophecy of a humble and peaceful king coming to Jerusalem “*vindicated and saved*” is based on the story of David's return to the city after the defeat of Absalom's rebellion, when he came in triumph as king, and yet humbly and in peace (2 Sam 19–20). When the Son of David chose to ride down to the city from the Mount of Olives on a donkey, the acted allusion was unmistakable. A further messianic nuance is added by the “*foal*” and “*donkey's colt*” which feature in the royal oracle of **Gen 49:10–11**, and observers might also have remembered how Solomon, the son of David, rode on a mule to his enthronement in **1 Kgs 1:38–40**. We shall note below (see on vv. 2–3) that Jesus' donkey-ride was a matter of **deliberate choice**, and indeed probably of **careful planning**, rather than a matter of necessity. Among a crowd of pilgrims on foot the rider on the donkey intended to be noticed and expected his supporters to draw the appropriate conclusion. He cannot have been surprised or displeased when they did. Such a **deliberately provocative approach** to the city is consistent also with the equally public and provocative action which Jesus was to take on his arrival in the temple area (vv. 12–13). Among the Passover crowds coming into the city it would have been possible for Jesus and his disciples to arrive without drawing attention to themselves, but **Jesus has not come to slip quietly into Jerusalem. . .**

But in deliberately presenting himself before Jerusalem as its **messianic king**, Jesus has chosen an OT model which subverts any popular militaristic idea of kingship. The meek, peaceful donkey-rider of **Zech 9:9** is not a potential leader of an anti-Roman insurrection. In **20:25–28**

Jesus has spoken of a type of leadership which is completely opposed to the world's notions of kingship and authority, and now he models it in the "meekness" of his royal procession to the city.

II. (:6-9) PRAISE ACCOMPANYING PUBLIC ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM AS THE MESSIAH

A. (:6-7) Donkey Saddling

1. (:6) Following Instructions

"And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them,"

2. (:7) Functioning Saddle

"and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat."

B. (:8-9) Celebratory Procession of Praise

1. (:8) Paving the Way

"And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road."

Donald Hagner: Although the king rides into the city humbly upon the lowly colt of an ass, the crowds bring him into the city with a public demonstration befitting a king.

Craig Blomberg: The whole picture conveys **celebration** and **honor**, reminiscent of the victory parades with which triumphant kings and generals in Old Testament and intertestamental times were welcomed (cf. **2 Kgs 9:13; 1 Macc 13:51**). The strewing of garments and branches further demonstrates how the crowds have the wrong messianic concept. There will be no victory party when they arrive in Jerusalem.

2. (:9) Praising the Messianic King

"And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!'"

William Barclay: It may be that the word *hosanna* had lost some of its original meaning, and that it had become to some extent only a cry of welcome and of acclamation, like 'Hail!'; but essentially it is a people's cry for deliverance and for help in the day of their trouble; it is an oppressed people's cry to their saviour and their king.

R. T. France: "*Hosanna*" and "*Blessed is he who comes in the Lord's name*" both derive from **Psalm 118** (vv. 25 and 26 respectively), which was the last and longest of the Hallel psalms (**113–118**) traditionally chanted at the major festivals in Jerusalem. The latter part of **Ps 118** apparently describes a joyful pilgrimage (with green branches, v. 27) into the temple, led by the king (the "*one who comes in the Lord's name*"), and it is from those verses that the crowd's shouts are drawn. "*Hosanna*" is a Greek representation of the Hebrew *hôšî' â-nâ'*, "*Save us now*", which opens the plea for God's blessing in v. 25; the phrase seems to have passed into more general use as a shout of praise, like *Hallelujah*, and that is how it is used here, where the following dative "*to the Son of David*" makes it clear that it is an ascription of praise rather than a prayer. The same sense is required in the second Hosanna clause by the addition of "*in the*

highest,” a reverent way of speaking of God in heaven (cf. **Luke 2:14**). The fact that the same praise formula is applied to the Son of David and to God is interesting in the light of later christological developments, but that is probably to read too much into the instinctive exuberance of this pilgrim crowd. In the psalm “*the one who comes in the Lord’s name*” was probably the king, leading the festival procession, and as such the acclamation fits well with Jesus’ regal approach to the city. But in the light of the title “*Son of David*” it seems clear that for the crowd Jesus was not just any king, but the expected Messiah whose “*coming*” the prophets had foretold.

Leon Morris: Matthew goes on to the acclamations that were a feature of the excitement. He speaks of two crowds, one ahead of Jesus and one behind. The one will doubtless be pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the Passover (whose enthusiasm was perhaps generated because they had heard his teaching and seen his miracles in Galilee), and the other is probably mainly local, those who lived in the capital city and its environs (and who had been there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead or had heard of it). Characteristically Matthew has the plural form crowds for both. His verb were shouting is in the imperfect tense, which indicates that the shouting kept on for quite some time. The picture we get is one of **great excitement**. Evidently there were many Galileans who had thought of Jesus as the Messiah and were disappointed that in his own area he made no public declaration of who he was and of his determination to establish a kingdom that would throw the mighty Romans out of the land. But they had heard his teaching and they had seen him do miracles. As a result they had hoped that he would proclaim himself King, and they were prepared to follow him if he did. Now they thought he was going to fulfil their hopes, and they were ecstatic at the prospect. . .

To come “*in the name*” of anyone was to come in some sense representing him and to come in order to set forward his purposes. The crowds proclaim Jesus as God’s representative, one who would set forward the divine purpose. Luke and John both include “*the king*” in this part of the crowd’s cry, and although Matthew does not use the expression, it is implied. It was because they foresaw a Galilean King that the crowd of pilgrims got so excited. They cried “*Hosanna*” once again, and this time added “*in the highest*.” It is an enthusiastic cry and probably means that Jesus is to be praised everywhere, right up to heaven itself.

Daniel Doriani: “*Hosanna*” was often a **nationalistic cry**, rather like “God save the king” in England or “God bless America” in the United States.

III. (:10-11) PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF JESUS INADEQUATE

A. (:10) Curiosity Regarding Jesus’ Identity

“*And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, ‘Who is this?’*”

R. T. France: The entry follows the royal acclamation, in which the people of Jerusalem are not yet involved. What happens in vv. 8–9 is outside the city walls, and the people who hail Jesus as the Son of David are specifically described as **Jesus’ traveling companions**, “*the crowds, both those who were going ahead of him and those who were following him.*” (v. 9) It is only in v. 10 that we are introduced to the **people of the city**, and their reaction is specifically contrasted in vv. 10–11 with that of the enthusiastic, mainly Galilean (see on 20:29) crowd. All this can be discerned by the careful reader of **Mark 11:1–11**, but Matthew, by his addition of vv. 10–11, has more clearly drawn the reader’s attention to the **opposing views of the Galilean pilgrims and of the people of Jerusalem**. It is surprising how many readers, unaware of the “tribal” distinction between Galilee and Judea, have failed to notice this element of the story, and so continue to talk

and preach about the fickleness of a crowd which could shout “Hosanna” one day and “Crucify him” a few days later. That is an unfortunate misreading both of the texts and of the historical situation: **the Jerusalem crowd of 27:15–25 were not the same people as the pilgrims who had escorted Jesus into the city.**

B. (:11) Characterization as a Galilean Prophet

“And the multitudes were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

Richard Gardner: Finally, in a piece of narration found only in Matthew (**vv. 10-11**), Jerusalem itself responds to Jesus’ festive entry. With the same verb he uses elsewhere to describe a storm or earthquake (cf. **8:24; 24:7; 27:51-54; 28:2-4**), Matthew tells us that the whole city was **thrown into an uproar** (GNB). The description recalls the scene in **2:3** when all Jerusalem was troubled by the news of Jesus’ birth! So it is that the residents of the city ask: *Who is this?* The somewhat subdued answer identifies Jesus in terms of his Galilean roots (cf. **2:23; 4:12-16**) and the **prophetic role** in which he will soon confront the city. It is an ominous answer, we will learn shortly, because Jerusalem has a reputation of killing God’s prophets (**23:37**). To call Jesus a prophet, therefore, is to signal in advance the fate that awaits him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is “**The Triumphal Entry**” the best title for this incident?
- 2) How did Jesus demonstrate that **He was in control** of all the events leading up to His crucifixion and resurrection?
- 3) If Jesus fulfilled prophecy relating to His first coming and death and resurrection in such **detail**, what should we expect with respect to prophecies regarding His second coming?
- 4) What different types of **responses** to Jesus do we see in this passage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. T. France: Here, for the first time in the Synoptic accounts¹ (except for a childhood visit in **Luke 2:41–52**), Jesus and his disciples come to the Jewish capital, the site of the temple which was the earthly focus of the religion of Israel. The visit will be brief. All the narrative of **21:1 to 28:15** appears to cover a period of only about **one week**, focused on the Passover festival which takes place as its climax and in the context of which Jesus will be executed. During this week the events which Jesus has so starkly predicted in **16:21; 17:22–23** and **20:17–19** will at last take place, and the fulfillment of those predictions will be carefully documented in these chapters. The shadow of those events has fallen across the whole of the journey narrative in **chapters 16–20**, and now with the arrival of Jesus and his Galilean followers outside the city walls we see the beginning of the **decisive confrontation** with the Judean authorities for which we have been well prepared. . .

The Confrontation Begins: Three Symbolic Actions (21:1–27)

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem is deliberately dramatic. It begins with two actions designed to draw attention and to provoke people to think about Jesus' messianic claim (the royal procession to the city walls and the attack on the traders in the temple courtyard), together with a further symbolic action (the miraculous destruction of the fruitless fig-tree) which, though witnessed only by Jesus' immediate entourage, seems to be closely connected with his prophetic action in the temple. In the first of these actions Jesus is supported and acclaimed by the pilgrim crowd who accompany him to Jerusalem, but in the second he apparently acts alone. In both cases, however, Matthew tells us of the hostile reaction of Jerusalem, in the first case in the response of "*the whole city*" (v. 10) and in the second as focused in the leading group of "*chief priests and scribes*" (v. 15). Jesus has publicly thrown down the gauntlet, and so this section concludes with the response of the "*chief priests and elders of the people,*" representing the Sanhedrin, who publicly question Jesus' right to act in this high-handed way. That this challenge takes place in the temple courtyard where Jesus' most provocative action has been staged sets the scene for the continuing confrontation which will all be set in the same temple area until Jesus finally and decisively leaves the temple in **24:1**.

Three aspects of the historical situation are important for understanding the significance of these and the following incidents in Jerusalem.

(1) The "temple." I have spoken of "the temple courtyard" (where Matthew speaks simply of "the temple") to make it clear that the location for these scenes is not the temple building itself, the place of sacrifice (into which only priests were allowed to go) but the much more extensive area surrounding the temple building, which we refer to as the Court of the Gentiles. The majority of the huge temple complex (about 13.5 hectares, 33 acres, roughly six times the size of Trafalgar Square) consisted of this open space, nearly a mile in circumference, surrounding the temple building and its inner courtyards and itself surrounded by porticoes, into which anyone could go so long as they did not pass the barriers which restricted the central area to Jews. It formed the natural meeting place for visitors and locals alike, especially at festival seasons, and the porticoes provided shaded areas for groups to gather and for teachers to collect a crowd, and in the days before the Passover also for the flourishing market in sacrificial animals and sacred money (see below). When Jesus "*taught in the temple*" he may well have been one of several such teachers, but he was in the place where people in general could best be reached.

(2) Passover. Of the three pilgrimage festivals when all adult male Jews were in theory expected to visit the temple in Jerusalem (Passover, Weeks [Pentecost] and Tabernacles; **Deut 16:16**) Passover seems to have been the most enthusiastically observed. Passover pilgrims came not only from Galilee and other Palestinian provinces, but from all over the Mediterranean world where Jews were settled. The nearest modern equivalent is perhaps the Hajj to Mecca. Ancient and modern estimates of the numbers involved vary wildly, but the calculation of J. Jeremias⁷ perhaps offers a reasonable approximation: he estimates the normal population of Jerusalem at the time as about 30,000, but the number present at Passover as something like 180,000. There were therefore many times more people than the city could properly accommodate, and Passover groups camped all around the city (see on **21:17**). The official city limits were extended at Passover time to include the surrounding hill-sides, Bethphage (v. 1) being the outer limit according to the Talmud. The temple courtyard would be the natural gathering ground for this huge throng of people during the festival.

(3) Galileans. A Galilean was essentially a foreigner in Jerusalem, and Jesus' entourage, being made up of Galileans, would normally stand out as distinctive among the Jerusalem crowd. At Passover time the cosmopolitan crowd would make this less obvious, and of course there would be many other Galileans present. We have already noted (see on **20:29**) that the "*large crowd*" which accompanied Jesus to the city were probably mainly Galileans, and no doubt others were already there or arrived during the week. We shall note below in **vv. 10–11** the impact of this Galilean influx on the city. But Jesus' recorded dealings are not with the larger Passover crowd but with the Jerusalem authorities, and to them the challenge of the prophet from Nazareth and his Galilean movement (**v. 11**) represented an unwelcome threat. The comment on Peter's Galilean accent in **26:73** reveals something of the cultural background to this confrontation.

Matthew Henry: In the borrowing of this donkey,

(1) We have an instance of Christ's **knowledge**. Christ could tell his disciples where they should find a donkey tied, and a colt with her.

(2) We have an instance of his **power** over the spirits of men. Christ asserts his right to use the donkey, in bidding them bring it to him; but he foresees some hindrance which the disciples might meet with in this service; "*If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them.*" What Christ sets us to do, he will bear us out in the doing of; "*He will send them right away.*"

(3) We have an example of **justice and honesty**, in not using the donkey without the owner's consent.

William Barclay: We may then take it that Jesus' actions in this incident were planned and deliberate. He was following a method of awakening people's minds which was deeply interwoven with the methods of the prophets. Again and again in the religious history of Israel, when the prophets felt that words were of no avail against a barrier of indifference or incomprehension, they put their message into a **dramatic act** which the people could not fail to see and to understand.

There are two pictures behind Jesus' dramatic action.

(1) There is the picture of **Zechariah 9:9**, in which the prophet saw the king coming to Jerusalem, humble and riding upon a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey. In the first instance, Jesus' dramatic action is a **deliberate messianic claim**. He was here offering himself to the people, at a time when Jerusalem was surging with Jews from all over the country and from all over the world, as the Anointed One of God. Just what Jesus meant by that claim we shall go on to see; but that he made the claim there is no doubt.

(2) There may have been another intention in Jesus' mind. One of the supreme disasters of Jewish history was the capture of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes about 175 BC. Antiochus was determined to stamp out Judaism and to introduce into Palestine Greek ways of life and worship. He deliberately profaned the Temple, offering pig's flesh on the altar, making sacrifices to Olympian Zeus, and even turning the Temple chambers into public brothels. It was then that the Maccabees rose against him and ultimately rescued their native land. In due time, Jerusalem was retaken and the desecrated Temple was restored and purified and rededicated. In 2 Maccabees 10:7, we read of the **rejoicing of that great day**: 'Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to

him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place.' On that day, the people carried the palm branches and sang their psalms; it is an almost exact description of the actions of the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem.

It is at least possible that Jesus knew this, and that he entered into Jerusalem with the deliberate intention of cleansing God's house as Judas Maccabaeus had done 200 years before. That was in fact what Jesus did. **He may well be saying in dramatic symbol not only that he was the Anointed One of God, but also that he had come to cleanse the House of God from the abuses which defiled it and its worship.** Had not Malachi said that the Lord would suddenly come to his Temple (**Malachi 3:1**)? And, in his vision of judgment, had not Ezekiel seen the terrible judgment of God begin at the sanctuary (**Ezekiel 9:6**)?

To conclude our study of this incident, let us look at Jesus in its setting. It shows us three things about him.

(1) It shows us his **courage**. Jesus knew full well that he was entering a hostile city. However enthusiastic the crowd might be, the authorities hated him and had sworn to eliminate him; and with them lay the last word. Almost any other man in such a case would have considered discretion the better part of valour; and, if he had come to Jerusalem at all, would have slipped in under cover of night and kept prudently to the back streets until he reached his shelter. But Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that deliberately set himself in the centre of the stage and deliberately riveted every eye upon himself. All through his last days, there is in his every action a kind of magnificent and sublime defiance; and here he begins the last act with a flinging down of the gauntlet, a deliberate challenge to the authorities to do their worst.

(2) It shows us his **claim**. Certainly it shows us his claim to be God's Messiah, God's Anointed One; very probably it shows us his claim to be the cleanser of the Temple. If Jesus had been content to claim to be a prophet, the probability is that he need never have died. But he could be satisfied with nothing less than the highest place. With Jesus, it is all or nothing. People must acknowledge him as king, or not receive him at all.

(3) Equally, it shows us his **appeal**. It was not the kingship of the throne which he claimed; it was the kingship of the heart. He came humbly and riding upon a donkey. We must be careful to see the real meaning of that. In western lands, the donkey is a despised animal; but in the middle east the donkey could be a noble animal. Often a king came riding upon a donkey; but when he did, it was the sign that he came in peace. The horse was the mount of war; the donkey was the mount of peace. So when Jesus claimed to be king, he claimed to be the king of peace. He showed that he came not to destroy but to love; not to condemn but to help; not in the might of arms but in the strength of love.

So here, at one and the same time, we see the courage of Christ, the claim of Christ and the appeal of Christ. It was a last invitation to men and women to open not their palaces but their hearts to him.

Donald Hagner: Jesus enters Jerusalem humbly, seated upon a lowly beast of burden, while being acclaimed the messianic king of the line of David and accepting this acclaim. The arrangements for the entry are made under divine superintendence and in fulfillment of prophecy. Yet in spite of this the crowds hardly understood the significance of this humble entry of Jesus into the capital. Their thoughts concerning the messianic king, the Son of David, were

dominated by ideas of power, glory, the overthrow of the Roman authorities, and the establishment of a national-political kingdom. It was precisely for this reason that earlier Jesus tried to keep his messianic identity a secret (which was now no longer necessary). If the crowds' identification of Jesus as the Davidic king was correct, they missed the paradoxical character of that kingship. The irony was that the king, who really was the promised Messiah, came to Jerusalem not as a warrior upon a stallion but humbly as a servant—indeed, as the servant who had come to die. The goal was a more fundamental salvation and a kingdom that was universal in scope, one that far transcended the limited horizon of the crowds.

Grant Osborne: **Wilkins** provides an excellent harmony of the events that take place during this week:

Friday	Arrival in Bethany (John 12:1)
Saturday	Mary's anointing of Jesus (John 12:2–8; cf. Matt 26:6–13 par.)
Sunday	Triumphal entry (Matt 21:1–11 par.), surveying the temple (Mark 11:11), return to Bethany (Matt 21:17; Mark 11:11)
Monday	Cleansing the temple (21:12–13 par.); cursing the fig tree (21:18–22); miracles and challenge in the temple (21:14–16); return to Bethany (Mark 11:19)
Tuesday	Disciples' questions regarding the fig tree (Mark 11:20–21); debates with the leaders in the temple (Matt 21:23–22:46 par.); Olivet Discourse after return to Bethany (Matt 24–25)
Wednesday	Little recorded in the gospels—Jesus and disciples apparently remain in Bethany; Judas arranges for his betrayal (26:14–16 par.)
Thursday	Preparation for Passover (26:17–19 par.); after sundown, Passover meal and Last Supper (26:20–35); Farewell Discourse (John 13–17); Gethsemane (Matt 26:30–46 par.)
Friday	After midnight, the betrayal and arrest (26:47–56); Jewish trials—Annas (John 18:13–14), Caiaphas and partial Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57–75 par.), full Sanhedrin (27:1–2); Roman trial—Pilate (27:2–14 par.), Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6–12), Pilate (Matt 27:15–26 par.); crucifixion (9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 27:27–56); burial (27:57–61 par.); tomb sealed with guards (27:62–66)

Stanley Saunders: His entry into Jerusalem is a “prophetic-symbolic” action, a form of “street theater,” in which he will use the generic signals associated with the “parousias” of emperors and military conquerors in conjunction with signs that point to the character of his rule. By twisting the political rituals associated with Roman and Jewish elite power to his own ends, he puts the powers into his parody parade. Jesus’ “triumphal entry” signals the triumph of God’s identification with the weak, the lowly, and the marginal—those who will come to him for healing and to praise him in the temple in the next episode (21:14–16). Jesus’ actions implicitly make the **source** and **character of his power** the central issue (cf. 21:23). On the world’s terms, this scene is not really triumphal at all, but an affirmation of the kind of power Jesus has displayed all during his ministry in Galilee, and simultaneously a mockery of what ordinarily passes for power among the Jerusalem elite. The “triumphal entry” tears the facade from the scaffolding that holds the Jerusalem “establishment” together.

Throughout this story Matthew carefully foreshadows events, images, and themes that will be developed in the subsequent narrative (e.g., Mount of Olives, **Matt. 24:3; 26:30**; Jesus as king, **27:11, 29, 37, 42**; Son of David, **21:15; 22:42–44**; prophet, **21:46; 26:68**; Jerusalem shaken, **27:51, 54**). The evangelist also continues to exhibit a penchant for “twos”: two citations of Scripture around which the passage is structured (**21:5 = Isaiah 62:11** and **Zechariah 9:9; 21:9 = Psalm 118:25–26**); two disciples who go to secure the animals for Jesus’ entry; and not one, but two animals upon which Jesus rides. Both of the citations focus on God’s victory over the nations on Israel’s behalf, and establish a clear messianic frame for Jesus’ entrance. The reference to **Psalm 118**, which will be featured again later in the chapter (**21:42**), suggests the fate that awaits him at the hands of Israel’s leaders and Rome’s imperial order, but also affirms God’s steadfast love and vindication of the psalmist before his enemies. The acclamation of Jesus as Son of David according to this psalm is one of many ironic references in this story.

John MacArthur: The Humble Coronation of Christ

I. THE END OF THE PILGRIMAGE

Now this is a very important event in these eleven verses because it initiates the last week of the life of our Lord prior to His crucifixion. It is the last drama. It is His last public act prior to being crucified, the last event of His ministry. And it has to be treated with a great amount of respect, and it has to be understood for what it really is or you won’t understand what comes after it. I really feel that the earthly coronation of Jesus Christ, sometimes called the triumphal entry, gets bypassed far too much. It is a very **significant event**. And you’ll see that significance unfold as we examine it together.

He wanted to demonstrate to the world that He was no victim, that He was not caught up in some euphoric Messianic movement, but that it was **all under His total control**, and it was all within His own power. Every detail was worked out accurately. And He wanted to create a mass demonstration. That’s right. He wanted the people to cry “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” He wanted them to cry out that He was the Messiah, because He wanted it in their very mouths that He had indeed proved Himself to be who He was. He wanted them to bespeak the fact that there was no doubt about the credentials of Jesus Christ. He wanted that whole mob, that whole national multitude to be crying out that this was the Messiah, so that forever and always it could never be said they really didn’t have enough information. They knew what He had taught and they knew what He had done. And the climax of it all was the resurrection of Lazarus whom they had known to be dead for four days. And out of their own mouths came their own affirmation that became for

them either the statement of their true belief or the statement of their damnation, because they knew who He was. And He set the scene to put it in their own mouths, and they said it. The **credentials were overwhelming**. The proof was unanswerable.

And there is another reason that He created this mass demonstration, and that is because it would lead to the anger of the Pharisees, which ultimately would lead them to desire His life, which would ultimately lead to His crucifixion. And He had to set that in motion, too, because it was important not only that He be selected as the Lamb to die, but that He die on the Passover day. And He had to set that all in motion. I don't know if you know this, but the day He rode in there, on Monday, was the day traditionally that the Jews selected their lamb for sacrifice. And He offered Himself on that day as the Lamb for the whole world. And He had set it in motion so that by Friday the Passover day, He would die. And so Jesus took charge of all the events, creating the situation as He wanted to create it. He also did what He did here, sending the disciples to get these two animals, in order to fulfill prophecy, as it says in verse 4. "*It was all done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.*" He was in control of everything. He was on a divine schedule. And so He **initiated His own coronation**. And so we begin then with the end of the pilgrimage. And we see Him as He arrives at Jerusalem. . .

II. THE EXACTNESS OF PROPHECY

He's not a king like Alexander the Great. Not at all. He's not a foreign tyrant; He's Israel's own king. He's not cruel and oppressive; He's righteous and bringing salvation, says Zechariah 9:9. Literally the text says, "Showing Himself a Savior." He's not slaying; He's saving. He's not rich; He's poor. He's not proud; He's meek. He's not riding a great steed; He's riding a donkey's colt. You say, what's the point? The point is, He's a king unlike any other king, and He has a coronation unlike any other coronation. It's a strange coming by kingly standards. But He's declaring who He is in a very important way.

III. THE EPITOME OF PRAISE (:8-9)

And the palm branches they threw down, palm branches – indicated in **John 12** to be palm branches. Here it doesn't say what they were – were signs of salvation, symbols of joy. You can read about it in **Revelation 7:9**. They're waved at a time of **great joy**, a time of celebrating salvation. And so they're **celebrating salvation**. There's a joy. There's an excitement, an ecstasy as He comes in. They knew who He was. They knew what He taught. And they knew what He'd done. And they knew He could raise the dead. And so this multitude moves out, throws everything at His feet. And they cry out – look what they cry, "*Hosanna to the Son of David.*" Hosanna means save now – save now – save now. They're crying for salvation. Now listen to me. But it is not soul salvation. It is military deliverance they're after.

IV. THE ELEMENT OF PERPLEXITY (:10-11)

So, that's how it is with Jesus. He offers Himself as a King and there are a few who understand – a few. And they embrace Him as the King that He is, the King of peace who brings salvation and makes men right with God. And then there is a group of people who understand who He is, and they see all of His credentials, but they're looking for external stuff. They want the materialistic kingdom: health, wealth, happiness, here now, give it to me fast. And they're not willing to face the reality of their sinfulness and emptiness and estrangement from God, and so they curse Him

when He confronts that. And then there is the rabble crowd that just get caught up in the sweep and can go either way. How is it with you?

J. Ligon Duncan: The Triumphal Entry

I. We must live in the light of Jesus' kingly knowledge.

Now the triumphal entry of Jesus, and that's what this passage records, is done by Jesus for some very specific purposes. He has, in His design, at least four things that He wants to do by entering into Jerusalem in this way and I'd like to rehearse those things with you very briefly.

First of all, by entering into Jerusalem this way, Jesus is evoking a display of enthusiasm on the part of the crowds for Him. And He knew that the enthusiasm of the crowds was going to provoke the religious leaders.

Now secondly, and connected to that, Jesus by entering into Jerusalem this way, is provoking a crisis response on the part of the Sanhedrin.

Thirdly, Jesus by going into Jerusalem this way, fulfilled messianic prophecy recorded about him in Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9. Jesus does not attempt to restrain the crowd from saying to him "*Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*" He doesn't attempt to stop them from quoting messianic psalms, like **Psalm 118** as they cry out to him. He had always done that before but now His time has arrived. And what is He doing? In this time when all of Israel is gathered in Jerusalem, He wants everyone to see very clearly who He claims to be and what He has come to do. And so by entering into Jerusalem this way, and drawing attention to His person in the work, He is actually advertising who He is and what He has come to do.

And finally, Jesus as He enters in this way to Jerusalem, is once again showing us that what Israel expected their Messiah to be like was not going to be what they got when He came. Once again, as Israel expects a great conquering military leader to come into Jerusalem with his mass armies to expunge those filthy Gentile Romans from the land to set up a rule of righteousness; to cast out those who are oppressive and wicked and corrupt in government to set up a rule of justice for all the people from the least to the greatest; to expand the boundaries of Israel to the former bounds of the Solomonic empire; to rule once again and set up a nation and a kingdom that would never fail; as they were expecting that, they get the Messiah riding into the town on a donkey. Once again, Jesus is teaching us that He is a King indeed, but He is not going to fit the expectations of the people of Israel. And so for all those reasons, Jesus enters into Jerusalem in this way.

II. Scripture proves His claims and reveals His person and work.

There's a second thing I'd like for you to see in this passage in verses 4 and 5. Not only do we have that kingly command and prediction of the first three verses, but we have this fulfillment of the Scriptures in this action of taking the foal and Christ riding on that foal into Jerusalem. We see a fulfillment of the Scriptures and we note again that Scripture proves Jesus' claims and reveals His person and work. Let me say that again a little bit differently. Scripture not only proves Jesus' claims, it also reveals His person and work so that when we attend Scripture, our idea of the Savior is changed so that we understand Him like He wants to be understood. We all

have our preconceptions of Jesus. But Jesus wants to define Himself to us and even as we see Him fulfill Scripture, He is defining Himself to us.

III. Jesus' coming demands a response.

David Thompson: This passage of Scripture is commonly referred to as "Christ's Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem." However, when we examine what is actually here, it would be better termed "Christ's Tragic Entry Into Jerusalem." This event is so crucial to the life of Jesus Christ that it is described by all Gospel writers (**Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-42, John 12:12-14**).

EVEN THOUGH JESUS WAS PUBLICALLY HONORED AS HE ENTERED JERUSALEM, THE RESPONSE OF MOST OF THE PEOPLE WAS TRAGICALLY EMOTIONAL AND NOT TRULY SPIRITUAL.

This should have been the greatest day in the history of Israel. The Davidic King, the Messiah was entering God's capital city, Jerusalem. But as we shall see, Christ's entrance stirs the emotions but it doesn't change the hearts.

TEXT: Matthew 21:12-17

TITLE: CLEANSING TEMPLE CORRUPTION

BIG IDEA:

THE MESSIAH KING ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE TEMPLE IN ANTICIPATION OF IMPENDING JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Doriani: We call this episode “the cleansing of the temple” but that phrase understates the significance of Jesus’ action. By taking such decisive action, Jesus is **asserting his authority** over the center of Israel’s religion and identity. Like the prophets of old, he protests against abuses in the temple. As Israel’s great high priest, he oversees the proper use of the temple, its worship and its sacrifices. As king, he exercises authority by governing the central symbol of Israel’s faith, the centerpiece of Israel’s identity as God’s people.

When Jesus cast out the money changers, he judged the priests and leaders who allowed such corruption of the temple. In fact, Mark says that at least for a while Jesus shut the temple down: he “*would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple courts*” (11:16). If animals and people cannot go in or out, the temple is closed, at least temporarily.

Grant Osborne: The **authority** of Jesus Messiah, recognized at the entry into Jerusalem, is now demonstrated at the temple. The next two chapters center on this authority, seen first in cleansing the temple of evil practices, portrayed as judgment in the parabolic act that follows (vv. 18–22), and second in the temple debates with the leaders (21:23 – 22:46).

Jesus, called a prophet by the people (21:11, 46), now acts like a prophet and condemns the leaders for corrupting God’s temple. Via another prophetic symbolic action (as in 21:1–11) he purifies the temple of its false commercial activity (vv. 12–13) and then as the Son of David heals “*the blind and the lame*” (vv. 14–17). . .

Jesus has revealed himself not only as Messiah but also as **eschatological Judge** of his people. As royal Davidic Messiah, Jesus is also Lord of all and has complete authority to stand in judgment over the nation and the temple. So Jesus is the humble King whose office is to die as the suffering Servant, yet also the great King who will sit on his judgment seat over all, including the church. He has come to humble the proud leaders and exalt the powerless and the children.

Donald Hagner: When the Son of David, the messianic king, comes to Jerusalem, he goes directly to the temple, the physical center of the Jewish faith. There he performs a symbolic act in clearing the temple of mercantile activity by which he points to his own authority and identity as well as to a symptom of the failure of Judaism. In the temple, furthermore, he heals the blind and the lame, thereby pointing to the real presence of the messianic kingdom in and through his ministry, the rule of God wherein the unhindered communion between God and humanity—the very thing the temple had symbolized—alone is realized. He finally allows himself to be proclaimed Son of David and accepts the affirmation as he had in the entry into the city. One “*greater than the temple*” is here (12:6). The Messiah is thus among his people in judgment and

in healing. The truth of Jesus' identity can be made public; the claim will not be widely received but instead will bring Jesus to the cross.

I. (:12-13) CONFRONTING TEMPLE CORRUPTION

A. (:12) Physical Confrontation and Cleansing of Corrupt Temple Commerce

1. Bold Entrance into the Temple

“And Jesus entered the temple”

Grant Osborne: “*The temple*” (τὸ ἱερόν) refers to the whole complex, not just the “*inner sanctuary*” (ναός).

R. T. France: On arriving in Jerusalem from the east the first area reached was the temple precinct. The importance of this sacred area for Jewish ideology can hardly be exaggerated. It was not only the focus of the nation's religious life, but also a symbol of **national identity and pride**, particularly since the Maccabean revolt of the second century BC had succeeded in reclaiming it from the deliberate paganization attempted by Antiochus Epiphanes. The purification and rededication of the temple in 164 BC were commemorated annually thereafter in the Festival of Dedication. The rebuilding and enlargement of the temple by Herod the Great had been on a scale to match its patriotic significance; as a later rabbi remembered, “It used to be said: He who has not seen the temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building.” (b. B. Bat. 4a)

Matthew's account reads as if Jesus went straight into the temple area and took action straight away, whereas **Mark 11:11–15** inserts a **day's delay**. In Matthew's account Jesus' second dramatic gesture thus follows directly and appropriately from the first, and the effect is no less startling and provocative. The day's delay mentioned by Mark suggests, however, that it was less a spontaneous outburst of anger than a **planned act of defiance and public demonstration of the Messiah's authority**.

2. Beat-down Expulsion of the Marketplace Participants

“and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple,”

Stu Weber: The practice of selling sacrificial animals in Jerusalem originated as a good and helpful idea. Jews coming to worship from all over Israel and other parts of the known world needed animals to sacrifice (birds for the poor people, larger animals for those who could afford more). Most of them traveled days—some even weeks—and it was easier to carry money to buy a sacrifice at their destination than to herd an animal along and carry supplies for its upkeep on the journey.

But there was no reason to carry on any of this business inside the temple itself. We can also assume that the priesthood gained a healthy profit from sales in the temple and that Jesus' disruption was an attack on one of their sources of wealth. It is likely that **financial corruption** was the order of the day; animals were sold and the money exchanged at exorbitant prices. The Jewish leaders were **misusing the house of prayer for worldly profit**.

Leon Morris: Worshipers had to make their offerings in Tyrian currency, and the money changers performed a necessary function. So did the sellers of sacrificial animals and birds. It was not practicable for people coming from all over the Roman world to bring their beasts or

birds with them. If they were to offer sacrifice, there had to be some place where they could purchase them. But the point is that that place did not have to be within the temple precincts, and it is to this that Jesus was objecting.

Grant Osborne: The **ingressive aorist** (Wallace, 558–59) “*began to throw out*” (ἐξέβαλεν) was not just anger but a **calculated act**. Jesus obviously realizes this will not be a long-term solution but still considers the violent act a symbolic action aimed at the leaders for corrupting the temple with their mercantile activity. Most likely the activity resumes almost immediately (note the present participles emphasizing the ongoing activity of “*selling*” and “*buying*”).

3. Break-down of the Marketplace Environment

*“and overturned the tables of the moneychangers
and the seats of those who were selling doves.”*

Warren Wiersbe: The purpose of the court of the Gentiles in the temple was to give the “outcasts” an opportunity to enter the temple and learn from Israel about the true God. But the presence of this “religious market” turned many sensitive Gentiles away from the witness of Israel. The court of the Gentiles was used for mercenary business, not missionary business.

B. (:13) Prophetic Condemnation of the Subversion of Temple Worship

1. Intended Function of Worship in the Temple

“And He said to them, ‘It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer;’”

Daniel Doriani: In Mark, we have the additional phrase that it was to be “*a house of prayer for all nations*” (**Mark 11:17**). In this context, “*prayer*” is a synecdoche for all the elements of public worship—prayer, teaching, sacrifice, and praise.

R. T. France: Jesus’ explicit protest is against the misuse of God’s house for trade instead of prayer. The phrase “*bandits’ cave*,” traditionally translated “*den of thieves*,” has sometimes been taken to mean that he was attacking unfair trade practices which exploited the poor pilgrims, but that is not the most likely reason for this allusion to **Jer 7:11**. Nor would it explain his expulsion of the buyers along with the sellers. It is **where the trade is being carried out** rather than **how** that is the focus of his displeasure. And that means that the protest is directed not so much against the traders themselves but against the **priestly establishment** who had allowed them to operate within the sacred area. Commercial activity, however justified in itself, should not be carried out where people came to pray, and a temple régime which encouraged this had failed in its responsibility. This was, therefore, apparently a **demonstration against the Sadducean establishment**.

2. Illegitimate Function of Commerce in the Temple

“but you are making it a robbers’ den.”

Donald Hagner: The messianic king cannot countenance proceedings within the temple precincts that violate its divinely intended purpose.

Michael Wilkins: The religious leaders were treating the temple as robbers do their dens—a place of refuge for both accumulating illicitly gained wealth and for plotting future illegal activities. Caves in Palestine were regularly used as robbers’ dens, so the metaphor was clear to

Jesus' hearers. The temple's primary purpose, as a house for communing with God, was lost in the frenzy of temple activity.

Daniel Doriani: The Greek word translated “*robber*” (*lēstēs*) always carries the connotation of **violent action**, so that it refers to more than economic dishonesty. The word ordinarily means bandit, revolutionary, or insurrectionist, and never means thief. When we link this with **Luke 19:42**, where Jesus laments that the city did not know “*the things that make for peace*” (ESV) and predicts a devastating defeat at Rome's hands, we realize that Jesus foresaw that the nationalism that led to this abuse of the temple would lead Israel to rebel against Rome—and lose—forty years later. When Israel rebelled and Rome counterattacked, as Jesus predicted, Jewish armed forces chose the temple as their primary fortress, thinking, apparently, that the temple would protect them. Thus Jesus foretold the fall of Jerusalem, the temple, and the nation. To use the temple to guarantee military victory perverts the very purpose of Israel, whom God called to be a light to the nations. **Nationalism breeds corruption** and he will clean it out, then and now!

II. (:14) CARING FOR THE CRIPPLED

“And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.”

Daniel Doriani: While he was still there, Jesus reopened the temple for the neediest people in Israel: “*The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them*” (**Matt. 21:14**). The healings are acts of love, but also a protest and a correction. At that time, the Qumran community banned the lame and blind from their assembly, and the law of Moses barred them from the temple precincts (**Lev. 21:18–20**). So Jesus expelled those whom the authorities permitted and permitted those whom the authorities expelled: he drove out the money changers and he welcomed the crippled. He gave grace to those whom the leaders excluded from the realm of grace.

David Turner: Jesus also acts on behalf of those who are **physically needy**. This account of healing the blind and lame is the last healing account in Matthew (cf. **9:27–28; 11:5; 12:22; 15:30–31; 20:30**). Evidently, it occurs in the outer Court of the Gentiles, since blind and lame people are to be excluded from the temple (**Lev. 21:18–19; 2 Sam. 5:8**; m. Hag. 1.1; cf. CD 15.15–17; 1QSa 2.8–9; 1QM 7.3–4; 4Q394 [MMTa] frg. 2.18–19; but cf. **John 9:1; Acts 3:1–2**). In any event, Jesus removes the barrier to their full participation in God's house of prayer. His clearing the temple of financial dealings amounts to casting out the insiders; his healing amounts to welcoming the outsiders (**Boring** 1995: 406; **Patte** 1987: 290).

D. A. Carson: These two actions—cleansing the temple and the healing miracles—jointly declare his **superiority over the temple** (**Heil**, “Significant Aspects of the Healing Miracles,” 283–84) and raise the question of the **source of his authority** (v.23).

Grant Osborne: In the context, Jesus uses the healings to display what the temple should look like as a “*house of prayer*,” in contrast to the leaders who have turned into a place of commerce. His authority over the temple and over issues of uncleanness continues; Jesus is not only the “final interpreter of Torah” but has authority over Torah and temple (cf. **12:8**). He is *greater than the temple*, and in the temple precincts themselves he heals and makes the impure pure.

Donald Hagner: The Messiah thus manifests the blessings of the kingdom precisely in the precincts of the temple (see **Trautmann**), which is thereby transformed from a commercial center to a place of healing (one cannot but think of Matthew's earlier citation of **Hos 6:6** [**Matt 9:13; 12:7**]).

David Thompson: The temple of God is a great place to be **healed**. The blind and lame came and He healed them. The aorist tense indicates He did this in one moment of time. A person can be healed from all sin in one moment of time and have their eyes opened to behold wonderful truth and they can begin to walk right and straight. The church of God should be a healing center, giving hope to those who have been crippled and blinded by sin.

III. (:15-16) CORRECTING THE CRITICS

A. (:15-16a) Anger of the Religious Leaders over Messianic Acclamation

1. (:15a) Rejection of Messianic Acclamation

a. Messianic Acclamation from the Healing Miracles of Jesus

*“But when the chief priests and the scribes
saw the wonderful things that He had done,”*

Donald Hagner: They had seen the θαυμάσια, “wonders” (the only occurrence of the word in the NT) performed by Jesus. Despite these remarkable healings, however, they were unwilling to draw the appropriate conclusion concerning Jesus' messianic identity.

b. Messianic Acclamation from the Praise of the Children in the Temple

*“and the children who were crying out in the temple
and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’”*

Leon Morris: Once again we notice Jesus' attraction for little children; it is significant that on a day of such high drama Jesus should find time for children. They were using the acclamation “Hosanna” and speaking of Jesus as “*the Son of David*.” We have seen that this was a messianic term; it is unlikely that the children understood all that the term signified for their elders. But the priestly and academic people knew what it meant, and it annoyed them that children, however innocently, were using such a term for Jesus. In any case, in the usages of the time such exalted personages would not have cared greatly for children. So it does not surprise us that they were **indignant**. It was bad enough to have the enthusiasm of the crowds at Jesus' entry to the city, but it was worse to have him invade the temple precincts (their own special territory) and destroy a lucrative source of income, and it was intolerable that there, in the temple courts, he was doing his miracles and now being acclaimed by children (who knew no better!) in messianic terms.

John Walvoord: These were boys, who like Jesus, had come to the temple for the first time at the age twelve.

2. (:15b) Reaction to Messianic Acclamation

“they became indignant,”

3. (:16) Refutation of this Messianic Acclamation Demanded

“and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’”

Richard Gardner: The only feature that shatters this idyllic scene is the complaint of the chief priests and the scribes (vv. 15-16; cf. **Luke 19:39-40**), who represent the old order that Jesus is challenging. They are offended by what they see and hear. Jesus deflects their criticism, however, by interpreting the children's praise as a fulfillment of the psalmist's words in **Psalms 8:2**. (Note the question-and-answer format of verse 16, which resembles a **rabbinic dispute**.) In short, infants or *little ones* discern and rejoice in what they see in Jesus, as they have throughout the Gospel (cf. **11:25!**), while the guardians of Israel fail to perceive what is happening.

B. (:16b) Acceptance by Jesus of Praise and Worship from These Young Children

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read, Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself?’”

R. T. France: The most striking feature of this quotation, however, is the bold assumption by Jesus that what the psalm says about the praise of God (in distinction from mere human beings, **Ps 8:4**) is applicable to the children's praise of him.

Stu Weber: Their assumptions concerning Jesus' identity led the chief priests and scribes to believe that pointing out the children's “error” would cause Jesus to be horrified at their actions. Surely he would command the children to stop. Any Jewish teacher would have been horrified to be proclaimed “*Son of David*.” For anyone other than the Messiah to accept such acclaim was equivalent to blasphemy.

But the Son of David saw no problems with the children's praise. When his attention was drawn to it, he affirmed its appropriateness, supporting it with a quote from **Psalms 8:2**. His *have you never read* revealed his enemies' lack of understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, on which they were supposed to be experts (cf. **12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31**). Jesus used the children's praise to show how obvious it should have been that he was the Son of David.

Charles Swindoll: This scene reminds us that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah those scholars and priests were looking for. They had no interest in personal righteousness; they were concerned only with political power. They had no time for national repentance; they were looking only for military might. They weren't longing for peace, justice, and mercy; they cared only about their own economic prosperity. If the Messiah came for anything other than their own personal gain, they weren't interested.

Jesus could have stood there and debated the priests and scribes for hours. Instead, He let Scripture have the last word. Having made His point that things weren't right with the religious and political heart of the nation of Israel, Jesus departed the way He had come and returned to Bethany (**21:17**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus (1) justified the children's praise of Him with this verse from **Psalms 8** and (2) thus identified Himself as the LORD of that Psalm. By using this verse, He (3) at least inferred that the children were praising Him as part of the Lord's plan. Jesus was not going to forbid the children to call Him “*Son of David*,” because this was exactly what He wanted them to do. Rather, He used the objection from the priests and scribes to further state His claim that He was more than just the human descendant of David. In other words, as offended as they were that Jesus would assume the title “*Son of David*,” He was assuming even more than that.

(:17) EPILOGUE -- GEOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

“And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.”

Robert Gundry: Abandoning the chief priests and the scholars and lodging outside the city in Bethany symbolize judgment on both the city and the Jewish authorities there. Apart from this symbolism, the crowding of Jerusalem during festivals, especially during Passover, forced many pilgrims to find lodging outside the city.

Stu Weber: Having accomplished his grand entrance, the king left the priests and scribes. Matthew used the Greek verb *kataleipo*, meaning “to leave behind.” It is a stronger verb than *leipo*, implying a **purposeful departure**, possibly in disgust or righteous anger, after the confrontation. The same verb *kataleipo* was used in **Matthew 16:4** when Jesus left his challengers to cross the Sea of Galilee, and in **19:5** of a man leaving his parents. There was calculated determination in Jesus' action. In the flow of Matthew's argument, this is most significant. Jesus (in light of the leaders' rejection and opposition) had now **deliberately abandoned** the chief priests, the scribes, the temple, Jerusalem, and everything else related to official Israel and its false religion.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How important is the priority and purity of worship to the Lord Jesus?
- 2) What made the religious leaders so indignant at the behavior of the children in the temple?
- 3) What does this passage demonstrate regarding the credentials of Jesus as the promised Messiah?
- 4) How fearsome will Jesus be at His Second Coming when He unleashes the wrath of God in judgment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: The temple courts were arranged as boxes inside boxes. In the outermost box, under covered colonnades, people met and teachers taught. The next box was the court of the Gentiles, who could go no closer to the most holy places. Inside that box came the court of the women. They could not go beyond their court. Next came the court of Jewish men, then courts for priests. Finally, the innermost court was the holy of holies, where only the high priest could go, and that but once a year. By locating commerce in the court of the Gentiles, the priests took away the one place Gentiles could meet.

David Turner: Renewal or Destruction?

This episode reinforces the previous episode's stress on Jesus as the messianic son of David. Jesus's first action upon entering Jerusalem is to deliver it not from the oppressive Roman occupying forces but from its own **hypocrisy**. His entrance to the city is royal, but his action in

the temple is **prophetic** (W. Davies and Allison 1997: 133–34). Previous “cleansings” of the temple were accomplished by Josiah, Hezekiah, and Judas Maccabeus (**2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chron. 29:3–11; 1 Macc. 4; 2 Macc. 10**). Instead of directly threatening the political status quo, Jesus confronts the temple, the religious center of Israel, and its established leadership. His major activities in the temple are directed against hypocrisy and on behalf of the needy. As did the prophets before him, Jesus spoke and acted against the **corruption of Israel’s established worship** (cf. **Zech. 14:21; Mal. 3:2–4**) and for those who were without status. Therefore Jesus’s acts in the temple augur the eschatological reversal in which the meek “*will inherit the earth*” while the corrupt leaders will be brought low. Jesus’s healing in the temple and his cleansing it both demonstrate the truth of **Matt. 12:6**: “*Something greater than the temple is here*” (cf. **Mal. 3:1**). Jesus’s citation of **Ps. 8:2** in **Matt. 21:16** is an implicit claim that he is worthy of the praise and worship that the psalm directs to God.

Jesus’s action in the temple has been commonly viewed as an act of correction or purification. But some scholars argue that Jesus was not so much reforming the temple as announcing its doom (R. Horsley 1987; E. Sanders 1985). Jesus did in fact predict the destruction of the temple (**24:2**; cf. **Jer. 26:1–11; Josephus**, J.W. 6.300–309), but his activities here condemn not the priestly sacrifices or the temple as a divine institution but its **parasitic commercial enterprises**. Although the biblical prophets commonly denounced the corruption of the temple and its priests, their oracles did not oppose the sacrificial system itself but the abuses of it. Later Jewish texts also critique the corruption of Jerusalem and the temple.

The cleansing of the temple symbolizes both the reformation of its abuses and the judgment that will come if the abuses continue (W. Davies and Allison 1997: 135–37; Keener 1999: 496–501). Protest against present corruption and warning of future destruction are compatible elements of the prophetic message when there is hope of repentance (**Matt. 23:39**) and the rise of an eschatological temple (**Ezek. 40–48**). Biblical prophetic ministry confronts Israel’s abandonment of covenant obligations, calls Israel to repentance, and promises judgment and hope based on Israel’s response. Matthew perhaps saw in Jesus’s acts a fulfillment of the Lord coming suddenly into his temple (**Mal. 3:1–4**). Another possibility is stated by the most likely translation of **Zech. 14:21**, which envisions a day in which there will be no more merchants in the house of the Lord.

Leon Morris: All three Synoptists have this story of Jesus driving the traders from the temple precincts at this point, the end of his public ministry, whereas John has a similar story at the beginning (**John 2:13–17**). It is perhaps significant that in both traditions the temple cleansing comes at the beginning of Jesus’ first visit to Jerusalem. It is usually assumed that the action took place once only, and argument centers on whether John or the Synoptists have it in its correct place. But against this are the **many differences**. First, there is the fact that John has the story in a large block of non-Synoptic matter (in **John 1–5** nothing occurs in the Synoptic Gospels except the ministry of John the Baptist, and this is so different that there is no question of dependence either way). Then there are the **many differences in the narrative**. John has a reference to oxen and sheep and to a whip made of cords, none of which is in the Synoptists. And where they are talking about the same thing, the words are mostly different: the word for money changers is different (though in a second reference John also has the Synoptic word), as is that for overturned. John speaks of the money as being poured out and says that Jesus commanded the traders to take their things away, while none of the Synoptists mentions this. The Synoptists all tell us that Jesus quoted **Isaiah 56:7**, but John does not say that he cited Scripture at this point. He does, however, say that the disciples remembered the words, “*Zeal for your house will eat me*

up” (Ps. 69:9), which is not found in any of the Synoptic accounts. There are other differences from Mark in parts of the story that Matthew does not reproduce. **So many differences in a very short narrative make it unlikely that the Synoptists and John are describing the same event.** And we must bear in mind that the Synoptists omit the whole of Jesus’ early ministry in Jerusalem. There seems to be no good reason why they should take this one solitary incident from those days and include it in their accounts as far away from its rightful place as possible. We should also bear in mind that if Jesus did throw the traders out in the early part of his ministry, it is not at all unlikely that they would return in due course. Nor that Jesus should repeat his action.

William Barclay: In this **Court of the Gentiles**, two kinds of trading were going on. There was the business of money-changing. Every Jew had to pay a temple tax of one half-shekel, and that tax had to be paid near to the Passover time. A month before, booths were set up in all the towns and villages, and the money could be paid there; but after a certain date it could be paid only in the Temple itself, and it would be there that the vast majority of pilgrim Jews from other lands paid it. This tax had to be paid in certain currency, although for general purposes all kinds of currencies were equally valid in Palestine. It must not be paid in ingots of silver, but in stamped currency; it must not be paid in coins of inferior alloy or coins which had been clipped, but in coins of high-grade silver. It could be paid in shekels of the sanctuary, in Galilean half-shekels, and especially in Tyrian currency, which was of a very high standard.

The function of the money-changers was to change unsuitable currency into the correct currency. That seems on the face of it to be an entirely necessary function; but the trouble was that these money-changers charged a commission for changing the currency at all; and, if the coin was of greater value than a half-shekel, they made a further charge for giving back the surplus change. That is to say, many pilgrims not only had to pay the half-shekel but also the fees for changing currency. All this made a considerable impact on a working man’s income.

This surplus charge was called the *qolbon*. It did not by any means all go into the money-changers’ pockets; some of it was classed as free-will offerings; some of it went to the repair of the roads; some of it went to purchase the gold plates with which it was planned entirely to cover the Temple proper; and some of it found its way into the Temple treasury. The whole matter was not necessarily an abuse; but the trouble was that it lent itself to abuse. It lent itself to the exploitation of the pilgrims who had come to worship, and there is no doubt that the Temple money-changers made large profits out of it.

The selling of doves was worse. For most visits to the Temple, some kind of offering was essential. Doves, for instance, were necessary when a woman came for purification after childbirth, or when a leper came to have a cure attested and certified (**Leviticus 12:8, 14:22, 15:14, 15:29**). It was easy enough to buy animals for sacrifice outside the Temple; but any animal offered in sacrifice must be without blemish. There were official inspectors of the animals, and it was to all intents and purposes certain that they would reject an animal bought outside and would direct the worshipper to the Temple stalls and booths.

Craig Blomberg: This whole episode, combining cleansing and condemnation of the temple, proves more **significant** than is usually recognized. . . It provides the final impetus for Jesus’ crucifixion (**Mark 11:18**). It offers an example of Jesus’ genuinely human but sinless anger expressed in righteous indignation against the **profaning of that which is holy**. . . But, like many of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus provides a good paradigm for speaking out publicly

about God's indignation against the flagrant defiance of his standards in the world. Once again it is the “clergy” and the “Bible teachers,” not the disreputable people of society, who are Jesus' target for attack. **Corruption among the leadership of God's people** arouses Jesus' wrath more quickly than anything else. But Christ does more than denounce injustice—**he takes action** against it. That the temple merchants quickly resumed business as usual is often speculated, but we are not told one way or the other. The point is that Jesus did what was right, irrespective of the duration of its effect.

Walter Wilson: The fact that in **21:13** Jesus alludes to **Jer 7:11** is also relevant in determining the meaning of the demonstration in **21:12**, since the text from which it is drawn, Jeremiah's so-called temple sermon (**7:1–15**; cf. **26:1–11**), concludes with a **prediction of the temple's destruction (7:14–15)**. In the same vein, the demonstration itself can be compared with the symbolic act attributed to the prophet in **Jer 19:10**, in which he smashes a jar, interprets the act as a **sign of destruction (19:11–12)**, and then announces God's judgment on Jerusalem in the court of the temple (**19:14–15**), an act that provokes the anger of the temple's chief officer (**20:1–2**). An examination of subsequent texts in the gospel is also of value in this regard. Specifically, the imagery of the withered fig tree (**21:18–19**), of “*this*” mountain being cast into the sea (**21:21**), of the vineyard's tenants being put to death (**21:41**), of “*their*” city being burned (**22:7**), and of Jerusalem's “*house*” being left desolate (**23:38**) suggests that Jesus's action against the temple here has some relation to his prediction of the temple's destruction in **24:2** (cf. **26:61; 27:40**). Thus the temporary suspension of commercial activity foreshadows the permanent cessation of all temple-related activity when the temple is destroyed, the overturning of tables and chairs signifying its physical downfall.

John MacArthur: Purging the Perverted Temple – Divine Credentials of the Messiah

And so, by going to the temple as the first official act after His inauguration, He is identifying for us clearly the turf or the territory of His mission. Three years had not changed that purpose. He goes right back to the temple. . .

Jesus walks in. His eyes, His ears, and His nostrils are filled with the sights and sounds and smells. The stench of a stockyard, the wrangling and haggling and haranguing of people bargaining over the price of animals. The noise the animals make. All the chaos of the crying animals being slaughtered. Blood. It is a scene that's unbelievable.

This is Jesus' turf, because this is the house of God, and it has been turned into a cave for robbers. And so, He comes and sees this horrifying but familiar scene. And it says to us something so important; it says that Christ came, first of all, to deal with men on a spiritual level. You understand that? That's the point. He came to throw out corrupt worship and to **bring in true worship**. He is on a divine mission.

Second point, He has divine authority. He has divine authority. If we can't see that He's the Messiah because of His mission, boy, we ought to see that He's the Messiah because of His authority. Now listen, the most powerful thing going on in that country was the temple. I mean the high priest was a powerful man. And the man who is next to the high priest was equally powerful. And the one who was the head of the temple police was powerful. . .

There's a third credential that I want you to see in verse 13. He not only showed He was on a divine mission and demonstrated divine authority, but he revealed a commitment to divine Scripture. He revealed a commitment to divine Scripture. You see, He vindicates what He does

by this in **verse 13**, “*He said unto them, ‘It is written,’”* and then He quotes Isaiah 56:7, “*My house shall be called the house of prayer*” - and Isaiah adds, and Mark also includes - “*of all nations.*” Matthew leaves it out because His audience is primarily Jewish.

But the Lord says, “I vindicate what I do, because I’m doing something consistent with the Word of God.” Oh, that’s so great. As Messiah, He was always hooked to the Word of God. In John He says, “*I never do anything that the Father doesn’t show Me to do. I never do anything that the Father doesn’t tell Me to do.*” Everything He ever did was consistent with the Word of God. He vindicates His anger by basing it on Scripture. . .

There’s a fourth thing I want you to see. He not only shows His divine mission, His divine authority, and His commitment to the divine word, but we see Him as the Messiah because of His divine compassion. . .

And so, we see them come, and in compassion, He heals them. And may I suggest to you that that’s the truest kind of worship? True worship is in the name of the Lord meeting the need of someone. That is a far greater worship than a sacrifice, is it not? Sacrifices, sacrifices, sacrifices by the millions. But where was the worship of love to one in need?

And then another mark, a divine credential, if you will. We see His divine mission; His divine authority; His commitment to the divine Word; divine compassion, and also His divine power. . .

One other credential that I see in a positive sense, He accepted divine worship. . .

There’s one other thing. He gives His credentials: divine mission, divine authority, divine word, divine compassion, divine power, divine worship, and one other thing. One other thing that proves He was the Messiah. It’s this: He was rejected.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Cleansing of the Temple

I. (:12-13) Judgment begins at the house of God.

You see, this passage is a picture of the **spiritual state of Israel**. Israel thinks she is doing fine with God, but in fact, her worship is empty. It has all the external forms, but it is emptied of the heart, and the very context in which they are worshiping it is almost like a cattle show. The context in which they are worshiping is a visible picture of how empty that worship is. And the Lord Jesus makes a beeline for that in order to give them self-consciousness about their spiritual state. God’s reforming and refining and sifting work begins with the people of God, and with the way we worship.

II. (:14) God’s grace extends to marginalized people.

Is our religion real? And **Tasker** said, “Service rendered to the afflicted is worship more acceptable to God than multitudes of sacrifice.” A truth brought out in Matthew when He, alone, of all the evangelists reports that Jesus miraculously healed the blind and the lame that came to him in the temple. Is that our attitude? Are we on the lookout for mercy ministry amongst our own congregation? And then, beyond that, are we on the lookout as to how we can minister to the broader community, and display the mercy of the Lord Jesus to them? are we creatively and actively and immediately looking to do that? If we follow the Lord Jesus, we will.

III. (:15-17) The Poor in Spirit see God.

Finally of course, He is indicating once again that it is the humble, it is only the humble who perceive spiritual truth and reality and worship God. In this case it is the children; the adults, the pious religious leaders, they don't see God! But the children, they see Jesus clear out the temple, they see Jesus heal those outcasts, and they instinctively know that that is true religion, and they instinctively know that He is the son of God. See, Christ's glory is hidden from the prideful. But it is revealed to the humble. The chief priests and the scribes were indignant, that Christ did not take notice of this display of irreverence within the temple precinct, even though they weren't concerned with all the trade being conducted within the same bounds. And so Jesus makes it clear that in fact the praises sounded by these children were in the nature of a rebuke to those religious superiors, and He drew their attention to that truth expressed in Psalm 8, that God has called children and infants to sound aloud His praises.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now that is very important and has many different applications and in a moment we'll talk about some of them, but these I think are the two important truths of this passage. They have to do with prophecy.

1. The king claims his rights as **king in his temple**, and
2. he also expresses in it his view that the **spiritual takes precedence** over everything else.

I cannot possibly imagine this taking place were it not for the fact that there was something about the majesty about the Lord Jesus that suggested the majesty of the eternal God that enabled him to accomplish this task. It's almost as if there was given through him an overwhelming sense of the dignity of his character. There was almost a lifting of the veil of his humanity so that there came forth something of the majesty of deity.

o me it remind it reminds me of the incident when the soldiers came in the Garden of Gethsemane to take the Lord Jesus with Judas the Betrayer, and they came up to him asked and he asked them whom they were seeking. They said, Jesus of Nazareth. He said I am. And I think we probably should add, he – I am he. But when he said that the soldiers went back and fell to the ground. Again there was a lifting of the veil of his humanity so there was something of the overwhelming majesty of his person that came through, and these Roman soldiers found themselves groveling in the dust, and he had only spoken a word. So it was this, I think that enabled him to cast them all out. I'm sure there must have been fear and awe on the part of those who stood about wondering what had happened that this man was able to accomplish this. . .

The thing that our Lord spoke about of course was the desecration of the temple of God, and I say again as I close simply this, that it is possible for us to desecrate the presence of God in our lives by putting other things before the primary thing which is the worship of the living God through Jesus Christ. It's possible for us today to introduce into our own being as believers contending things and thus instead of our bodies being the place of worship and praise primarily, they are primarily instruments by which we are engaged in enlarging our bank accounts or other issues, other activities that are less than the highest, and I think the Lord Jesus speaks directly to that in this statement. Make not my father's house a house of merchandise; let it not be a den of robbers and thieves, but let it be what it should be a house of prayer. May the Lord enable us as Christians to hear and respond and pray that, O Father, make not the house of the Holy Spirit a house of merchandise, but make it truly a house of prayer.

TEXT: Matthew 21:18-22

TITLE: CURSING OF THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE

BIG IDEA:
JUDGMENT ON THE HYPOCRISY OF ISRAEL FORESHADOWED IN THE CURSING OF THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE

INTRODUCTION:

Jeffrey Crabtree: Commentators divide over the significance of this miracle. **Hagner** (33B:604) says this miracle can only be understood as anticipation of national Israel's soon demise and the temple's soon destruction. **Walvoord** (159-160) thinks this cursing of the fig tree had nothing to do with Israel and was only about faith and miracles, nothing more.

It seems probable, however, that the fig tree incident fits in with the theme of the cleansing of the temple and the challenge to Jesus' authority (**Carson**, Matthew 444-445). Both were about **hypocrisy**. Jesus' condemnation of the tree for its barrenness, when it looked like it should have had at least some fruit, was a sign of judgment against Jerusalem's spiritual hypocrisy and barrenness (**Lk. 13:6-9**). If this is the right understanding, Jerusalem and all Israel were facing severe judgment for their hypocrisy (**23:38; 24:2, 15-22**) and spiritual barrenness (**v. 43; 23:3; Hagner** 33B:605).

Stanley Saunders: But the surprising, hyperbolic, and even abrasive character of this action should help us identify it as a **prophetic sign-act**, delivered not in response to Jesus' hunger but for the sake of Jesus' disciples and directed against the "fruitlessness" of the Jerusalem leaders. The story interrupts the flow of Jesus' conflicts with the Jewish authorities in the temple (cf. **21:14-16** and **21:23-27**) precisely in order to comment upon them. . .

Throughout Matthew fruit symbolizes appropriate responses to the proclamation of God's reign; it signifies human actions that are commensurate with God's mercy, presence, and healing power (cf. **3:8; 3:10; 7:16-20; 12:33**), and with the harvest that Jesus is gathering (cf. **21:41, 43**). The sweet fruit of a fig tree is a symbol of God's blessing (**Num. 29:5; Deut. 8:7-8**).

Stu Weber: In the preceding passage, the king had pronounced judgment on Israel and its leaders for their idolatrous behavior (**21:12-13**). With the fig tree, Jesus acted out a parable or "mini-drama" to illustrate the reality of Israel's fruitlessness and its doom. Just as the leaves of the fig tree advertised fruit, so the Jewish leaders claimed to be fulfilling God's purpose. However, the advertising was a lie. Under the "leaves" of their showy religion (**6:1-18; 15:8-9**) their hearts were barren and unbelieving. They had missed their opportunity to repent and to bear true fruit, and so the king pronounced their judgment. There would be no more opportunities for these hypocrites—they would never bear fruit but would die through the judgment of God.

Grant Osborne: Two primary themes are linked together because both flow out of the authority and spiritual power of Jesus.

- (1) The cursing of the fig tree is a parabolic enactment of the judgment Israel will soon face because the people have rejected God's Messiah and defiled his house, the temple.

(2) Jesus promises that his followers will share his authority through prayer—with faith the disciple taps into the same power source as Jesus did.

I. (:18-19) POINT OF THE MIRACLE: JEWISH NATION WILL SOON BE JUDGED FOR ITS HYPOCRISY – PROFESSION WITHOUT FRUIT

A. (:18) Occasion for the Miracle

“Now in the morning, when He returned to the city, He became hungry.”

B. (:19) Cursing of the Fig Tree

1. Show without Substance

*“And seeing a lone fig tree by the road,
He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only;”*

R. T. France: By speaking of “*a single fig tree*” rather than just “a fig tree” Matthew probably intends to alert the reader that this tree, perhaps standing on its own, was unlike others which at that season would not have fully developed leaves. Its precocious show of foliage promised, but did not provide, the fruit which normally came with the leaves.

William Barclay: But it is the fig tree’s habit of fruit-bearing which is relevant here. The fig tree is unique in that it bears two full crops in the year. The first is borne on the old wood. Quite early in the year, little green knobs appear at the end of the branches. They are called paggim, and they will one day be the figs. These fruit buds come in April, but they are quite inedible. Bit by bit, the leaves and the flowers open out, and another unique thing about the fig is that it is in full fruit and full leaf and full flower all at the same time; that happens by June. No fig tree ever bore fruit in April; that is far too early. The process is then repeated with the new wood; and the second crop comes in September.

The strangest thing about this story is twofold.

- First, it tells of a fig tree in full leaf in April. Jesus was at Jerusalem for the Passover; the Passover fell on 15th April; and this incident happened a week before.
- The second thing is that Jesus looked for figs on a tree where no figs could possibly be; and Mark says: *‘for it was not the season for figs’ (Mark 11:13)*.

The difficulty of this story is not so much a difficulty of possibility. It is a moral difficulty; and it is twofold.

- First, we see Jesus cursing a fig tree for not doing what it was not able to do. The tree could not have borne fruit in the second week of April, and yet we see Jesus destroying it for not doing that very thing.
- Second, we see Jesus using his miraculous powers for his own ends. That is precisely what in the temptations in the wilderness he determined never to do. He would not turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger.

The plain truth is this – if we had read of anyone else cursing a fig tree for not bearing figs in April, we would have said it was an act of ill-tempered petulance, springing from personal disappointment. In Jesus, that is inconceivable; therefore there must be some explanation. What is it? . . .

Lessons: Uselessness invites disaster, and profession of faith without practice is doomed.

2. Severe Curse

“and He said to it, ‘No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.’”

Donald Hagner: The surprising curse (note esp. εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, “forever,” with the connotation of final judgment), its harshness, and the immediate withering of the tree disclose that what occurs here is a prophetic sign that points beyond itself to a far more grievous kind of barrenness.

3. Sudden Withering

“And at once the fig tree withered.”

II. (:20-22) DERIVED LESSON: POWER OF FAITH EXPRESSED IN PRAYER

Stanley Saunders: Prayer coupled with “faith” creates a social space in which God’s power is manifest, thereby providing an alternative to the temple, which has been controlled by those who produce no fruit. Prayer and faith are at the heart of God’s alternative temple; they are the locus of God’s presence and power, the means by which God will produce fruit in the disciples.

Richard Gardner: Jesus’ miracle is a sign not only of judgment, but of the power available to disciples through prayer (cf. **7:7-11; 18:19; John 14:13-14**), prayer that expresses an unwavering confidence in God (cf. **Luke 17:5-6**). Up to now, the faith of Jesus’ followers has been hesitant and shaky, little faith (cf. **14:31; 17:14-20**). If that faith becomes firm and articulate, however, the disciples will be able to do even more amazing things than Jesus has just done.

A. (:20) Curiosity Regarding the Rapid Withering of the Cursed Fig Tree

“And seeing this, the disciples marveled, saying, ‘How did the fig tree wither at once?’”

R. T. France: Their words here, as in **8:27**, imply that Jesus’ power is **unique**, which will make it all the more remarkable when he goes on to suggest that they too can do what he has done.

Daniel Doriani: So the fig tree withered immediately. We expect the disciples to ask **why** Jesus cursed the tree. Instead they ask **how** he did it. *“When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked”* (**Matt. 21:20**). As so often, the Twelve partially miss the main point, focusing on the wrong thing. They were thinking, “That was amazing. How did you do that? Can you teach us to do it too? It could be useful to curse and destroy from time to time.”

B. (:21-22) Connection between Power and Prayer of Faith

“And Jesus answered and said to them,”

1. (:21b) Prospect of Exercising Such Power

“Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Moving mountains (v. 21) is hyperbole (1 Cor. 13:2) and speaks of doing very difficult things (17:20; Zech. 4:6-9) that might seem impossible.

R. T. France: The “faith” which receives answers to prayer is characterized by practical confidence in God’s power and willingness to respond. In view of what has been said in 18:19–20, it should also be noted that the verbs in these verses are all plural; the promise of effective prayer is made to the united praying community rather than to the private interest of the individual.

Stu Weber: The necessary ingredient was faith (taking God at his word), which the disciples lacked. Jesus clarified his meaning by mentioning the opposite of faith—doubt. . .

Jesus meant us to assume that mountain-moving faith should not be exercised in such frivolous ways as rearranging the earth. In fact, faith cannot be exercised in any way except according to God's will. It is not the faith which moves mountains, but the power of God in response to the expression of faith. True faith is always in keeping with God's will and is based on intimacy with God and an understanding of his heart and will.

Daniel Doriani: As Jesus traveled from Bethany to Jerusalem, he stood in sight of the Mount of Olives and Mount Zion, **the temple mount**. When he spoke of a mountain, therefore, Jesus had to mean the temple mount. That is the mountain they should want to move, not physically, but spiritually. Faith alone can move the mountain where dead religion flourishes. As Jesus told his disciples that faith can move the temple mountain, he reinforced the lesson of the fig tree. By faith we can move the temple mountain, the mountain that is all show and no substance, into the sea.

Grant Osborne: “*Doubt*” (διακρίνομαι) refers not to a certainty that God will give anything one asks (see on v. 22) but rather to a “divided mind” that trusts God only partway and is centered more on self. **Bruner** says, “Doubt, in Jesus’ teaching, is the decision to live as if God does not exist, and for disciples of Jesus this decision is disloyal. (In French, the word for doubt is defiance.)” . . .

Furthermore, faith is much more than a power that infuses our prayer life. Primarily, it is a perspective on life, a lifestyle that centers on God and immerses one’s self in God. Faith is a way of thinking in which God is everything, the sphere within which we live, and this type of prayer is not just intercessory, a prayer life centered on getting God to do things for us. It is more a constant desire to do things for God, and such a life has great power because it centers on doing things for God. This is a true life of faith.

2. (:22) Principle of Seeking God’s Will via Believing Prayer

“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”

Charles Swindoll: Where does a knowledge of God’s will come from, so we know that what we pray will be answered? **Colossians 1:9** gives us a hint: “*We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*” Such knowledge of God’s will is a work of divine wisdom, which necessarily comes from the Spirit. As we learn and live the Spirit-breathed Word of God (**2 Tim. 3:16**), we will be equipped to pray according to His will.

David Turner: The fig tree incident also shows that Jesus’s disciples still need to develop faith that God will answer prayer. Jesus has previously rebuked their “*little faith*” (**6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20**). Here their faith is challenged again in a context connected with the temple, which is called “*a house of prayer for all nations*” (**Isa. 56:7; Matt. 21:13**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is God’s response when He expects to see fruit and finds none?
- 2) How do people today make an outward show and profession of spirituality while never evidencing any fruit that points to genuine life transformation?
- 3) What shocked the disciples about this miracle?
- 4) How is this promise of answered prayer a helpful preparation for the upcoming ministry of Jesus’ disciples?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: The Way of the Fig Tree: Promise Without Performance

On Wednesday, He came again to the city of Jerusalem, and again into confrontation with the religious leaders. That confrontation is recorded for us in **verses 23** and following. But we need to stop at this point. Because when He came in on Tuesday, and when He came in on the morning of Wednesday – **on both of those two days**, there was a fig tree that came into play. Mark tells us the first meeting with the fig tree was on the first day He came in to cleanse the temple. And then the second day, when He came back again, there was a second encounter with the fig tree. That’s in **Mark chapter 11**.

Matthew condenses both of those into just one narrative, from **verse 18 to 22**. Matthew isn’t so concerned with the chronology as He is with the point, the message of the fig tree, and that ought to be our emphasis as well. . .

Now, Jesus, then, on Monday, when He rode in, listened to the accolades and the hosannas and accepted the coronation, fickle as it was. And having been affirmed and inaugurated as King on Monday, He then proceeds immediately to do two kingly things. The first thing He did was cleanse the temple; the second thing He did was curse the tree. Both of those are acts of sovereign authority. . .

The first thing, cleansing the temple, was a **denunciation of their religion**. It was a denunciation of their worship. The second thing, cursing the tree, which we’ll see today, was a **denunciation of them as a nation**. . .

But this fig tree was unlike most fig trees. In the first place, it shouldn’t have even been there with leaves on it, because it was only April, and fig trees, though they bloom twice a year, the

early fruit doesn't come until May or June. And for a fig tree to have leaves in April was very uncommon. Maybe in Jericho they had already eaten of the figs, because everything blooms early in Jericho, the sun is so constant and so intense. But up on the hilltop, it just didn't happen that in April fig trees bloomed and bore fruit. . .

The fig tree is a **symbol of the prosperity and the wealth and the richness of that land agriculturally**. So, the presence of fig trees are the mark of the prosperity of the land, the absence of fig trees, the mark of the judgment of the land. . .

Now, fig trees bear fruit twice a year: May/June and then later in the year. And here's the important point: the fruit comes before the leaves. The fruit comes before the leaves. And so, if you see a tree with leaves, what should you expect? Fruit. And when the Lord saw the tree with leaves, it was amazing, because in Jerusalem, it's too early for that. Oh, maybe this tree was at a very fertile point in the soil. It may have been that that soil had unique nutrients. It may have been that it was near a brook, and water was in abundance, provided to the roots. It may have been that somebody specially cared for that, or it may have been that God just had that tree bloom a little early. But **it should have had fruit because it had leaves**. . .

That fig tree is symbolic of Israel. The leaves are symbolic of Israel's religious activity, and the fruitlessness is equally symbolic of Israel. They have a form of godliness. Right? Without power. *"They have a zeal for God without knowledge,"* Paul says in **Romans 10:2**. . .

Now, people, the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the tree then, you see, is very dramatic, don't you? Devastating. And it's little wonder that they reacted by hating Jesus Christ and wanting Him dead. **Jerusalem and Judaism is spiritually fruitless, sinful, cursed for judgment**. That's essentially the message of Jesus as the King. He is coronated on one day. This is His message the next day, **"You're doomed."** Boy, they really didn't expect their Messiah to come to deliver that word, did they? . . .

So, the parable is understood. Powerful. But remember that I said the Lord had his disciples with Him? And the Lord wants to use this to teach them something. So, we turn a little corner as we come to **verse 21**, and let's call this **the principle**. And here the Lord moves from the parable to the principle. And this is a principle for the disciples.

The first principle, we could say, is the obvious truth that **profession without reality is cursed**. That was something they must have learned from this, that it doesn't do any good to profess to be religious if there's no fruit. That's a profound lesson. And while it is a national illustration in the parable, it certainly has individual implications. And I warn you that if your life is a life of leaves without fruit, you are cursed and doomed just like the nation Israel was. God's going to judge the religious. God is going to damn to eternal hell those people who have had a show of religion without the truth. That is the first principle. . .

And the Lord is saying, "Look, I want you to know that **You have this power**. And this power's available to you **through faith**. If you would believe and not doubt, you can see God's power." It's like – recorded in the Gospel of John in the upper room, when the Lord said to them, *"Greater works shall these – than these shall you do, because I go to My Father."* In other words, there's great power available.

John 14, He says, *"Whatever you ask in My name, I'll do it."* And in **verse 22**, He sums it up by saying, *"All things whatever you shall ask in prayer believing you shall receive."* This is a

tremendous thing. They're saying, "Lord, what power. You wish that tree dead, and it was dead."

And He says, "You've got the same power available. You've got the same power." And He turns it into a **lesson about prayer** for them, that you can see the same power working if you believe. .

Boy, when I see a verse like 22 of Matthew 21, "*All things whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing you shall receive,*" that's a pretty **dynamite promise**, folks. And if you understand that that means all things **in the will of God**, it doesn't hurt it, it just makes it all the better. Right? Because what do you want? You only want what God wills. Right? I want whatever God wants for me. I want the best that God wants for me. I want the best that God wants for you. I want the best that God wants for this church. I want the best that God wants for this ministry, whatever it is. I want that. With all my heart I want that. And here the Lord says, "If you really believe God wants that and God can do that, then **let's see the exercise of your faith in persistence**. And some of us have not received the blessing of God in our lives simply because we have not persisted in prayer.

Now, my job is not to harmonize all of that with God's sovereignty. God does that part. I can't do that, but my job is to respond in faith and simple trust to the confident statement of **verse 22**, that if I ask in prayer, believing that God will do what He will do and is able to do what He says He will do, that I'll see His power. I just – I get tired of impotence. I get – I'm weary of a church without power. I'm weary of a life without power. I'm weary of people without power. I'm weary of not seeing the hand of God in an almighty way. I want God to be at work, and I know that the plan here is given very clearly if we ask in prayer, not doubting. And, you know, a lot of folks start their prayer – oh, great faith – and they don't get an answer in the next 24 hours, and... phist. **That's not mustard seed**; that's not getting stronger, and bigger, and larger. You **keep pursuing, keep persisting, keep knocking, keep crying out**.

J. Ligon Duncan: A Foreshadowing of Judgment: The Fruitless Fig Tree

I. (:18-19) Christ punishes pretended piety.

You'll see here Jesus address the issue of **religious hypocrisy**. If I could put this in a phrase, I might say it this way. Jesus is dealing in verses 18 and 19 with apparently **fruitful fruitlessness**.

Matthew is simply shortening the account and giving us an **abbreviated version**. There's no conflict between what Matthew says and what Mark said. You will notice, for instance, that Matthew is very, very vague about telling you the timeframe or using terms that specify exactly when things happen. That is because Matthew wants you to focus on one thing: the immediacy of the withering of this tree. He wants to show you a picture of the quickness of the judgment of God that is about to come against unbelieving Israel. It would be a matter of only years from the time that Jesus said these words to the time that Matthew wrote them down, to the time that Israel itself would be destroyed. And Jerusalem in particular would be savagely destroyed and burned and the people of Jerusalem would be driven out by the occupying Romans. God's judgment was going to come quickly against unbelieving Israel. And Matthew, the way he records this story, emphasizes the **swiftness of that judgment**. . .

Jesus is criticizing Jerusalem and her religious leaders. They appeared to be fruitful, but they were not. So Jesus here in this parable — in this story, in this event of the fig tree shows their future destruction. **William Hendriksen** says this. "The pretentious fig tree had its counterpart in

the temple. There was bustling, religious activity there, but no sincerity and truth. Jesus was thus predicting the downfall of unfruitful Israel. Just as the cleansing of the temple was a symbolic denunciation of the Messiah, of the worship of the old Israel, so the withering of the fig tree was a symbolic denunciation by Him of the Jewish nation as the privileged people of God.” . . .

A person who is a hypocrite is **more concerned about prestige than character**. In fact, a person who is a hypocrite uses character, feigned character, simply as a means to an end. What they really want is to be esteemed by other people or not to be shamed. But they do not want to be close to God. And so Jesus brings a dire warning against them. They feign character in order to get what they really want, and **what they really want is the applause of men**. And Jesus wants us to understand how **hypocrisy is a danger to our souls**. Hypocrisy does not want to be shamed, and it wants to be liked and respected. And so it will hide certain sins of the heart so that no one will bring a reproach and so that you will be popular. But the more and more you hide that sin without confessing it or repenting of it, the more and more a wall is built in the heart until you become impervious to repentance and repentance is the very instrument of salvation in this case. . .

II. (:20-23) Christ’s disciples must realize the power of faith and prayer in the Christian life.

He makes it clear that His disciples must realize the power of faith and prayer in the Christian life. According to Matthew, one of the things that the disciples fixated on when they saw this miracle was **the rapidity of the tree’s withering**. They were impressed that it happened so soon. One night, and the tree was completely withered. . .

when He says if you believe, and he also speaks of prayer, He’s reminding us that He’s speaking about believing the Lord for things that He has promised in His word.

Michael Wilkins: The fig tree provided a striking lesson for the disciples. Just as its fruitfulness was a sign of its health, so fruitfulness was a sign of Israel’s faithfulness to the covenantal standards. Now that Israel, especially represented by its religious leadership, had perverted temple practices and had not repented at the appearance of Jesus Messiah proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, Israel was being judged by God.

Jesus’ cursing the fig tree was not a fit of temper but a **symbolic act**, demonstrating that God’s creatures must produce that for which they were created. Even so we humans have been created by God to carry out his will, which means first of all entering into a relationship with him, which will then allow us to bear the fruit of that relationship, found especially in the fruit of the Spirit produced in our lives (cf. **Gal. 4:6–7; 5:13–26**). With the empowering of God’s Spirit, whatever he calls for us to do we can accomplish in his power, if we only will submit to his will.

TEXT: Matthew 21:23-27

TITLE: DISPUTE REGARDING THE SOURCE OF JESUS' AUTHORITY

BIG IDEA:

HARD HEARTS THAT REFUSE TO SUBMIT TO THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CANNOT OBJECTIVELY JUDGE HIS CLAIMS

INTRODUCTION:

Warren Wiersbe: This series of three parables grew out of the demand of the chief priests and elders for Jesus to explain what authority He had for cleansing the temple. As the custodians of the spiritual life of the nation, they had the right to ask this question. But we are amazed at their ignorance. Jesus had given them three years of ministry, and they still would not face the facts. They wanted more evidence.

Walter Wilson: Undeterred by the hostile reception he received from the authorities on his first day in Jerusalem, Jesus once again enters the temple alone (21:23a; cf. 21:12a), once again is challenged by the authorities with a question (21:23b–c; cf. 21:16a), and once again responds with a counter-question (21:24–25a; cf. 21:16b).

Appropriately enough, the authorities raise a **question about authority**, and in so doing establish a basic rubric for the whole cycle of controversy stories and polemical parables that make up this part of the narrative (21:23 – 22:46). The reader, of course, recalls that Jesus teaches “*as one having authority*” (7:29, also with διδάσκω and ἐξουσία). In challenging this authority, the chief priests and the elders expose themselves to questions about the nature of their own authority. Indeed, the pericope (and the whole unit) can be understood as presenting a **clash of different forms of authority**. On one hand, there is the cultic authority of the chief priests (representing the temple) and the sociopolitical authority claimed by the elders “*of the people*” (21:23), who together with the scribes constitute the Sanhedrin, which in turn represents the nation. On the other hand, contrasting with this institutional basis of authority, the roles of king, teacher, and prophet are (as we have seen) all applicable to Jesus, though in this instance the association of Jesus with John the Baptist foregrounds the last of these roles (21:26; cf. 21:11), thereby drawing attention to his charismatic presence.

The character of this authority will be demonstrated in no small measure through the skillful manner in which Jesus debates his various opponents. In this case, he immediately understands that the question in 21:23c is a sham, and that his opponents are searching for some basis to accuse him of blasphemy (cf. 26:63–66). In response to their two-part question (regarding the nature and origin of his authority), Jesus responds with a two-part question of his own: was the baptism (and, by implication, ministry) of John the Baptist of heavenly or human origin (21:25a)? He prefaces the question by indicating that his willingness to answer their question is contingent upon how they answer his (21:24).

Stu Weber: The king's authority will threaten those who desire to usurp his authority for themselves. . . . If they really wanted a truthful answer, they would have admitted to the authority of God behind Jesus' teachings and miracles. Jesus knew they were not open to the truth, so he placed a hurdle between them and the answer to their question. They had to acknowledge that

John's authority came from heaven. Their refusal to answer was acknowledgment of their resistance to the truth—that Jesus' authority came from God.

I. (:23) ENTRAPMENT QUESTION REGARDING THE SOURCE OF JESUS' AUTHORITY

A. Forum for Interrogation = the House of God

“And when He had come into the temple,”

Grant Osborne: In light of the imminent judgment that is his central theme at this time (see **chs. 24–25**) Jesus is likely proclaiming the **judgment** side of the arrival of the kingdom and calling for **repentance**. Most likely he is teaching in one of the porticoes in the Court of the Gentiles, where most teaching occurred.

B. Fallacious Interrogators = the Jewish Religious Leaders

“the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching,”

Richard Gardner: The dispute narrated in **verses 23-27** pits Jesus against two groups of Jewish leaders, one with the power of office {chief priests}, the other with representative authority (elders of the people; cf. **Exod. 19:7; Isa. 3:14; Jer. 19:1**). It is the same combination of opponents who shortly will plot Jesus' destruction (**26:3-5**) and condemn him to death after his arrest (**26:57-68; 27:1-2**). When these authorities question Jesus about his authority, they raise an issue that accompanies Jesus throughout the Gospel (cf. **7:28-29; 12:38; 16:13-15; 28:18**): What are Jesus' credentials? Who or what authorizes him to act as he is now acting in the temple (cf. **John 2:18**)?

C. Fundamental Question = By What Authority and Who Gave You This Authority

“and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?’”

Grant Osborne: The first question challenges his presumption to both teach and perform miracles in the temple; how can he act as both rabbi and prophet? In so doing they are laying a trap for him, since if he answers “human authority” he will contradict his actions, and if “divine authority,” he will be guilty of blasphemy. The second question assumes it could not have come from God, a possibility the leaders have long ago rejected. They are daring Jesus to incriminate himself by answering.

Leon Morris: The expression is very general and may cover the triumphal entry, the driving out of the traders, and the healings in the temple. Certainly these were **significant happenings**, and in the view of the questioners they should not be done without authority of some kind. What authority? The groups associated with the questioners had not given Jesus any authority, so they are intrigued. Their second question implies that **nobody could assume authority**. There had to be some superior person or institution that gave anyone the authority to act in ways like those Jesus had just demonstrated.

R. T. France: “*These things*” which the authorities object to are the openly messianic manner of his arrival and the high-handed way in which he has interfered with the business of the temple, compounded by his refusal to silence his young supporters. This northern villager, proclaimed by his followers as a prophet (**v. 11**), is assuming an authority which challenges the duly

constituted leadership of the official guardians of the temple and of the religious life of Jerusalem. They could hardly ignore such a challenge. His behavior is not only highly irregular; it is a threat to their position. **Just who does he think he is?**

Donald Hagner: Not infrequently the request of information can hide, as here, a lack of receptivity and commitment.

Stanley Saunders: The question about the source of Jesus' power is not new; the Pharisees have already accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul (9:34; 12:24). These two questions together pose the fundamental terms of Jesus' struggle with the Jewish leaders and articulate the nature of the conflict that will lead to his crucifixion.

Daniel Doriani: The authorities think they have trapped Jesus with a dilemma. If he says he gained his right to criticize from a human authority, they will say, "But we are the human authority." But if he says his authority came from God, they will accuse him of blasphemy. So they decided in advance to reject both possible replies.

II. (:24-27) EMBARRASSING COUNTER TRAP

A. (:24-25a) Counter Question Posed by Jesus

1. (:24) Tit for Tat – I Will Answer If You Will Answer

"And Jesus answered and said to them, 'I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.'"

Grant Osborne: This is not just a way of avoiding giving an answer. The very question Jesus asks contains the answer to their two questions, for Jesus' mission and authority are tied closely to that of John the Baptist.

2. (:25a) The Authority Question Rephrased –

Based on Continuity with the Ministry of John the Baptist

"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"

Walter Wilson: Significantly, Jesus responds to a question about himself by talking about someone else, the presupposition being that there is a fundamental **continuity** between the authority that informs Jesus's ministry and the authority that informs John's.

Robert Gundry: John predicted that the one coming after him—that is, Jesus—would be stronger than he was (3:11). So if the chief priests and elders attribute heavenly authority to John's baptism, Jesus will ask them why they didn't believe John's prediction that Jesus has fulfilled, as proved by the marvels they've seen him perform the previous day right in the temple. From the quotation of Scripture in 3:3, of course, Matthew's audience know that John's baptism had divine authority behind it. "*The crowd*" consists of those who submitted to John's baptism because they considered him a prophet and who now follow Jesus as the stronger one predicted by John. With "*we fear the crowd*" the chief priests and elders confess to one another their **principle of expedience** and thus expose their guilt to Matthew and his audience.

D. A. Carson: He does not raise this question as a simple rebuke—as if to say that if the authorities cannot make up their minds about John, neither will they be able to do so about him. His question is far more profound. If the religious authorities rightly answer it, they will already

have the correct answer to their own question. If they respond, “*From heaven,*” then they are morally bound to believe John—and John pointed to Jesus (see comments at **11:7–10**; cf. **Jn 1:19, 26–27; 3:25–30**). They would, therefore, have their answer about Jesus and his authority. If they respond, “*From men*” (v.26), they offer the wrong answer—but they will not dare utter it for fear of the people. The religious authorities share Herod’s timidity (**14:5**).

R. T. France: The focus specifically on **John’s baptism**, rather than his call to repentance, picks out the element in his ministry which was likely to have been found most offensive by the Jewish establishment (see on 3:6), with its radical implications for the membership of the true Israel, a theme which will be explored further in Jesus’ parables which follow in **21:28 – 22:14**.

B. (:25b-26) Consequences of their Answer Hamstring Their Response – Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place – No Safe Answer

1. (:25b) Considering the Answer: From Heaven

*“And they began reasoning among themselves, saying,
If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’”*

Leon Morris: Their reasoning covers the **consequences** of each of the possible answers, and they give no attention whatever to the actual source of John’s baptism. They reasoned among themselves; this was not for public hearing.

R. T. France: The dilemma of the questioners is not an intellectual one—their view of John seems to have been clear enough—but tactical, involving the danger of “loss of face”. To voice their true view of John would have exposed them to popular anger, but to give an insincere answer would expose them to ridicule, since their rejection of John’s message was well-known, as Jesus will confirm in v. **32**. While there is some ambivalence about the popular response to John as Jesus describes it in **11:16–19**, the presupposition is that they went out to him as a prophet (**11:9**), even if his style of prophetic ministry proved not to be to their taste. John’s prophetic image is confirmed in **16:14**, and his popular appeal, already mentioned in **14:5**, is presupposed in v. **32**.

2. (:26) Considering the Answer: From Men

*“But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude;
for they all hold John to be a prophet.”*

C. (:27) Contest Decisively Won by Jesus

1. Embarrassing Answer of Expediency by the Jewish Religious Leaders

“And answering Jesus, they said, ‘We do not know.’”

Walter Wilson: By responding out of cowardly self-interest (**21:27a**), the leaders demonstrate that their own authority is in fact human in character (**21:25a**), their failure to provide spiritual leadership revealing them to be blind guides (cf. **23:16–26**). Their answer may be a calculating evasion, but the reader recognizes that in a real sense, the religious authorities do not “know” the truth about the nature of God’s involvement in the world.

D. A. Carson: Their **equivocation** gave Jesus a reason for refusing to answer their question. Rejection of revelation already given is indeed a slender basis on which to ask for more. In one sense, the Sanhedrin enjoyed not only the right but the duty to check the credentials of those who claimed to be spokesmen for God. But because they misunderstood the revelation already given

in the Scriptures and rejected the witness of the Baptist, the leaders proved unequal to their responsibility. They raised the question of Jesus' authority; he raised the question of their **competence to judge such an issue.**

William Barclay: For a moment, the Jewish chief priests and elders were silent. Then they gave the lamest of all lame answers. They said: "*We do not know.*" If ever anyone stood self-condemned, these men did. They ought to have known; it was part of the duty of the Sanhedrin, of which they were members, to distinguish between true and false prophets; and they were saying that they were unable to make that distinction. Their dilemma drove them into a shameful self-humiliation.

There is a grim warning here. There is such a thing as the deliberately assumed **ignorance of cowardice.** If we consult **expediency rather than principle,** our first question will be not 'What is the truth?' but 'What is it safe to say?' Again and again, the worship of expediency will drive us to a cowardly silence. We will lamely say: 'I do not know the answer,' when we know perfectly well the answer, but are afraid to give it. The true question is not 'What is it safe to say?' but 'What is it right to say?'

The deliberately assumed ignorance of fear and the cowardly silence of expediency are shameful things. If we know the truth, we are under obligation to tell it, though the heavens should fall.

2. End of Dispute Dictated by the Victor

"He also said to them,

'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'"

Robert Gundry: The chief priests and elders didn't really want to know the nature and source of his authority. They only wanted to embarrass him. So he doesn't tell them what they didn't want to know anyway, and embarrasses them instead.

Donald Hagner: If Jesus regarded the work of John as ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, "*from heaven,*" it is clear that the same answer was implied with regard to his own ministry (cf. **Bengel**). That was implied already in the message that through his ministry the kingdom of God was being made manifest (cf. **12:28; 13:16–17**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do the Jewish religious leaders continue to test the wisdom and debate skills of Jesus after so many previous embarrassing failures?
- 2) Why is it sometimes best to answer a question with a question?
- 3) In what ways did Jesus view His message and ministry to be harmonious with that of John the Baptist?
- 4) How have you responded to the authority claims of Jesus over your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Wilkins: Jesus's final conflict with the Jerusalem religious leaders began when he entered the city and acted prophetically in the temple (21:15–17), but at this point it escalates. The leaders' question about the source of his authority tends to set the tone for the controversy stories found throughout 21:23 – 22:46. **Boring** (1995: 409) takes all of 21:24 – 22:46 as a response to the leaders' question in 21:23. In his view, the two unanswerable questions Jesus puts to the leaders form the poles of a **chiasmus**:

- A Jesus's question (21:24–27)
 - B Three parables (21:28–32; 21:33–46; 22:1–14)
 - B' Three controversy stories (22:15–22; 22:23–33; 22:34–40)
- A' Jesus's question (22:41–46)

Whether or not the chiasm is valid, the ultimate conflict between Jesus and the leaders is indeed over the matter of his **authority**.

Leon Morris: The **question of proper authority** was important for the Jews of the day. They held that they were the people of God, and they therefore detested their Roman overlords. Of necessity they submitted to them, but they did not believe that the Romans had the right to govern them. They were God's own people, and their human lords were God's high priest and those associated with him in the appointed assemblies, the great Sanhedrin and the lesser councils throughout the land. People like John the Baptist and Jesus presented problems because they did not fit into this picture. They were not like the Romans, who ruled unjustly but had the military backing that enforced their demands. And they were not like the high priests and other officials, who because of their official position were regarded as authoritative persons by official Judaism. **What authority, then, did they have?**

Grant Osborne: The purpose of these controversies is to present both the **messianic authority** and **teaching authority** of Jesus in contrast to the growing rejection/apostasy of the leaders. In each of the episodes Jesus shows his superiority to the religious experts as he takes them on in rabbinic fashion and decimates them with his **handling of Torah**. **Daube** shows that the last four (22:15–46) correspond to the four main types of questions recognized by the rabbis:

- questions of **wisdom**, on a point of Torah (22:15–22);
- of **mockery** (scoffing at a belief), on the resurrection (22:23–33);
- of **moral conduct**, on the relationship between God and human beings (22:34–40);
- and of **biblical exegesis**, on a seeming contradiction between two passages (22:41–46).

Once again, Jesus is the final and authoritative interpreter of Torah (see on 5:17–20). The three parables between the first and second of the debates (21:28 – 22:14) center on the unbelief/opposition of the leaders and God's judgment of them. . .

In terms of reader response, there are two major issues here:

- (1) the absolute authority of Jesus, confirmed by the Baptist, and
- (2) the danger of self-righteous rejection of Jesus' authority, as exemplified in the leaders.

The first has been the message of Matthew throughout, the second is explored in **12:31–32; 13:11–15** and will dominate **ch. 23**. Rejection can go only so far, and then the opportunity to repent is gone, and only judgment remains (**Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 1 John 5:16**. “*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (**Heb 10:31**).

John MacArthur: The Authority of Jesus

The word “*authority*” is a strong word. It’s filled with meaning. When we hear the word “*authority*,” there’s a certain force about that word. There may be even a certain intimidation about that word. We talk about the authorities, and we rightfully have a sense of respect, maybe a sense of awe, maybe a sense of fear.

The word “*authority*” denotes permission. It denotes privilege; it denotes power; it denotes rule, control, influence. When someone has authority, that means they’re on top of other people. They have responsibility beyond the norm. They are able to determine things, to decide things, to render judgments, to wield certain rights and privileges. And we say in the home there’s authority, resting with the Father, with the parents. In the government there are authorities: the police and those who govern us. In the schools there are authorities. In business, in the plant, in the job – in any dimension of life there are authorities, people who have the privilege, the power, the permission to set the rules, to determine the judgments and the verdicts.

But there is one who has **authority that surpasses all other authorities**. In Matthew **chapter 28, verse 18**, Jesus said this, “*All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*” “All authority is given unto Me” – that is an amazing claim to privilege. That is an amazing claim to power, to permission, to right. And Jesus demonstrated that very well in His ministry. . .

Now, He had so much authority that He was a **problem to the Jewish system**. Because, you see, they believed that they were the authorities. And they had a very highly-developed and sophisticated system of authority. And He absolutely ignored it. He never asked their information for anything. He didn’t ask them to approve His doctrine. He didn’t ask them to approve His healings. He didn’t ask them to approve His casting out of demons. He didn’t ask them to approve His verdicts and His judgments. He didn’t ask them to help Him decide who were the children of God, and He didn’t ask for their advice on how to give eternal life. He totally ignored them. . .

You see, the Jews were amazed; they were distressed; they were appalled that He acted without any approval, without any authorization. I mean you just don’t go in and cleanse the temple. He never consulted the Sanhedrin. He never quoted an eminent rabbi. He did what He wanted; He said what He wanted, and He acted as He wanted. Such behavior was absolutely unacceptable to them. You see, rabbinical teaching had no inherent authority. The rabbis quoted the rabbis, who quoted the rabbis, who quoted the rabbis, who quoted the rabbis, and that’s the only authority they ever had. And you had to get approval from the Sanhedrin. You had to be ordained by the Sanhedrin to function as an accepted rabbi.

But **Jesus was His own authority**, because all authority had been given to Him by God, and He never had authorization from men for anything at all. In fact, He ignored their whole system of authorization, and this sets up conflict. **It sets up conflict**. All through His ministry, He’s in conflict with existing authorities in the Jewish community. And it comes to a head as we come now to **Matthew chapter 21**. And it comes to a very, very severe conflict. . .

So, He went into the temple and walking about, amidst the mass of people, He is teaching and preaching: **teaching the kingdom, preaching the Gospel**. And likely He talked about sin – the wretchedness of it and the folly of hypocritical religion. And likely He talked about judgment, the inevitability of hell for those who refused God’s truth and God’s way of salvation.

And no doubt He talked about righteousness, the hopelessness of self-righteousness and trying to attain salvation by your own good works. And He must have talked about humility and the place for brokenness, and self-emptying, and self-crucifixion, and bankruptcy of spirit. And He must have talked about love – the love of God and the love men should have for God. And He must have talked about peace. He must have talked about the fact that God wanted to make peace with men, not on a temporary basis, but on a permanent basis.

And maybe He talked about false prayers. And maybe He talked about vain repetition. And maybe He spoke about doing religious deeds to be seen by men. And maybe He talked about false humility. And maybe He spoke about spiritual pride. And maybe He talked about the cost of following Him. And maybe He talked about persecution. And maybe He talked about eternal glory.

Perhaps He spoke about the law of God, the Word of God; perhaps about honesty, or marriage, or forgiveness, or true riches, or faith, or hope, or grace, or mercy, or false teachers. Maybe He talked about entering the kingdom. Maybe about a narrow gate and a narrow way, or a broad gate and a broad way. Maybe He talked about life. Maybe He talked about death. Because He must have talked about the kingdom and preached the Gospel. . .

When unbelief investigates the truth, it comes up with the wrong answers, see? Because it’s already predisposed to ignore the facts. Typical of people who come to look at the Gospel message and look at the virtue of Jesus Christ, already having convinced themselves that their way is right and the way of God is wrong. And no matter how much evidence you give them, they’ll still reject, because that’s their predisposition.

J. Ligon Duncan: By What Authority?

I. Our response to Jesus’ authority is a spiritual diagnostic.

It is an indicator of where your heart is with God.

But I want you to see, friends, that the question that they are asking Him **has already been plainly answered**. It is vital for you to understand that. There is absolutely no question about the answer to this question. Jesus by His own words, His own teaching, by His claims, by His miracles, and by His life had made it abundantly clear where the source of His authority came from. Furthermore, God had witnessed to Jesus Himself. You remember, the Father spoke from heaven to accredit His ministry at the baptism of John. The Father spoke from heaven at His transfiguration. The Son was witnessed to by men, beginning with John the Baptist who said of Him, “*Behold the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world.*” And even His enemies, and even demons would confess that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. And furthermore, Scripture corroborated the claims that He was making. And so God and man and Scripture coalesced to testify to the authority of Jesus Christ. So the question that these leaders were asking was a question that had already been answered. And the reason they are asking this

question is not because Jesus has not made a clear testimony to who He is. **It is because their hearts are hard.**

II. Jesus Responds

He's not just being tricky. He's saying, that if you answer this question, then you've got the answer to the question you just asked Me. If you answer rightly that John's ministry was from God, and John said of Me, behold the Lamb of God who comes to be slain for the sins of the world. If John acknowledges Him to be the Son of God, then you've got your answer. Jesus' answer points unambiguously to the authority of His person and His work. The witness of John shows that the work and the teaching of Jesus' ministry is from God.

Jesus in responding to His accusers shows that the claims that He has made about Himself are corroborated by God, by faithful men like John, and by the Scriptures.

III. The response of the leaders to Jesus.

They begin reasoning amongst themselves, and they begin trying to figure out **how to get out of this mess that they've gotten themselves in.** But their reasoning was not careful reflection on what Jesus had said. Their reason was not careful consideration of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their reasoning was rather scheming to figure out how to avoid answering the question. Jesus had put a question to them that they did not want to answer. And basically they considered amongst themselves how they could go about lying in response to that question. Instead of saying to Jesus, "Really I don't want to answer that question," or "We don't want to answer that question," they said, "*We don't know.*" The chief priests were politicians. And the elders derived their authority as representatives of the people. And so they were being driven by popular discernment and perception. In other words, they were being led by polls. And the irony of this is these people who so wanted to assert their own authority are totally captive to popular opinion. So that they have no authority whatsoever in face of the question that Jesus Christ puts to them. Larry Richards says this: "Unwilling and unable to take a stand or exercise the authority they claim to have, these men replied, we don't know. Because that was the politically correct thing to do." . . .

And yet there are **people who do not accept the claims of Christ. Why?** Because they don't have enough information? No. Because there's not enough evidence? No. Because the claims aren't clear? No. **Because they don't want to bow the knee.** You see, when we come to Christ we don't negotiate terms. It's **unconditional surrender.** Come to the foot of that cross and He accepts only those who bow the knee and embrace him as Savior and Lord. He's given all the testimony in the world in the glory of His gospel, in His person, in His work, and our only proper response is to bow the knee and embrace Him.

TEXT: Matthew 21:28-32

TITLE: PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS – EXPOSING THE UNBELIEF OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

BIG IDEA:

ACTIONS MEAN MORE THAN MERE WORDS – GOOD INTENTIONS CANNOT BE SUBSTITUTED FOR GENUINE REPENTANCE AND THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: This is a parable about **rejection** and **unbelief**, a reluctance and yet a final willingness to do the Father’s will (the tax collectors and sinners) vs. an initial willingness and yet final refusal to follow his will (the leaders). It imparts the message that it matters more “what one does” (the tax collectors and sinners) than what one is (the religious leaders). . .

The allegorical elements are clear: the father is God, the vineyard is his kingdom community, the first son the outcasts, and the second son the leaders. The sinners turned against God for much of their lives but have now come back to God (and entered his vineyard) by turning to Jesus. The religious officials originally agreed to do God’s will but have now turned their backs on God by rejecting his Son. The obvious turning point in both cases is Jesus. . .

The leaders and the sinners show the contrast between those who say they will follow God, yet never come to faith and obedience, vs. those who initially reject but find repentance and belief, then do the Father’s will. The other aspect is that it is the despised members of society rather than the religious elite who are willing to do so.

Stu Weber: Jesus had struck the first of three blows against the credibility of the leaders of Israel—against their qualification to serve as the shepherds of God's people. In spite of the religious show they put on and their claims to be obedient to God, they had rejected the mission God had given them (see **Ezek. 34**). They were guilty of neglect and abuse of God's flock.

D. A. Carson: The **shock value** of Jesus’ statement can be appreciated only when the low esteem in which tax collectors were held, not to mention prostitutes, is taken into account. In our day of soft pornography in the media, we are not shocked by “prostitutes.” But Jesus is saying that the **scum of society**, though it says no to God, repents, performs the Father’s will, and enters the kingdom, whereas the religious authorities loudly say yes to God but never do what he says, and therefore they fail to enter. Their righteousness is not enough (cf. **5:20**). Thus the parable makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile but **between religious leader and public sinner**.

Walter Wilson: Insofar as it illustrates the need to both hear and do what God requires, the parable in **21:28–31** reinforces the main point of the parable Jesus had used to conclude the Sermon on the Mount in **7:24–27**.

Donald Hagner: Doing the will of the Father, for Jesus, is more than simply a matter of words; it is always a matter of deeds (cf. esp. **7:21–27; 25:31–46**). It is one thing to say one does or will do the will of the Father; it is another thing actually to do it. Words alone mean nothing. A certain claim of serving God and being faithful to Torah went with being the religious leadership

of the Jewish people. Yet in fact these leaders were not obedient to God. They had not heeded the message of John the Baptist, just as they now opposed the message of Jesus himself. But the paradox lay in the fact that the despised sinners, the tax collectors and harlots—those with no claim to righteousness whatsoever—believed both John and Jesus. Thus they, rather than the “righteous” establishment (cf. **9:13**), were entering the kingdom of God. They who knew themselves to be desperately needy of grace were the ones open to it and thus the ones who received it.

Daniel Doriani: The parable teaches two lessons.

- First, anyone can come to Jesus through repentance and faith.
- Second, it is never enough to make promises to God, or to claim to believe, or to recite a creed. What counts is actual devotion: love of God, worship, and loving service to others.

In almost every church there are **pretenders**. Pastors rarely know who they are, but the Lord knows and he will reveal the truth to all who are willing to hear.

It is simple enough if the Lord is nudging someone to give up his or her charade. They need only repent of their pride and deceit, then heed his call to love and serve him. Why should anyone wait? There may never be a better time to get right with God. Let no one think he will repent later. If anyone chooses to deafen himself to God’s call, later may never come.

Ray Fowler: This is the ultimate meaning of the parable of the two sons. **Repentance and faith are more important than outward religious show.** It doesn’t matter if you say you believe in God if your actions don’t show it. Repentance trumps religion every time. A true conversion involves repentance from sin and turning to God in faith through Jesus his Son.

In other words, it doesn’t matter how religious you are. If you do not repent and believe in Jesus, you will not enter the kingdom of God.

And, it doesn’t matter how sinful you are. If you do repent and believe in Jesus, you will enter the kingdom of God.

What you say and what you do matters. If you truly believe in God, you will do what he tells you. And he tells you to repent of your sins, and to put your faith in Jesus his Son.

(:28a) PROLOGUE – ENGAGING THE TARGET AUDIENCE

“But what do you think?”

Grant Osborne: The introductory “*What do you think?*” occurs often (**17:25; 18:12; 22:17, 42; 26:66**) and asks the listener (here the leaders) to ponder carefully what Jesus is saying. In this sense it is similar to an “*amen*” (ἀμήν) saying (e.g., **21:21, 31**) in pointing to an **important truth**. Through it we the real readers are also invited to **think carefully** about the story’s message.

Ray Fowler: Jesus begins by asking them, “*What do you think?*” Jesus was often interactive as a teacher – asking questions, probing people’s thoughts and motivations, helping people to dig deeper beneath the surface. Here he engages the religious leaders up front and lets them know he

wants their feedback on what he is about to say.

Keith Throop: Context: Jesus had said He would tell them by what authority He did the things that He did, but only if they first answered His question about John the Baptist. Since they didn't want to give Him a straight answer to His question, He followed through on what He said and gave them no answer to their question.

Yet He doesn't simply drop the matter. Instead, He tells a short parable and continues to question them in order to highlight the real issue, namely **their unbelief**.

I. (:28b-30) SIMPLE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

(:28b) The Situation

"A man had two sons,"

A. (:28c-29) The First Son of False Profession

1. (:28c) Command of the Father

"and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'"

2. (:29) Hypocritical Response of the First Son

"And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go."

William Barclay: This parable teaches us that **promises can never take the place of performance**, and fine words are never a substitute for fine deeds. The son who said he would go, and did not, had all the outward marks of courtesy. In his answer, he called his father 'sir' with all respect. But a courtesy which never gets beyond words is a totally illusory thing. True courtesy is obedience, willingly and graciously given.

B. (:30) The Second Son of Genuine Repentance

1. Command of the Father

"And he came to the second and said the same thing."

2. Repentant Response of the Second Son

"But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went."

II. (:31-32) STRONG REBUKE OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A. (:31a) Self Incrimination

1. You Make the Call

"Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Jeffrey Crabtree: The **power of choice** is one of the presuppositions that made this parable work. Both sons made a real choice. The father did not choose for them. By His application, Jesus showed that individual choices determine entrance into the kingdom.

2. No Argument Here

"They said, 'The latter.'"

Stu Weber: **Actions are more significant than words.** This was so obvious that even Jesus' opponents answered correctly. It was the first son—the one who initially said no but who ultimately obeyed—who did the will of the father.

B. (:31b-32) Shocking Application to the Jewish Religious Leaders

1. (:31b) Worse Off than Tax-gatherers and Harlots

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you.’”

2. (:32) Confirmed Rejectors of the Way of Righteousness Preached by John the Baptist

a. First Indictment

1) You Failed to Believe

“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him;”

John Schultz: Jesus actually puts the priests and elder in the same category with the prostitutes and tax collectors. The difference is that the latter refused initially, but ended up repenting. The former kept on refusing. Jesus tried to make these pious people jealous by putting the prostitutes and tax collector before them as an example. Jesus also emphasized that there could be no doubt about the heavenly origin of John's baptism. He did not defend His cleansing of the temple or apologize for it. He attacked His accusers. John's baptism and the cleansing of the temple belong to the same category. There is also a relationship between the cleansing of the human heart through confession of sin, conversion and the cleansing of the temple. The temple was symbolic of God's revelation of Himself on earth. As Jesus indicated earlier in connection with another cleansing of the temple, the actual revelation of God is in the resurrected body of Jesus Christ.² We become members of that resurrected body through regeneration, of which the baptism of John was an indicator.

Ray Fowler: Jesus says, *“John came to show you the way of righteousness.”* What was the way of righteousness John came to show? John showed the way of righteousness was **repentance and faith in Jesus**. We read in **Matthew 3**: *“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”* (**Matthew 3:1-2**)

So, John preached a message of repentance, and then he also pointed the people to Jesus. We read in **John 1:29**: *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”* (**John 1:29**)

John showed the way of righteousness was repentance and faith in Jesus rather than outward religious show. But the religious leaders did not believe him. In fact, even when they saw the tax collectors and prostitutes repenting and believing, they still did not repent and believe in Jesus themselves. This made them even more guilty than before.

They chose outward religious show over heartfelt repentance and faith in Jesus. And so, they were like the second son who said he would obey his father, but then did not do what his father told him. Jesus asked them, *“What do you think? Which son did what his father wanted?”* They already answered, *“The first son.”* Earlier they had tried to trap Jesus and failed. **Now Jesus has trapped them, and they stand condemned by their own words.**

2) Tax-gatherers and Harlots Did Believe

“but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him;

Donald Hagner: Jesus now provides **the logic** underlying his explanation of the parable. God had provided an invitation to the Jewish leaders in the preaching of John the Baptist (in mind from the preceding pericope), which they had rejected. John had come ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, “*in the way of righteousness.*” Probably this is to be understood as a reference to the process of the accomplishment of salvation in history through God’s sending of John as the forerunner of Jesus (the phrase occurs also in **Prov 8:20; 12:28; 21:21[LXX]; 2 Peter 2:21**, but in these instances the emphasis is clearly on ethical righteousness). John came preaching the imminence of the kingdom of God (cf. **3:2; 11:11–12**). Yet the Jewish leaders “*did not believe him*” (οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ; cf. **v. 25**). The tax collectors and harlots, on the other hand, responded to John’s message (for the response of the former, cf. **Luke 3:12; 7:29**). Jesus further contrasts the Jewish leadership with the first, initially disobedient son by noting that unlike him they did not “*change their mind afterwards*” (οὐδὲ μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον; cf. the same language in **v. 29**) and respond appropriately by believing him. The words τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ, “*and believe him,*” ordinarily expressing purpose, here are exegetical, providing the content of the preceding verb (see MHT 1.216–17). Their culpability is stressed by the participle ἰδόντες, which may be taken as concessive, hence “*although seeing.*” The object of the participle remains unexpressed, although presumably intended is the witnessing of the response of the unrighteous to the ministry of the Baptist. **The Jewish authorities thus have no excuse.** The contrast noted here between the receptivity of sinners and the hardheadedness of the Jewish religious leadership in relation to the message of Jesus is a common motif in the Gospel tradition (cf. **9:10–13; Luke 7:29–30, 35–50; 18:9–14; John 7:48**). The connection between John the Baptist and Jesus is such that **those who reject John also reject Jesus.**

b. Second Indictment = Persistence in Unbelief Despite Evidence of Transformed Lives

“and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.”

Stanley Saunders: [Jesus’] own application of the parable turns on two details:

- First, Jesus links the parable with the preceding discussion about John’s baptism (**21:25–27**). For him, doing the father’s will corresponds to believing John, who “*came to you in the way of righteousness,*” and bearing the fruit of repentance (**21:32a**; cf. **3:2, 8**). By this definition of “*doing*” what the father asks, all would agree that the leaders have failed.
- The second important detail concerns the matter of repentance. Jesus says that while John’s proclamation prompted belief among the tax collectors and sinners, “*you did not change your minds and believe him*” (**21:32**). Here Jesus uses the same word for “*change your mind*” as he had for the first child’s turnabout after refusing to go (**21:29**). Because the tax collectors and sinners did change their minds (which Jesus here equates with repentance) and bore the fruit of righteousness (e.g., joining at table with Jesus and his disciples, cf. **9:10–11**), they will go into God’s kingdom ahead of the leaders, who did not change their minds and go into the vineyard (Israel) to work (bear fruit) (**21:31**).

Leon Morris: People whom they despised, the tax collectors and the harlots, were more open to John’s message. They did believe him, which means that they responded to his call for repentance and amended their whole way of living and of approach to God. Clearly the change

was evident, for Jesus says, “*you had seen this.*” But even the evidence of what a true response to John’s preaching could do in people’s lives did not produce a change in the conventionally religious. **They did not repent afterward**, that is, after they had seen what repentance effected in the lives of those who responded to John; they did not believe John. **Repentance and believing John are closely connected**; had they produced the one they would have produced the other, but they produced neither.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) If there has been no transformation of life, has there really been any conversion?
- 2) Does our life match our profession of faith?
- 3) Do we freely receive all repentant sinners into the body of Christ?
- 4) How can we address religious hypocrites with the promise of the offer of the gospel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: The father in the story clearly represented God the Father. The first son, “I Won’t,” represented the **nonreligious, openly sinful tax collectors and prostitutes** —the worst of the worst in the minds of religious Jews. These men and women heard John the Baptizer’s message and defiantly turned away from it, but then, after thinking it over, they believed and repented. Meanwhile, the “I Will” son reflected those who appear obedient and faithful on the outside but prove to be wicked and disobedient. Specifically, he **represented Israel’s religious leaders** who professed to believe, but who, deep within, didn’t. Jesus declared that those deemed “sinners” by the religious authorities would enter the kingdom of God before them. Ouch! Jesus pulled no punches in this straightforward rebuke of His devious critics. If the religious leaders hadn’t gotten the veiled references to their wickedness in His earlier parables, they certainly did now. Jesus directly pointed His finger at them and replayed their own rejection of John the Baptizer (**21:32**).

R. T. France: The Jewish leaders (like the second son) claimed to be living in obedience to God’s law, and kept themselves strictly apart from those who (like the first son) made no such claim. It was Jesus’ interest in such “*tax collectors and sinners*” (**Luke 15:1–2**) which gave rise to another parable about two sons (**Luke 15:11–32**). In this gospel the “underclass” of Jewish society have also been described as “*tax collectors and sinners*” (**9:10, 11; 11:19**), and on two occasions the Jewish tax collectors have been even more dismissively linked with Gentiles (**5:46–47; 18:17**). The substitution of “prostitutes” here for either “sinners” or “Gentiles” gives an even more offensive comparison, especially in so male-dominated a society as first-century Palestine. These are the people whom the “*chief priests and elders of the people*” would most despise and most heartily thank God that they were not like (cf. **Luke 18:11**). They had no place in respectable, religious Jewish society—how much less in the kingdom of God. So when Jesus speaks not only of their entering God’s kingdom but also going in there first, he is making a no

less radical pronouncement than when he spoke of Gentiles coming into the kingdom of heaven to sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob while the “*sons of the kingdom*” found themselves outside (8:11–12).

Klyne Snodgrass: The primary feature of this text is clear. **God requires productive and obedient living from his people.** Claims and concerns for appearance are not enough. Churches often push for membership and professions of faith but allow (or even foster) a separation between believing and doing. **How did people ever get the idea that obedience to the will of God is optional?** Many parables, and especially this one, push for **integrity of life** before God. Talk and external appearance are cheap; what counts is actually doing the will of the father from the heart. **Any separation of believing and doing is a distortion of the gospel message** and is directly confronted by this parable. **A person cannot believe apart from obedience.** (*Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, p. 275)

John MacArthur: The Authority of Jesus

It’s a parable. Very simple. A father has two sons. The reason you have a father and two sons here is because built into that relationship you have a responsibility for obedience. The father goes to his sons. He runs a vineyard. He says, “*Go to the vineyard and go to work.*” Son number one says, “*I will not,*” but afterwards, he repents and goes. Son number two says, “*I will,*” and never does. It would seem to me that somewhere there ought to be son number three who said, “*I will,*” and did. But not in this story. You just have two bad ones. It’s a characterization of humanity. See?

“*What do you think?*” He says.” And He says, in **verse 31**, “*Which of the two did the will of his father?*”

“*And they say unto Him, ‘The first.’*” And they’re so excited to be able to answer a question, thinking that at last they’ve got one that won’t incriminate them. But it did. “The first, the first. I mean the guy who did it was the guy who said he wouldn’t, but repented and did.”

Well, they were right. That was the characterization, the parable. Fourth is the connection. How does He connect that with them? How does He apply that? This is devastating. When they hurriedly answered, “The first,” they put themselves in a dire situation for a **great rebuke**. . .

The point here is **you have people who claim obedience and don’t obey**, people who deny obedience but ultimately do, and that’s the difference. Tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. I mean that is a strong statement, and boy, have they lost face in front of the crowd. He’s not saying, “You’re going to go in after them.” That’s not the implication. **The idea is, “They’re going to go in, and you’re not.”** Religion doesn’t get you in the kingdom. And sin repented of and forgiven doesn’t keep you out. Isn’t that good news? They were the worst of humanity. They were the very worst of humanity.

But the Gospels tell us, so beautifully, that in the ministry of John, many – it says, “*Many harlots believed on Him.*” It was the people who were overwhelmed with their sin. And they came down to John, and they said, “We got to get ready for the kingdom. If the Messiah’s coming, we got to get ready. We want to confess. We want to repent of our sins.”

But when the Pharisees – you remember in **Matthew 3**? – came down, and John was baptizing? And John says, “*You snakes. You snakes. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? You*

better bring forth fruits unto repentance, because the Messiah's coming, and when He gets here, He's going to take the ax, and He's going to lay it at the root of the tree. And" – he says – "He's going to come, and in His hand is the fan, and He's going to separate the wheat and the chaff, and He's going to start a furnace of fire."

In other words, he gave them a **whole judgment message**. He was taking the sinners in, and they were confessing and repenting and being baptized in a baptism of repentance to get ready for the Messiah. **And the religious leaders were coming, and not accepting the message, and not believing at all, and not repenting.** . . .

And then comes your **second indictment**, because you, too, have sat and seen that power in that Gospel transform lives. And you've seen people's lives changed. And their lives transformed, and even after having seen that, **you still don't believe**. That's a **double indictment**. And the word that we see in this, to those men, is a word of final judgment; a word of doom; a word of hell; hopelessness for those who had been exposed to the full light of the Son of God, the full light of the prophet of God, the full light of the prophet of God - John the Baptist. They'd seen it all; they'd heard it all, and they wouldn't believe the message, and they wouldn't even believe the transforming power.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Two Sons

This story, this parable of Jesus, is unique to Matthew. You won't find it in the other gospel writers. It sets forth beautifully the comfort of repentance to those who have sinned and yet have seen their sin and turned from it and come to Christ. But it also has in it a very straightforward, powerful warning against hypocrites and the danger of their position. . . .

I. (:28-31a) A Picture of Israel's State.

Jesus is telling the parable in order to show Jewish religious leaders what Israel looks like in terms of its spiritual condition in the weight of John the Baptist's and Jesus' ministry. He's saying basically there have been two responses to John's ministry, and these are two responses. . . .

Basically, Jesus is asking this question: both of these sons responded wrongly in the first place, so which of them was right with God at the end of this scenario? The one who said that he would but didn't, or the one who said that he wouldn't but later did? Jesus is showing us a picture of a repentant son and a hypocritical son. The repentant son is the one who had first rejected God's commands, but then later had a change of heart and did what his father told him to do. The hypocritical son is the one who pretends to be very concerned and obedient to his father, but then never does his father's will. Jesus, in telling this parable, is showing these Jewish religious leaders themselves in talking about the son who says, "No, I will not." . . .

The message is, of course, that God is more willing to receive repentant sinners than sinners are to repent of their sins. Jesus is saying to us in this parable that the father is far more ready to receive you than you are to let go of your sins. His message to those in Israel, even to those Pharisees, is that if they would but relinquish their sin and cast themselves on the mercy of God, they will find the favor of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God. He will receive them. And so we learn here that God delights when the wicked turn from their sin to him. That's the great message here – the priority of repentance.

II. Jesus condemns hypocrisy.

God will exclude from His kingdom all those who are right in their own eyes. Why do you think Jesus is so strident when He speaks about the spiritual danger of hypocrisy? Let me tell you why in one phrase. Hypocrisy immunizes you from grace. Hypocrisy immunizes you from grace. The hypocrite wants to pretend he is right. He wants to pretend to be righteous. He wants to pretend to be in right relationship with God, even when he's not. And therefore, He immunizes himself from the grace which God is waiting to shower upon everyone who will simply admit that they are in need of a Savior. You see, if you don't think you need a Savior, then the offer of a Savior means nothing to you. If you don't think you need forgiveness of sins, then some preacher standing up and preaching on for half an hour about the glories of forgiveness of sins in Christ means nothing to you because you don't think you need it, and so Jesus is strident when He speaks to the sin of hypocrisy because it's a soul-killing sin. It immunizes us to the message of grace. . .

On the other hand, these Jewish leaders claimed to be outwardly obedient. They made a lot of confession with their lips, but their lives, their hearts, were not right with God. They were shutting themselves out and they were shutting their followers out of the kingdom by their hypocrisy. Their pride, their hypocrisy had two or three elements that I'd like to explore. The root sins connected to their hypocrisy were as follows: first, pride. These religious leaders acted like the kingdom was theirs, not God's. They didn't realize that they were merely God's appointed ministers in that kingdom; they had acted as if that kingdom belonged to them and not to God. We'll see that even more clearly in the next parable that Jesus sees, but its very clear that pride is at the root of their hypocrisy.

Secondly, however, they had a **false understanding of God's love**. They thought that they needed to look in order to obtain God's grace. They thought that there was something that they could do which would establish God's favor toward them. They thought that there was something that they needed to do in order for God to love them. They were wrong about that. God was far more willing to show them mercy and grace than they were to let go of their sin.

Finally, they **desired more than anything else not to be shamed by their sins**. They wanted to be respected and honored amongst the people of God, but they did not want to own up to the shame of their sin, and because they did not want to face the shame of their sin, they were hypocritical and they pretended as if their sin was not there. . .

We must be careful to care more about the reality of our relationship with God, than about other people's perception of our relationship with God. We need to care more about God's opinion of us than man's opinion of us. Hypocrisy is a soul-killing sin, you see, just because it cuts us off from the grace of God. Repentance leads us to obedience into the ways of righteousness. But hypocrisy insulates us from obedience. It makes us work very hard to look one way on the outside that we're really not on the inside; and that is not the way of righteousness that John taught.

S. Lewis Johnson: The Authority of John and Jesus

He moves on to discuss by an illustration the **situation in Judaism** at this time, and this passage, incidentally, is **connected with the preceding**, because in **verse 32** he says, for John came out in the way of righteousness and you believed him not, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him, and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward that ye might believe him, so it is

evident that this next illustration has a great deal to do with this ministry of John the Baptist. It is a very simple little story, incidentally. . .

It is one of the major points in this parable that we have a need that **belief should behave in accordance with our belief**. Moral standards today are still valid ,even in the midst of today's miasma of relativity. There is a story of a Scottish elder who was going to take a trip to the Holy Land, and he was very thrilled over it. The trouble with this elder was he was really a disagreeable person around the church, and so when he told the minister he was going to the Holy Land. He said, not only am I going to the Holy Land, but he said, I got a copy of the Ten Commandments, and I'm going to climb Mt. Sinai, and from the top of Mt. Sinai I'm going to read the Ten Commandments.

The minister said, I have got a better idea. He said what? He said, **stay home and do them**.

You know, we make these loud professions of orthodoxy, but **it is extremely significant that these professions make these realities**. And finally, I want you to notice one last thing here. Will you look at that word in **verse 31** before you, that prepositional phrase, verily I say unto you, the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God **before you?** Now you know, I think from this story, you might have expected the Lord Jesus to say the publicans and harlots are going into the kingdom of God instead of you. But he didn't say that.

He said, **before you**, which **leaves the door open**, and you can see that even here in the midst of their sham and pretense and hypocrisy, we still have an **unlimited invitation to faith in the Lord Jesus**. The publicans and harlots – true, they have precedence over you now. They have already gone into the kingdom of God before you, but it's **before you** and **the promise still remains for you**. **You have lost the precedence, but not the promise**, and for open neglectors and nominal followers of the Lord Jesus, that is a promise the word of God contains.

TEXT: Matthew 21:33-46

TITLE: PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANT FARMERS

BIG IDEA:

THE WICKEDNESS OF ISRAEL'S RULERS IN REJECTING GOD'S PROPHETS AND EVENTUALLY HIS OWN SON HAS CAUSED A RADICAL SHIFT AWAY FROM A KINGDOM FOCUS ON THE NATION OF ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION:

This parable must be interpreted from the perspective of the Apostle Paul's discussion in **Romans 9-11** of how the nation of Israel fits into God's plan for the future. Jesus is prophesying the transition from the emphasis on the nation of Israel to the Church Age and the times of the Gentiles. But that does not mean that the church has permanently replaced Israel in God's kingdom program. Her blinding is only **partial** and only **temporary** while the Gentile believers are grafted into the people of God. But eventually there will be a national repentance in the end times and all of the nation of Israel at that time will be saved. But here we see the dramatic rejection of the Jewish religious leaders and the nation itself due to persistent unbelief and rejection of God's prophets and then God's own Son, the Messiah.

Donald Hagner: As in the parables on either side of this one, the emphasis here again falls on the **unreceptivity of the Jews** and in particular upon the **Jewish religious establishment**. This is heightened by the motif of the **rejection** and **murder** of the servants and finally the son. Here the correspondence between the story of the parable and the historical rejection of the prophets and the Son of God is nothing less than remarkable. The reference to the killing of the son (v. 39) and the rejection of the stone (v. 42) become in effect further prophecies of what is to befall the Son (cf. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). What is most astonishing, however, is the salvation-historical perspective contained in the reference to the **transferring of the vineyard** from the original tenants to new ones—spelled out specifically as the transference of the kingdom of God **to a new people** (v. 43). For Matthew's Christian-Jewish readers, this served to explain both the present futility of the contemporary Judaism of the synagogue and the emergence of the new entity, largely but not exclusively Gentile in composition, **the church**. Finally determinative for this sequence of events was the response given to the Son sent by the Father. Those who reject the Son, who has become the cornerstone of the new reality of the church, which becomes in effect the new Israel, forfeit their favored position and bring themselves into judgment (v. 44), while those who receive the Son receive with him the blessed reality of the now-dawning kingdom of God (for the decisive importance of relation to the Son, cf. 10:32-33). Then, as now, **relationship to Jesus is finally what matters.**

Bock: This parable is one of the most important that Jesus tells, because it overviews the history of the leaders' response to Jesus. Here is a case of a parable with **clear allegorical features**, since virtually every step in the story has a **correspondence in Israel's history.**

R. T. France: The story of an absentee landowner reflects a familiar economic situation at the time; some of the chief priests and elders to whom Jesus is speaking would probably have owned land away from Jerusalem. The landowner must be a wealthy man, because a newly planted vineyard could not be expected to produce fruit for at least four years, during which he would

have no return on his capital outlay. Once the vines began to fruit there would be an agreed proportion of the crop due to the owner, leaving the tenant to derive their living from the rest. The fault of the tenants in withholding the due produce (and in the violence perpetuated on the slaves) is massively compounded by their decision to murder the owner's son and so to attempt to take over the property. At this point the story has moved away from everyday reality, and, as often happens in parables (notably in **22:7**), the intended symbolism has apparently invaded the tory-line: the murder of the son represents the forthcoming execution of Jesus.

(:33a) PROLOGUE – ENGAGING THE TARGET AUDIENCE

“Listen to another parable.”

John MacArthur: He uses the Greek word *allos* for “another.” It means **another of the same kind**. He has just given them a parable about two sons. And here is another parable in the same vernacular, in the same style. But more than that, the parable of the two sons was a parable about judgment. And here is another parable about judgment, another one of the same kind. It is a **judgment parable**. For they have manifested collectively a rejection of Jesus Christ. And so, the parables He gives them are parables that bring upon them the judgment due to those who reject Him. **They have rejected Him; so, in these parables, He rejects them.** And they are powerful to say the least.

I. (:33b-39) RELATING THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANT FARMERS – CONTRAST BETWEEN EXTREME WICKEDNESS AND EXTREME FORBEARANCE

A. (:33) The Situation – Landowner Cultivates, Protects and Leases Out His Vineyard

“There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey.”

John Schultz: The question is **what this vineyard stands for**. It does not represent all of creation, at least not initially. It is the mandate that God had particularly entrusted to the people of Israel, which, after the rejection of the Son, would be given to the Gentiles. In **v.43**, Jesus identifies it as “*the kingdom of God*.” It represents **God's revelation of Himself to mankind**. Israel had been given the task of being the guardian of God's righteousness. God's intention had been that Israel would not keep this treasure to itself but that, by becoming a kingdom of priests, it would demonstrate this riches for the benefit of the whole world. Israel failed completely in the carrying out of this task, both as far as the keeping of the mandate and the testimony of God's righteousness. It used the fruits of the vineyard for its own consumption.

B. (:34-36) The Sending of Two Groups of Servants to Collect the Harvest Payment

1. (:34-35) First Group Beaten and Killed

“And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.”

2. (:36) Second Group Beaten and Killed

“Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.”

Van Parunak: Throughout the OT, the rulers of the people abused the prophets.

- Jezebel and the prophets of the Lord (**1 Kings 18:4, 13**)
- Ahab and Micaiah (**1 Kings 22**)
- Joash and Zechariah (**2 Chr 24:20-22**)
- Jehoiakim and Jeremiah (**Jer 26:21**)

C. (:37-39) The Sending and Killing of His Son

1. (:37) Expectation of Respectful Reception

*“But afterward he sent his son to them, saying,
‘They will respect my son.’”*

William Hendriksen: The word “*finally*” is full of intense emotion and pathos. The owner has a son, a beloved son, his only child (see **Mark 12:6**). Besides that son there is no longer anyone else he can send. That son is his one and all. He is all there is left, the owner’s last word. So he sent his son, thinking, “They will be ashamed of hurting my son. They will respect him.” He spared not his own son! But what happens? When these wicked tenants see his son approaching they begin to plot. They enter into a consultation with each other. Accordingly, what they are going to do to him is not matter of impulse. On the contrary, it is “malice of aforethought,” the result of wicked deliberation, of corrupt, selfish scheming. It is premeditated murder. They reason as follows: “This is the heir. When we kill him there will be no other heir to worry about. So the inheritance which he would have obtained will be ours.” In their sinister folly they forget that the owner, the son’s father, is still alive, and will certainly wreak vengeance. How blatantly foolish is sin! How absurd! “*He who dwells in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will hold them in derision*” (**Ps. 2:4**).

2. (:38) Expedient Decision to Kill the Son and Seize His Inheritance

*“But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves,
‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.’”*

Thomas Constable: Israel's leaders did not reject Jesus because it was not clear who He was, but because they refused to submit to His authority (**23:37**). Jesus had announced to His disciples that the Jewish leaders would kill Him (**16:21; 17:23; 20:18**). Now He announced this to the leaders themselves and the people. The “*inheritance*” that the vine-growers (Israel's leaders) sought to seize from the heir (Jesus) was the messianic kingdom.

3. (:39) Expulsion and Killing of the Son

“And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.”

D. A. Carson: Elsewhere [Matthew] shows (**23:37**) their fundamental unwillingness to come to terms with Jesus’ identity and claims because they **did not want to bow to his authority**. True, their attitude was not, according to the synoptic record, “This is the Messiah; come, let us kill him”; yet, in the light of the Scriptures, their rejection of him was no less culpable than if it had been that. Therefore, though all the parable’s details may not be pressed, rejection of the son (**v.39**) by the leaders is the final straw that brings divine wrath on them.

II. (:40-44) REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH LEADS TO THE REJECTION OF ISRAEL (JUDGMENT AND REPLACEMENT)

A. (:40-41) Self Indictment by the Religious Leaders

1. (:40) Judicial Question

“Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?”

2. (:41) Judicial Verdict

a. Radical Punishment on the Wicked Tenants

“They said to Him, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’”

Daniel Doriani: The NIV captures a play on words in the Greek, which roughly reads “*bad ones he will badly destroy.*” So Jesus now says what he previously showed when he closed the temple and he cursed the fig tree: **judgment is coming.**

b. Radical Transfer of Stewardship of Owner’s Property

“and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus applied both parables directly to His accusers. Their condemnation came from their own mouths (v. 41) as well as from His. Jewish leadership was not doing its job (9:36). They “serve[d] themselves rather than God” (Keener, Background 103)—just as they had been doing for centuries (Jer. 23:1-4; Ezek. 34:1-24)—and so God would replace them. In the parable of the tenant farmers was justification (v. 43, “therefore”) for their judgment and the appointment of new leadership who would direct fruit to God.

B. (:42-44) Divine Indictment by the Prophetic Scriptures and by the Lord Himself

1. (:42) Rejected Stone Elevated to Position of Highest Prominence

“Jesus said to them, Did you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes ?”

Michael Wilkins: The crowds at Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem had sung out a portion of the last of the Egyptian Hallel psalms, “*O Lord, save us,*” a quotation of **Psalm 118:25** (cf. **Matt. 21:9**). Now Jesus draws on **Psalm 118:22** to point to his rejection and future vindication. God has given prominence to his suffering servant like a “*capstone*” (lit., “*head of the corner*”), either the stone that held two rows of stones together in a corner (“*cornerstone*”) or the wedge-shaped stone placed at the pinnacle of an arch that locked the ascending stones together. The suffering of the Son will be turned into the position of **ultimate prominence and importance.**

2. (:43) Rejected Kingdom Transferred from the Nation of Israel to a New People

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.”

Grant Osborne: The salvation-historical move from the Jewish people to the Gentiles/church is seen in **8:11–12** (cf. **13:12**) and is part of the universal mission theme in Matthew (see **1:3, 5–6; 2:1–12; 4:15–16; 8:5–13, 28–34; 12:21; 15:21–28; 24:14; 28:19**). . .

The children of the kingdom now consist of the **new kingdom community of the church.** But this does not mean the Jewish people have no more hope. Paul clarifies this in **Rom 9–11.** God has not abandoned his covenant promises but even now has called a remnant from among the

nation (**Rom 11:1–10**) and even has intended the Gentile mission to have as its main purpose making Israel jealous (**Rom 10:19; 11:11–16**), and the end result is intended that “*all Israel will be saved*” (**Rom 11:25–32**). Still, Jesus is prophesying **divine judgment on a people and its leaders who have rejected and are about to kill the very Son of God**.

John Schultz: The immediate result of the rejection of Jesus as the cornerstone was that the kingdom was taken away from Israel to whom it had been entrusted as guardian and given to someone else. The kingdom had been Israel’s “reason d’être.” God had chosen the nation to know His will and to obey it and thus to be the guardian of righteousness and a testimony to the world. All this was in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Israel’s rejection of Jesus made them fall from their status with God, and their task to witness and guard is henceforth given to **the church**, which is the body of Christ, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles who confess Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Robert Gundry: The church is called “*a nation*” because it will replace the nation of Israel with disciples from all nations, blended together into a new people of God. Implied is a comparison of this nation to a building (compare **16:18; Isaiah 5:7**) whose key- or capstone will be the resurrected Jesus. But that kind of stone turns into a **judgmental stone** that shatters and pulverizes.

Jeffrey Crabtree: At this point, Jesus interpreted the tenant farmer parable (v. **43**). The vineyard stands for Israel, or more particularly for the kingdom of God in Israel’s hands (vv. **41, 43; Hagner 33B:620**). As with the landowner and the tenant farmers, God will remove the kingdom from under the watchcare of these Jewish leaders and give it to another nation that will produce fruit. Jesus did not identify this other nation. This writer believes this new nation is the new people of God (**1 Pet. 2:9**).

3. (:44) Rejected Stone Brings Crushing Destruction

*“And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces;
but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”*

Michael Wilkins: Those who stumble over the stone and try to destroy it, such as the religious leaders who reject Jesus and will later condemn him, will be destroyed. In the end Jesus will come as judge and fall on those who have rejected him (cf. **chs. 24–25**).

III. (:45-46) REACTION OF THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A. (:45) Perceiving Themselves to be the Target

*“And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables,
they understood that He was speaking about them.”*

B. (:46) Plotting How to Seize Jesus without Opposition from the People

*“And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes,
because they held Him to be a prophet.”*

Stu Weber: The hypocrites could take a hint. They knew Jesus was accusing them of mismanaging God’s kingdom and that he was pronouncing judgment on them. They should have repented in the face of the truth, but instead they decided to remove the truth and continue in their denial. They were still thinking that if they could kill Jesus, they would win. They were

tragically mistaken. How blind is the insanity of unbelief, especially when marked by hatred and bitterness.

Charles Swindoll: The message hit its target with full force. Up until that moment, the chief priests and Pharisees had been oblivious as to where they fit in Jesus' parables. After the one-two punch delivered in the stories of the two sons and the unfaithful tenants, Jesus got their attention. They now understood that He had been speaking about them (21:45). Though they fumed in rage, they could do nothing to Jesus in that public forum of the temple court. Because the people (rightly) believed that Jesus was a genuine prophet, the Jewish leaders feared openly arresting Him (21:46). They would have to wait for a more opportune moment.

Thomas Constable: Rather than fearing Jesus, whom they understood to have claimed to be the instrument of their final judgment, these leaders feared the multitudes—whose power over them was much less. Rather than submitting to Him in belief, they tried to seize Him. Thus they triggered the very situation that Jesus had warned them about, namely, His death at their hands. Their actions confirmed their rejection of Jesus and their consequent blindness.

D. A. Carson: The pericope ends with magnificent **yet tragic irony (v.46)**. The religious leaders and others who do not accept God's Messiah are told they will reject Jesus and be crushed. But instead of taking the warning, they hunt for ways to arrest him, hindered only by fear of the people who accept Jesus as a prophet, and so trigger the very situation they have been warned about—a dramatic example of God's poetic justice. God in the Scriptures foretells this very event. These men, prompted by hatred, rush to bring it to pass.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you describe the **depth of depravity** of those Jewish religious leaders who opposed Jesus?
- 2) What are the limits of God's **patience** and **forbearance**?
- 3) Why does this parable not teach "**replacement theology**" – e.g. the church has now replaced the nation of Israel in God's Kingdom plans and there is no special prophetic future for the nation of Israel?
- 4) What are the practical applications (both in terms of Blessing and Judgment) of Jesus being the **chief cornerstone** and a **stone of stumbling** and **rock of offense**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: These leaders would forfeit the kingdom, and the stewardship would be handed over to a people (literally, "*a nation*") who will produce its fruit. The Jewish leaders were attempting to keep what was not theirs (power and control of the people, self-elevation, ill-gained wealth) instead of leading Israel according to the will of its master. Therefore, the kingdom would be

taken away from them. Soon the church would take over operations (as announced in **16:18-19; 18:18-20**), giving glory and service to God and producing spiritual fruit for him. Two thousand years of church history have proven that even the church does not do this perfectly. But the new covenant, sealed by Jesus' blood, allows God to work through the imperfect church to accomplish his perfect plan. His Spirit now lives in believers, planting his law directly in their hearts and unifying them in a way that was impossible before.

The stewardship would reside in the hands of the church. But **God was not finished with Israel**. He grafted the church into Israel's roots, but he will see to it that his covenant with Israel and his calling of the nation will be fully realized upon a day yet future (following Daniel's seventieth week and its tribulation). This is the Holy Spirit's argument in **Romans 9-11** (esp. **ch. 11**).

John MacArthur: Judgment on Christ's Rejectors

There are two things there. First is **judgment**. Second is **replacement**. Mark that. First is judgment, the replacement. So, they have said it with their own mouths they have concluded the illustration.

Now, thirdly, I want you to see the explanation. And this is missed by many people, but I want you to see it. This is the explanation. So powerful. Because Jesus speaks, explaining the parable, but explaining it in a veiled way. Watch verse 42, the explanation. "Jesus saith unto them, 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"'" . . .

The rejected stone is the **crucified Christ**; the restored cornerstone is the **resurrected Christ**. It couldn't be more clearly said than that. Peter reiterates the same message in his first epistle, chapter 2, "*Behold I lay in Zion*" – **verse 6** – "*a chief cornerstone, elect, precious. He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, who believe He is precious. Unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is become the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.*" Peter says the same thing. Christ is the cornerstone. Christ is the cornerstone.

Paul says it in Ephesians **chapter 2**. Says, "*We are fellow citizens*" – **verse 19** – "*with the saints, in the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.*"

Now, listen carefully and get this. The Lord is saying, by quoting **Psalm 118:22** and 23 – the man – the men in the tenant farmer situation took the son out, and they slew the son. And these leaders say, "*Well, when that man comes back, he's going to miserably destroy those wicked sinners and take away the vineyard from them.*"

And Jesus says to them, "*The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. Haven't you read that?*"

And what He is saying is this: **the stone is Jesus Christ**. Right? We've seen that. The rejection constitutes **the rejection of Israel**. The restoration constitutes His resurrection and His following glory. . .

Jesus says to the leaders of Israel, "You have lost the right to be in the place of blessing." God turned from Israel. That was the end of a great day. Oh, my. That was the end of a great era. God

turned away from Israel as the people of blessing and says, “*I will give it to a nation.*” What nation? Well, the word means people. What people? Well, the same nation of which Peter speaks in 1 Peter 2, “*An holy nation.*” I believe it’s **the Church, the redeemed of this age.**

So, those two results. A kingdom of God shall be taken from you, given to someone else. That’s the first one. Taken away. That’s sad. That’s replacement that we talked about earlier. You forfeited it. And Israel today is unblessed. We’ve been learning about that in Romans 9, 10, and 11, and I’m not going to, and I’m not going to go into developing it all, but **Israel has been removed for the time being from the place of blessing.**

You say, “Will they ever come back?”

Yes, they will. Yes, they will. God will graft them in, it says in Romans. **All Israel will be saved.** The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. “*The day will come*” – says Zechariah – “*when they’ll look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as an only son.*” **Salvation will come to Israel.**

Scott Harris: Results of Rejecting the Son

A LONGSUFFERING LANDLORD

We first meet this landlord when he sets aside one of his tracts of land and plants a vineyard in it. This would be a common practice. Vineyards were a good cash crop and so a good crop for an investor to plant. This landlord made a sizeable investment in this vineyard making sure it was equipped with all that would be needed. Not only was the ground prepared, but he put a wall around it to protect it from intruders, including both people and animals. He then dug a wine press. This would be either hewn out in the bedrock itself, or dug and then lined with stones. It would consist of a main vat where the grapes would be “pressed” by the feet of people walking around on them. At the low end of the vat there would be either a pipe or a trough that would allow the juice to run into another vat. Here the sediments in the wine would settle out and the clear wine skimmed off and put into containers that were either wineskins or jars.

This landlord even went to the additional trouble of building a tower in the vineyard. A watchman would be stationed in the tower to look out for enemies or for animals that might want to get into the vineyard. All of this points out that this landlord put together a first rate vineyard. .

The details of the illustration are only provided to further illustrate the point and they do not have to be probable in real life. And so we find here a landlord that has an **incredible amount of patience.**

In Mark’s account we find the story of each slave sent, here we find Matthew condenses the story. One slave is beaten, another is killed outright, and a third one is stoned and probably left for dead. Now we would think that after the first slave is beaten and certainly after the first slave is killed that this owner would retaliate against these wicked growers and bring them to justice. Yet we find that he continues to send more slaves in an effort to simply receive what is rightfully his. This demonstrates an unusual amount of patience to say the least, and **verse 36** shows his **longsuffering** to be unbelievable in that he sends still more slaves.

Anyone with that kind of forbearance is incredible. Indeed, some have questioned whether Jesus really even told this story because it seems so implausible. But the incredible tolerance of this man is brought to the inconceivable limit when we see in **verse 37** that this landlord now sends

his son. Mark makes this even more stunning when we find out that this is the man's only son, his beloved son. His hope is that these men who have not respected his slaves, though they came with his authority, will respect his son.

This man's son shows that he is of the same essence as his father for in going, he shows that he is a **selfless son**.

A SELFLESS SON

Jesus is the selfless son. Jesus knew what was to happen to Him from the beginning. We have seen for quite a few weeks now in our study of Matthew that Jesus has been telling the disciples over and over again that He was now on His way to Jerusalem where He would suffer many things that the hands of the hypocritical religious leaders there, eventually being crucified and then raised from the dead on the third day. That crucifixion is now only two days away, and here we find that Jesus Himself in this parable is telling the very people that would have Him crucified what they will do to Him. Jesus is the selfless son. He said it best Himself in the passage we looked at several weeks ago, **Matthew 20:28**, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many*. Jesus came knowing that He would die at the hands of wicked men, yet he was not deterred.

CONDEMNED CONTRACTORS

The chief priests and elders condemned themselves again when they answered Jesus question about the parable, *what will the owner of the vineyard do to those vine-growers?* Again, the answer was so obvious that they answered before they thought about the ramifications of their answer. Of course the landlord would take those wretched vine-growers that he had contracted with and he will bring them to a wretched end. Justice will be brought to bear and they will pay the full penalty of their guilt. Then other men who are more noble and will fulfill the terms of their contract will be given charge over the vineyard.

The wicked vine-growers in the parable represented these treacherous religious leaders who while claiming to lead the nation in the paths of righteousness were so blind to the truth that they could not recognize that the man standing before them was sent from God. Jesus tells them directly that God was not going to take his kingdom away from them and give it to another nation that would produce the fruit of it.

But as for these wicked men, not only would the kingdom of God be taken away from them, but they were in danger of a terrible judgement. A warning is given to them in verse 44. They could neither resist nor ignore Him for to do so would result in being broken into pieces, crushed into powder and pulverized to be scattered by the wind. Quite graphic language for the judgement that would come upon them. Much like the language we find in **Daniel 2**, which we be examining in this evenings service, in which a rock comes and destroys the statue, pulverizing so that the wind blows it away.

THE HOPE OF MANY

Where do you stand today in terms of this parable and its application? Have you recognized that the longsuffering landlord is God who has equipped you to serve Him, and that in view of His manifold mercies to you that is only right that you present yourself as a living sacrifice to Him (**Rom 12:1**). Are you bringing to Him His due? Have you marvelled at the selfless Son whom God sent but was crucified on a cross outside the gate of Jerusalem as the payment for your sins?

Are you one of the wicked growers who refuses to yield to God and tries to usurp Him and His authority over your life by trying to run things yourself? If so, then today is the day to acknowledge that, repent of it, turn away from it, and to start following God's will over your own.

Or maybe your one of the new nation that God has created to bring forth the fruit of His kingdom. If so, you should not only rejoice over the privilege, but also make sure that you are bringing forth that fruit. Are you fulfilling the purpose of your life? Are you living in holiness while telling others of God's mercy to the repentant, humble sinner?

https://www.gracebibleny.org/results_rejecting_son_matthew_213346

TEXT: Matthew 22:1-14

TITLE: THE WEDDING BANQUET AND THE ILLEGITIMATE GUEST

BIG IDEA:
**CONTEMPT FOR KINGDOM INVITATION AND KINGDOM REQUIREMENTS
RESULTS IN FATAL CONSEQUENCES**

INTRODUCTION:

Definition of Contempt: a feeling that someone or something is not worthy of any respect or approval; lack of respect accompanied by a feeling of intense dislike

Grant Osborne: This third of the triad of parables continues the themes of the wicked tenants in terms of God's gracious invitation to the guests, their refusal to respond, the king's judgment that fell on them as a result, and the extension of the invitation to others both "*the bad and the good*" (v. 10). The two primary differences are

- (1) the eschatological orientation to the messianic banquet at the end of history as well as the imminent judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1–10, preparing for ch. 24); and
- (2) the demand that people allowed into the banquet come on God's terms rather than their own (vv. 11–14).

With this final parable, the action then returns to the remaining four controversies (22:15–46).

This [parable] moves from the centrality of the guilt of the leaders (the parable of the wicked tenants) to the guilt of the whole nation (building on v. 43). Two themes are uppermost—divine justice and divine grace. God is just in his wrath and judgment on those who flaunt his invitation and gracious in inviting both "*the bad and the good*" (v. 10) to the messianic banquet. . .

There is a salvation-historical movement in this parable from Israel to the Gentiles to the church composed of Jews and Gentiles who believe and live rightly according to the kingdom demands.

Stu Weber: Jesus will reject those who refuse his invitation into honor and privilege, replacing them with true worshipers—those restored from sin by his grace. . . For a person to participate in this celebration presupposed that he had placed his faith in the Messiah and become a part of his people, the Messiah's bride. The invitation to the feast was an invitation to discipleship and salvation. It was also an invitation to enjoy the king's blessing—the "food" of the feast as well as the honor of being invited.

Thomas Constable: The three parables in this series are similar to three concentric circles in their scope.

1. The scope of the parable of the two sons encompassed Israel's leaders (**Matthew 21:28-32**).
2. The parable of the wicked tenant farmers exposed the leaders' lack of responsibility and their guilt to the people listening in as well as to the leaders themselves (**Matthew 21:33-46**).
3. This last parable is the broadest of the three. It **condemned the contempt with which Israel as a whole had treated God's grace to her.**

The point of these three parables is quite clear. God would judge Israel's leaders because they had rejected Jesus, their Messiah. He would postpone the kingdom and allow anyone to enter it, not just the Jews as many of the Jews thought. [Note: See **Toussaint and Quine**, pp. 140-41.] The prophets had predicted that Gentiles would participate in the kingdom; this was not new revelation. However the Jews, because of **national pride**, had come to believe that being a Jew was all the qualification one needed to enter the kingdom. Jesus taught them that receiving God's gracious invitation and preparing oneself by **trusting in Him** was the essential requirement for participation.

Albert Mohler Jr.: Jesus confronts the religious leaders with a third parable that paints the **consequences** they face for **rejecting his invitation** to repent and enter the kingdom of heaven. Some reject the invitation with trivial excuses. Others abuse and even kill the king's servants. Their actions are not merely insulting but treasonous, and the king's rage and the form of punishment are appropriate for such open rebellion.

The second part of the parable takes another unimaginable turn. Those who consider themselves able to dispense with the king's invitation are undeserving. It is not the externally righteous but the sinners who are received into the kingdom of heaven (**5:20; 9:12-13**). The wedding guests gathered from the streets correspond to the sinners, tax collectors, and Gentiles who are responding to Jesus' gracious invitation into the kingdom.

The third part of the parable focuses on a person who entered the wedding but who has arrived **inappropriately dressed**. The man's speechlessness implies he has access to appropriate attire but declines to wear it. His actions reveal he has refused Jesus' invitation to the kingdom, resulting in eternal judgment.

"*Chosen*" (**22:14**) is an alternate expression for Jesus' true disciples (or "*elect*"; cf. **11:27; 24:22, 24, 31**). While Jesus gives an **open invitation** to the kingdom it is only **God's sovereign choice** that brings about salvation. Only those who respond to the call appropriately can be part of the banquet, and their acceptance of the invitation reveals that they are chosen by God. The religious leadership of Israel lost their privileged position because **they rejected Jesus' invitation**.

Charles Swindoll: The **cast of characters** reflected in this parable is easy to identify. The king represents God; the son stands for Jesus. The elite who were invited to the banquet presumably represent the Jewish leaders. The invitation includes the various ways that God had already called the elite to discipleship in the kingdom of God. John the Baptizer had extended the invitation to repent and believe. Jesus and His disciples had been beckoning them to come. Besides this, the Old Testament prophets had foretold of the Messiah, His miracles, and His mission. And the amazing signs and wonders performed through the Holy Spirit should have sealed the deal for anybody with eyes to see and ears to hear. However, the scribes, Pharisees, priests, and other leaders of the Jews either rudely ignored these invitations or actively attacked those who extended them.

(:1) PROLOGUE – THIRD PARABLE IN THE JUDGMENT TRIAD

"And Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying,"

I. (:2-10) CONTEMPT FOR KINGDOM INVITATION -- THE WEDDING BANQUET

A. (:2) Royal Wedding Banquet = Grand Occasion

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.”

1. Identity of the Kingdom of Heaven
2. Identity of the King
3. Imagery of the Wedding Feast
4. Identity of the Son

B. (:3-7) Rejected Invitations

1. (:3) Initial Round of Rejections = Treasonous Unwillingness of God’s Covenant People

“And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.”

Homer Kent: Oriental custom included an initial invitation and a second call at the stated hour. The invited ones, here certainly Israel, refused this call, and when further explanatory entreaties were made, became either brazenly rude or positively murderous.

2. (:4-5) Subsequent Round of Rejections = Rebellious Indifference of Spiritual Harlots

a. (:4) Lavish Preparations

“Again he sent out other slaves saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.’”

b. (:5) Lawless Disinterest

“But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,”

Grant Osborne: From **rudeness** they turn to **indifference**, just walking away (lit., “those who did not care walked away”) from the king’s emissaries. “Paid no attention” (ἀμελήσαντες) connotes not just inattention but also **unconcern**. They act as if no invitation has come at all and just return to their daily work. . .

The mention of “*field*” and “*business*” sums up the basic two categories, agriculture and commerce, which thus stand for all the different occupations. **Luke 14:18–20** is similar, with the people providing excuses for not coming—buying a field, buying five oxen, and recently getting married. Again, the insult is far greater than we realize. These typify the reaction of the Jewish people to Jesus—**rejection** and **apathy**.

William Barclay: It reminds us that the things which make people deaf to the invitation of Christ are not necessarily bad in themselves. In the parable, one man went to his estate: the other to his business. They did not go off on a wild binge or an immoral adventure. They went off on the, in itself, excellent task of efficiently administering their business life. It is very easy to be so busy

with the things of the present that the things of eternity are forgotten, to be so preoccupied with the things which are seen that the things which are unseen are forgotten, to hear so insistently the claims of the world that the soft invitation of the voice of Christ cannot be heard. The tragedy of life is that it is so often the second bests which shut out the bests, that it is things which are good in themselves which shut out the things that are supreme. We can be so busy making a living that we fail to make a life; we can be so busy with the administration and the organization of life that we forget life itself.

Van Parunak: In the present context, the interpretation is straightforward. Remember from v. 1 that the feast represents the kingdom of heaven. These first verses recall the **history of the invitation to the Jewish nation**. Throughout the OT, the Lord taught Israel the basic principles of his kingdom. They had an early invitation to enter into it, and were given many clear signs when it should arrive—so much so that in the first century, there were those like Simeon, “*waiting for the consolation of Israel*” (**Luke 2:25**), or Anna, who “*spoke ... to all them that looked for redemption in Israel*” (**Luke 2:38**), or Joseph of Arimathea, “*who also himself waited for the kingdom of God*” (**Luke 2:51**). Even the pagan wise men, knowing Daniel’s prophecies, recognized that the time was right for the arrival of “*the king of the Jews*.” During his earthly ministry, the Lord’s focus was on “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.” He told his disciples to go only to these (**10:6**) and he rebuffed the Canaanite woman on the same grounds (**15:24**).

But these were **exceptions**. The bulk of the nation rejected the prophets when they brought additional details of the invitation, just as we saw in the previous parable. Now, when the final invitation arrives, announcing that the kingdom of God is at hand, their leaders spurn the king’s son, who will rule over the kingdom. Their behavior is parallel to that of the husbandmen in the previous parable.

3. (:6-7) Final Rejection of Violent Jewish Opposition Met with Angry Destruction

“and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.

But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire.”

Grant Osborne: Apparently the rebels are all from the same city, and the reprisal is directed only at them (“*those murderers*”) rather than at all who have rejected the invitation. Yet the others will face the king’s displeasure as well. The rage of the king and his strong response pictures God’s wrath at “*the day of the Lord*.”

J. M. Sherwood – The Biblical Illustrator: The danger of slighting these invitations.

1. It cannot fail to provoke the anger of God. “*The king was wrath*.”
2. It inevitably forfeits all the blessings of Christ’s meditation and sacrifice.
3. It shuts the door of mercy against the sinner.

C. (:8-10) Replacement Guests Sovereignly Summoned and Graciously Hosted

1. (:8-9) Replacement Gentile Guests Sovereignly Summoned

“Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’”

Matthew Henry: The commission he gave to the servants, to invite other guests. The inhabitants of the city (**Matthew 22:7; Matthew 22:7**) had refused; Go into the high-ways then; into the

way of the Gentiles, which at first they were to decline, **Matthew 10:5**. Thus by the fall of the Jews **salvation is come to the Gentiles, Romans 11:11; Romans 11:12; Ephesians 3:8**. Note, Christ will have a kingdom in the world, though many reject the grace, and resist the power, of that kingdom. Though Israel be not gathered, he will be glorious. The offer of Christ and salvation to the Gentiles was,

(1.) **Unlooked for and unexpected**; such a surprise as it would be to wayfaring men upon the road to be met with an invitation to a wedding feast. The Jews had notice of the gospel, long before, and expected the Messiah and his kingdom; but to the Gentiles it was all new, what they had never heard of before (**Acts 17:19; Acts 17:20**), and, consequently, what they could not conceive of as belonging to them. See **Isaiah 65:1; Isaiah 65:2**.

(2.) It was **universal and undistinguishing**; *Go, and bid as many as you find*. The highways are public places, and there Wisdom cries, **Proverbs 1:20**. "*Ask them that go by the way, ask anybody (Job 21:29), high and low, rich and poor, bond and free, young and old, Jew and Gentile; tell them all, that they shall be welcome to gospel-privileges upon gospel-terms; whoever will, let him come, without exception.*"

2. (:10) Replacement Gentile Guests Graciously Hosted

"And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests."

Stu Weber: It was as shocking then as it is now that God accepts the worst of sinners unconditionally. As long as a sinner shows a willingness to accept God's grace by faith, God will transform him or her into a kingdom citizen. With such a group of people the king filled his wedding hall. It was a blend of good and evil, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, wealthy and poor. Truly, the Lord will fill his kingdom with "all nations" or all peoples.

II. (:11-13) CONTEMPT FOR KINGDOM REQUIREMENTS -- THE INAPPROPRIATE GUEST

A. (:11) No Righteousness

"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes,"

[Traditional View:]

Homer Kent: It represents the robe of **imputed righteousness** that God graciously provides to man through faith (**Isa 61:10**).

[Alternate View:]

Van Parunak: So the picture is the same as in Colossians: the white garments are the **practical righteousness in the lives of believers**, which is made possible by God's gracious gift of free salvation.

Putting these results together, the guest without a garment is a **false professor in the church who is revealed by the lack of righteousness in his life**. The parable thus repeats what the Lord taught about false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount:

Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Once again, we see the shadow of the fig tree. Simply being in the church doesn't save somebody. **True inclusion depends on giving evidence of our salvation**

[Consolidated View:]

William Hendriksen: Does this mean, then, that the wedding garment is to be limited to “the imputed righteousness which is ours by faith”? (**Lenski**) Not at all. God not only *imputes* but also imparts righteousness to the sinner whom he pleases to save. Although these two must be distinguished, they must not be separated. . . not only guilt must be forgiven but also the old way of life must be laid aside and the new life to the glory of God must take its place. Briefly, the sinner must, by God's grace, “*put on Christ*” (**Gal. 3:27**). There must be a complete turnabout, a thorough-going renewal or “conversion,” exactly as Jesus himself had taught (**Matt. 4:17**), and as the apostles after him were going to teach.

The one thought of the parable, then, is this: “Accept God's gracious invitation, lest while others enter into glory you be lost. But remember that membership in the visible church does not guarantee salvation. Complete renewal (including both justification and sanctification), the putting on of Christ, is what is necessary.”

B. (:12) No Excuses

*“and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?'
And he was speechless.”*

The Biblical Illustrator: The hypocrite self-condemned

The guest referred to was **speechless** because-

- I. He could not plead ignorance of the will of the king who had invited him to the feast.
- II. He could not plead that in his case the wedding garment was not necessary.
- III. He could not plead that a wedding garment was not placed within his reach.
- IV. He had despised the wedding garment.
- V. He was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt.

Learn the worthlessness of mere profession, and the necessity of being prepared for coming judgment.

C. (:13) No Escape

*“Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot,
and cast him into the outer darkness;
in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

John Calvin: Let us not flatter ourselves with the empty title of faith, but let every man seriously

examine himself, that at the final review he may be pronounced to be one of the **lawful guests**; for, as Paul reminds us, that the *vessels* in the Lord's house are not all of the same kind, so
*let every one that calleth on the name of the Lord
depart from iniquity, (2 Timothy 2:19.)*

I enter no farther, at present, into the question about the eternal election of God; for the words of Christ mean nothing more than this, that the external profession of faith is not a sufficient proof that God will acknowledge as his people all who appear to have accepted of his invitation.

III. (:14) FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE – OPEN INVITATION BUT SOVEREIGN ELECTION

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Grant Osborne: The play on words between “*called*” (κλητοί) and “*chosen*” (ἐκλεκτοί) is the key. The “*called*” are those “*invited*” (see the cognate καλέω in vv. 4, 8, 9) and refers to the sense of election Israel claimed as the special people of God. However, the leaders and those who followed them in rejecting God's Son were not the truly “*elect*”/“*chosen*” of God. Here there is both human responsibility and divine sovereignty at work, a fitting conclusion to the parable. “*Called*” (κλητοί) catches it well: the people must respond to God's summons with both repentance and right living to be part of God's elect!

Stu Weber: The adjective *chosen* suggests that the faith decision is not totally in our hands, but it is a response to God's sovereign election. In particular, the unbelieving religious leaders were among those called but not chosen.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does God demonstrate His grace in this parable?
- 2) How shocking is it that the gracious invitation of the king is spurned and what does that say to the culpability of disbelieving Judaism?
- 3) What types of judgments – both temporal on the city of Jerusalem and nation of Israel and eternal – are described in this account?
- 4) What are false professors lacking that distinguishes them in the eyes of the king from legitimate kingdom participants?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: With this, Jesus rounded out his trilogy of parables which condemned the Jewish leaders for their rebellious disbelief. They had:

- (1) neglected their God-given trust (**21:28-32**);
- (2) tried to commandeer the kingdom for their own ends, persecuting and killing God's

messengers the prophets, and even his Son (21:33-46); and
(3) thrown away the honor and privilege of a covenant relationship with God, thereby dishonoring the Almighty and the Son.

W. M. Taylor – The Biblical Illustrator: Four different ways of treating God’s invitations in the gospel are here set before us.

1. We have it complacently ignored by those who went their ways to their farms and to their merchandise.
2. We have the gospel offer violently rejected. There is still a violent rejection of the gospel by open infidels.
3. The inconsistency and insolence of the man who professed to accept the invitation, and yet failed to comply with the conditions on which alone true acceptance of it was possible. He pushed into the festive hall without having on a wedding garment.
4. We have the gospel invitation sincerely and heartily accepted.

John MacArthur: Responding to a Royal Invitation

In the process of moving about the temple and teaching, He is confronted by these religious leaders. And in **verse 23** of chapter 21, they stop Him in His tracks, and they say to Him, “*By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?*” In other words, show us Your credentials. Show us Your rabbinic ordination papers. Show us the approval that You have to go about saying and doing what You do. Who gave You authority to throw out all of the businesses in this place? Who gave You the authority to end all of the money changing? Who gave You the right to speak a message that is contrary to the tradition which we teach? Who gave You the authority to speak without any rabbinical authority? Show us Your credentials.

And they’re angry, and they are bitter, and they are hostile, and they’re already planning His death the Bible tells us. And so, He answers them. And He answers them with a **trilogy of parables**. The first one is in verse 28 to 32 of chapter 21, a parable about two sons. The second one is a parable a vineyard that was leased out to tenant farmers, in verses 33 to 46. And this is the third parable in the trilogy, in chapter 22, verses 1 to 14.

And each of the parables is alike in that their message is a **message of judgment**. The parables, reduced to a simple understanding, say this, “You have rejected Me. All of the Old Testament prophets spoke of Me. All of the miracles that I have done validate My claim to be the Son of God, the Savior, the Messiah. All of the words that I have said affirm that. But you have consistently and for three years repeatedly rejected Me, and now God rejects you.” That’s the essence of the parables. The table has turned, and they are parables of judgment. Parables of judgment. **They climax in this third parable, very dramatic. . .**

I. Scene 1: The Invitation Rejected (:1-6)

Now, **what is the kingdom of heaven?** It is the sphere of God’s rule. It is the dominion where God rules, where God is sovereign, where God is king. To simplify it even further, it is the dominion of redemption. It is the sphere of God’s gracious salvation. The kingdom is that place where God rules, where God’s subjects live. It is a spiritual kingdom. It is a community of people who are redeemed, who have come to salvation, who are under the rule and the guiding and the leading of God. . .

What is important is the Lord wants to identify the greatest celebration that those people could ever comprehend in their culture. And He is saying the kingdom of heaven is like the **greatest celebration imaginable**, thrown by the wealthiest person imaginable, for the most honored person imaginable. He wants to capture all the best that life could ever imagine to give. And so, He says, *“There was a king, who made a wedding feast for his son.”* I mean this was the blowout of all blowouts in that culture. . .

Let me ask you the question, **Who are the already called people of God? The Jews. Israel.** You can start in **Genesis chapter 12**, where God called out of the loins of Abraham the people of Israel and said, *“I’m going to make out of your loins a great nation, a nation through whom the earth will be blessed. And anyone who blesses them will be blessed, and anyone who curses them will be cursed. And they shall be as the sand of the sea, and the stars of the heaven.”* And God was going to multiply them and all of this. And he called out that special nation. They were the called.

In **Hosea 11**, there’s that wonderful, wonderful word of the prophet Hosea in reference to Israel. It says – and we ought to be reminded of it – *“When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called My son out of Egypt.”* They were in Egyptian bondage, and God called Israel to be His people. He called them and carried them for 40 years through the wilderness, and carried them into the Promised Land, and gave them a land that flowed with milk and honey. And God had a special design for that already called people.

In Amos, the prophet writes, in **chapter 3**, *“Israel only,”* says God, *“have I loved, have I known.”* And then that great, great picture in **Ezekiel chapter 16**. It’s just a dramatic picture. A picture of a baby torn from a womb and thrown bloody on the ground and left there, destitute. And God comes by and sees this infant, still bathed in its blood, and washes it, and makes it His own. Beautiful picture of the calling out of Israel to God’s own heart. They are the already having been called. They were the unique people of God. They were God’s channel to reach the world, God’s point of contact for the doctrine of salvation and the truth of righteousness. And so, it was the already having been called ones that were called.

And **who are the servants that go out to call the already having been called ones?** Preachers like John the Baptist, like Jesus Himself, like the apostles. Right? Sent out two by two to preach the kingdom. . .

Secularism is usually **indifferent**. False religion is **hostile**. You look at the history of persecution around the world, and the persecutors of the truth are the purveyors of error inevitably. And that is why in **revelation 17**, when you see the final world system of religion that comes together in the end times, it says that final world religious system is drunk with the blood of the martyrs because it is false religion that stamps out the truth in hostility. Secularism is indifferent; it’s not interested.

And so, when Jesus came, and God called His people Israel - the already having been called people – to a glorious celebration, there were the secularists. They were indifferent. They were indifferent.

And there were the religionists, and they were hostile. It’s still so. It’s still so.

II. Scene 2: The Rejectors Punished (:7-8)

The point of sending out group one and group two was only to show not some kind of distinctiveness in the two groups, but to show the generosity, kindness, forgiveness, grace, and mercy of the king. Right? . . .

And He says, “**You’re city’s going to be burned.**” Boy, was that prophetic; 70 A.D. it happened. Titus Vespasian, the Roman general, came to Jerusalem, conquered the city, murdered 1,100,000 Jews, threw their bodies over the wall. Slaughtered beyond that, multiplied thousands all around Palestine.

And **Josephus**, who was an eyewitness to the whole thing, wrote in his history of Jewish war these words translated, “That building, the temple at Jerusalem, however, God long ago had sentenced to the flames. But now in the revolution of the time periods, the fateful day had arrived. The tenth of the month of Lous, (Av), the very day on which previously it had been burned by the king of Babylon. One of the soldiers, neither awaiting orders nor filled with horror of so dread an undertaking, but moved by some supernatural impulse, snatched a brand from the blazing timber and, hoisted up by one of his fellow soldiers, flung the fiery missile through a golden window.

“When the flame arose, a scream as poignant as the tragedy went up from the Jews now that the object which before they had guarded so closely was going to ruin. While the sanctuary was burning, neither pity for age nor respect for rank was shown. ON the contrary, children and old people, laity and priests alike were massacred. The emperor had ordered the entire city and sanctuary to be razed to the ground, except only the highest towers and that part of the wall that enclosed the city on the west.”

And that’s why today remains the western wall. The rest of the things was burned. Jesus said He – the king burned up their city. It hadn’t happened, but it would. **It was prophetic in a parabolic form.** Objectors to the Son, rejectors of the Son are judged in a fiery judgment. So accurate is our Lord’s statement here. What was He saying? He was saying **because Israel has rejected the Messiah, God rejects them.** And those who hostilely kill the Son will be severely judged by God, and their city will be burned. It was.

III. Scene 3: New Guests Invited (:9-10)

So, the point is go everywhere and get everybody that’ll come. “*Go into all the world and*” – what? – “*preach the Gospel and make disciples.*” That’s the mandates. That’s what Paul says in the book of Romans when he says, “*The fall of Israel is the rising of many.*” Through their fall, we have come to salvation. We have replaced them in this particular time. And God yet has something for Israel. They’re going to come back into His favor. They’re going to come back into His redemptive plan. They’re going to yet come back. That’s why they’re regathering in the nation today. But in the meantime, He has stretched out His arms, and He has sent His message into everywhere to everyone. “*As many as you can find, invite them all to come.*” Isn’t that the heart of the Gospel message? That’s where we are now, isn’t it? Their fall became our rising. God will not be frustrated, beloved. The festival’s going to have some guests. The celebration’s going to go on. And if it isn’t going to be one group, it’s going to be another one. . .

God isn't going around looking for the moral people. I mean God is calling everybody, bad and good. And the thing that makes them worthy is not their inherent goodness or badness, but their willingness to accept – what? – the invitation. *“And the wedding feast was furnished with guests.”*

IV. Scene 4: The Intruder Expelled (:11-12) -- Kingdom Crashers --

These are kingdom crashers. These are tares among the wheat. They're not properly garmented. You say, **“What's the garment?”**

That's easy. Go back to **Matthew 5:20** for a moment, and I'll show you the garment. In Matthew 5:20 it says, *“For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

What is it that is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of heaven? What is it? Righteousness. And a righteousness different than the Pharisees, which was a self-righteousness - **a God-given righteousness**. It's just what **Hebrews 12:14** says, *“Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”* You don't go into God's presence without manifest righteousness, without manifest holiness.

Job 29:14, the text says, *“I put on righteousness, and it clothed me.”* The Jews would understand this – who were listening to Him, because they would remember one of the most beautiful texts of the entire Old Testament. It would be very familiar to them. It is **Isaiah 61:10** and it says this, *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He hath covered me with a robe of righteousness.”* So, they knew that. Righteousness was the robe.

And the king looked at this man; **he saw no righteousness**. That is no right living, no right thinking, no right speaking. He saw no holiness, no godliness. He said, “You don't belong in here. You can't crash the kingdom on your own terms. That which proves you belong is manifest righteousness.” . . .

And the whole thing closes with a very simple statement, *“For many are called, but few are”* – what? – *“chosen.”* The call goes out to so many, but only a few are chosen. Paul often talks about the call in Romans, and when he does so, it is an internal call. It is the true call to salvation. Don't confuse Paul's discussion there with this, obviously, from the parable and the context, the **call referred to here is an external call**. The Gospel invitation is sent out to everywhere. Some are indifferent. Some are hostile. Some try to crash the kingdom on their own terms. But few – oh, my – are chosen. And with the word “chosen,” we're introduced to the **sovereignty of God**.

Yes, there is the will of man in receiving the invitation. Yes, there is the will of man in rejecting the invitation. But the perfect balance to that is that God is sovereign, and those who come choose to come, the Bible says, because they're chosen by Him. That's a mystery we'll never fathom, but we believe it.

So, many are called, but few are chosen. The broad road, many go in that way. The narrow, few there be that – what? – find it.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Marriage Feast

I. (:1-7) Indifference to Christ and opposition to Christ are both rejection of Christ.

Jesus is telling a colossal tale here. And He's doing it to shock you into the reality of what it is when we reject the gospel offer. God has spread this feast for us in the gospel. It's cost him his son. He's invited all to come. And when we reject that offer, either by indifference or direct opposition, it is not something that is acceptable. It is not simply rude. But it is an **offense to God almighty**, and that is precisely what Jesus is trying to drive home in this particular parable.

Now there are two or three things that I'd like to zero in on in these first few verses with you. First of all, I want you to see that Jesus is making it very clear that by rejecting these invitations, the people are not simply rude, they are **positively sinful**. They are actually engaging in rebellion against the king who is, of course, God. They are not neutral. They're not victims when the slaughter comes. They're not innocent people who have been perpetrated against with a horrible crime. They are unwilling. They are indifferent. They are opposed to God. This is the picture that Jesus paints here. And, of course, He's describing the leaders of Israel in response to the gospel message. But, this is a picture of everyone who fails to embrace Christ. This gospel invitation is universal. It goes out to everyone. There's no one excluded from this invitation by their rank or file. And when those turn this invitation down, it is not a matter of indifference, it's a matter of unwillingness and opposition to God. And so, Jesus paints very clearly the **wickedness** of those who refuse the invitation. . .

The second thing you see is the **extravagant love of God**. We see the **patience of God** in this passage. We see the **provision of God** in the passage. We see His constraining love. He is coming up with every argument possible in order to draw in as many as is possible to a feast which they have not earned or deserved. It's a banquet. It's a celebration. He's inviting them to it.

II. (:8-10) God's offer of the gospel is free and His inducements to come are great.

Here we see this filled wedding hall, and it's a picture of **the call of the gentiles**. Matthew from the beginning to end is concerned to show us that the message of salvation, as Paul would put it, is to the Jew first and also to the Greek. That is, that the message of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven is not something that is only for ethnic Israel. It is for the Jews to whom the covenant promises were originally given in the days of Abraham, but it is also for the Gentiles. And here in this picture in **verses 8-10**, He shows us the calling of the Gentile. But He also reminds us of something very important. And that is this, that God's offer of the gospel is free. And the inducements to our accepting that offer of the gospel are great. . .

Because He loves His Son so much, He wants His Son to be honored by many. And He is determined to fill that hall. You see one of the great motivations of God and the work of missions. He is determined that His Son will be honored by the nations. . .

And so, they're sent out into the highways and byways, and all manner of people are drawn in. Perhaps, mostly from the underprivileged ranks. And we see here the unrestricted offer of the gospel. The provisions of the glory in both of these things, the unrestricted offer of the gospel and the provision of the Father's glory at that marriage feast, are rooted in his desire to honor the Son. The fact is, the sacrifice of Christ is for all. And so, regardless of race and nationality or sex

or social standing. No nation has any special standing before God, Matthew says. But God desires all to come to Christ.

III. (:11-14) Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom.

When Jesus pictures people from all the highways and byways sitting, all but one in their wedding garments, He is implying that those garments have been supplied by the king himself. That was not uncommon in those days for the king himself to supply those wedding garments. And so when you walk in and you see this one man not sitting in wedding garments, it's not because he didn't have time. It's not because he didn't have a set of wedding garments on his own. It's because he has clearly refused the king's offer, or the king's servant's offer, of a wedding garment. . .

What is Jesus saying? He had no excuse. He was without excuse. He was stunned into silence. He had nothing to say. But it's so ironic, because the king says, “Friend” and then one of the very next words out of the king's mouth, “bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness.” Not normally something you say to a friend. Why? Jesus is showing us that there are some people who like to think of themselves as friends of his who aren't.

Gaebelein's Annotated Bible: The Parable of the Marriage Feast

The **dispensational character of this parable** is very marked. It is ushered in with the familiar words found alone in this Gospel. “*The Kingdom of the heavens is like,*” or as it ought to be, “*has become like.*” . . . The marriage feast which the King makes for his son and to which he invites guests typifies the gracious offer of God to give joy, comfort and blessings to those whom he wishes to partake of it. It is for the Son, in honor of the Son, that the feast is made. Of the Bride, who of course belongs also to the marriage feast, nothing is said. This parable foreshadows a great deal more than the other two parables in the previous chapter. **It goes beyond the cross, for the offer is made not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles.** The Kingdom was offered to the nation; had the Jews repented, there would have been a marriage feast for them, a feast of fat things, as promised by the prophets. God's mercy would have been manifested upon them. The invitation contained in the third verse was given in the preaching of the Kingdom before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Between the third and fourth verses these great events, as well as the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be placed. The preaching of the Kingdom with its gracious blessings stopped, as we learned in the study of this Gospel, with the twelfth chapter. In the thirteenth chapter the Lord teaches the mysteries of the Kingdom, that which takes place during this present dispensation. Now, in the fourth verse we read of a second invitation.

When was this second invitation given to the invited guests, that is to Israel? Not before the Cross, but immediately after, with the Holy Spirit come down from Heaven. These servants were to tell them which were bidden, that all things are ready. The work of redemption accomplished, God in His infinite mercy gives another call and now He can say that indeed all is ready, even for the people who had rejected the Son of His love and had crucified Him. The opening chapters of the Book of Acts give us the history of this invitation. There we find the record of the second call to Israel.

The preaching of the Kingdom is resumed for a brief period and with this preaching is the promise of forgiveness of sins and the times of refreshing and restitution. The invitation, which went forth after the Lord had taken His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high, is clearly

stated by Peter in the third chapter of Acts. *“Repent, therefore, and be converted, for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, who was foreordained for you, whom heaven indeed must receive till the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began”* (Acts 3:19-21).

No Gentile heard this message, nor was it meant for a Gentile; it was exclusively addressed to Jerusalem. It is a mistake to teach otherwise. The times of restoration or restitution of all things, refer us to that which is promised to Israel when converted, with the Kingdom restored. To use this passage, as it is done so often, as an argument for that wicked doctrine, the restitution of all things, including the unsaved, is fundamentally wrong. Most of the soul-destroying errors taught in these last days spring from a wrong division of the Word of Truth. If this new invitation had been accepted by the Jews, then the Lord would have returned and the restoration of all things, spoken by the prophets and promised to His earthly people, would have come to pass. But the call was not heeded; **the restoration of all things, promised to Israel, has been postponed.**

Of this refusal to accept this gracious invitation to come to the marriage feast we read in this parable in the fifth and sixth verses. They made light of it, they ignored the offer and occupied themselves with earthly things, such as merchandise. They did the same, what Judah had done after he had with his brethren sold Joseph, he turned a merchant (**Genesis 38:1-30**). But simple rejection of the gracious offer is not all, *“the rest (the leaders of the people) laying hold of his bondmen, ill-treated and slew them.”* The Book of Acts show how literally these words of the Lord were fulfilled. The climax was the stoning of Stephen.

And after this rejected second offer to the bidden guests, the Jews, comes the punishment sent upon them by God. Their city is destroyed, burned by fire, and these evil men, who are now called murderers, suffer the judgment as well. The Roman army came against Jerusalem, the city is burned; that awful judgment the Lord had predicted when He beheld the city, fell upon Jerusalem and the nation was dispersed. Again we say, **what a literal fulfilment!** This ends God’s dealing with Israel as a nation for the present age. He will deal with them again ere long; but **nationally they are set aside during this age**, which, however, does not mean that the individual Jew could not hear and accept the offer of Grace.

Now follows something new. It corresponds to that of which we read in the parable of the sower in **Matthew 13:1-58**, *“the sower went out to sow.”* It is now outside of Israel nationally that the Grace of God is offered and the invitation to the wedding feast is given. The servants go out into the highways and give the invitation and bring together all as many as they found, both evil and good, so that the wedding feast was furnished.

It is clear that this going forth of the servants stands for the Gospel call going out to the Gentiles. *“By their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles”* as the Holy Spirit later testifies through Paul, is taught by the Lord Himself in this parable.

Something follows, which is often misapplied. All the confusion about the wedding garment springs from the wrong conception of the parable, in giving it a church application and putting the scene into Heaven. However, the church is here not at all in view. It is, as in **Matthew 13:1-58**, the Kingdom of the heavens, the professing sphere of Christendom. The Lord shows that this sphere where His Name is professed and His gracious Gospel invitation is heard, is in a mixed condition. It is **composed of professors and possessors**. The call goes forth, many hear and

follow the call, but not all believe with the heart unto salvation. The man without the wedding garment is the representative of this class and a large class it is. This is evident from the words with which our Lord closes the parable, *“For many are called, but few chosen.”* The many which are called are all those who heard the call and made an outward profession, without having accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. The wedding garment is the same as the *“best robe”* which by the Father was put upon the prodigal. **The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the wedding garment** and all who are mere professors of Christ, without having put on the Lord Jesus Christ, will share the fate of this man in the parable. They will be cast into the outer darkness. Awful fate for every one who has not Christ to cover him in the presence of a holy and righteous God. However man may cover himself, however moral and cultured he may be, or religious and philanthropic, if he has not put on Christ he is naked and his place will be where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever. We only wish to add that the scene of viewing the guests must not be put in heaven. None but those who are Christ's, saved and in possession of eternal life, will be in heaven, and none of those can nor ever will be cast out. It refers to the same time as **Matthew 13:40-43**. Nor does the Lord teach the last things here, how judgment is to take place, where and in what order. In a general way He teaches this as a warning that though His invitation goes forth and many hear, yet not all will be chosen and that simply because they refuse to accept the gift of God -- the wedding garment, which alone fits us to be in the presence of the King.

The wonderful parable had been uttered; the fearful doom of Jerusalem and its evil leaders predicted; once more the Pharisees are silent in the presence of the King. Their hearts and moral condition had been uncovered, but determined to refuse the light which shone upon them, their darkness became greater than before. We see them withdrawing from His presence. They had nothing to say to Him; no answer to give; no confession to make. Led by their evil hearts, under the control of Satan they turned their backs upon the Lord. **Light refused becomes darkness.** *“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.”* This is a solemn word, especially in our day. Light received, truth revealed and not acted upon and followed, results in darkness in our days.

TEXT: Matthew 22:15-22

TITLE: THE TAX TRAP -- CONTROVERSY REGARDING PAYING TAXES

BIG IDEA:

BEGIN WITH YOUR PRIMARY OBLIGATION TO SUBMIT TO GOD AND YOU WILL HAVE NO STRUGGLE SUBMITTING TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Matthew now returns to the controversies that are the core of this section. The three parables have established the guilt of the leaders and the nation for rejecting the summons of the Son of God to enter the new kingdom reality. In the four debates that follow the Pharisees and Sadducees prove their guilt by repeatedly “testing” Jesus and trying to gather evidence against him. As stated in the introduction to this larger unit (**21:23 – 22:46**), the four controversies relate to the major types of rabbinic questions:

- wisdom (**22:15–22**),
- mockery against a belief (**22:23–33**),
- moral conduct (**22:34–40**), and
- biblical contradictions (**22:41–46**).

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ attempt to trap him lies at the heart of all “submission to government” passages in the NT (e.g., **Rom 13:1–7**; **1 Tim 2:2**; **1 Pet 2:13–17**). The point is not that allegiance to God is the antithesis of allegiance to government but that allegiance to government is part of allegiance to God. Yet at the same time God has the greater claim, and if a choice must be made, the believer must “*obey God rather than human beings*” (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

Matthew McCraw: God has designed us to be loyal in multiple human relationships and institutions. However, none of these are to take the place of our **loyalty to God**. We must be devoted to and faithful to God and that to which He has called us. He is Lord of our lives and He has a design for our lives.

Richard Gardner: The substance of Jesus’ answer, *Pay Caesar what is Caesar’s and God what is God’s*, could be paraphrased as follows: “Insofar as we live and participate in the civic order, there are civic obligations to fulfill. Our ultimate obligation, however, which sets boundaries and limits to all other obligations, is faithfulness to God, the ruler of all creation.”

Albert Mohler Jr.: Continuing their confrontation with Jesus, various leaders of the religious establishment now engage him in four debates. Threatened by Jesus’ pronouncement of judgment (cf. **21:45**), the Pharisees attempt to have Jesus incriminate himself. The Pharisees combine forces with their rivals, the Herodians, to try to defeat their common enemy. Taxes were a volatile issue in Israel. If Jesus answers that it is appropriate to pay taxes to Caesar, he will be cast into disfavor among the tax-burdened people. If Jesus answers that it is not appropriate, his words may incriminate him as an insurrectionist against the Roman Empire. Seeing through their ploy, Jesus uses the denarius coin for paying taxes to make a **profound counterpoint**. As the Creator of all things, God has sovereign claim over creation. Giving to God what is God’s requires good stewardship of all he has created. This includes respecting

governing authorities in a way that honors one's primary allegiance to God. Jesus' statement also clarifies his role at this point in God's salvation history. He is not establishing a political kingdom to oppose Caesar. Rather, in this age God's kingdom will operate within the existing political order, so those who respond to Jesus' invitation into the kingdom will have obligations to governing authorities of this world (cf. **Ro 13:1-17; 1Pe 2:13-17**).

I. (:15-17) EXECUTING THE TAX TRAP PUTS OUR OBLIGATION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT IN OPPOSITION TO OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. (:15) Sinister Scheming – Planning the Tax Trap

“Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said.”

Charles Swindoll: This is the only time the **Herodians** are mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. The Herodians were a group of Jews loyal to Herod's family —specifically, Herod Antipas —and thus in support of the Roman occupation and control over Judea. As such, they would have been in support of Rome's right to exact taxes from the Jewish people. The disciples of the Pharisees, however, would have been opposed to Roman interference in the affairs of the Jews, God's chosen people. Here we have the unprecedented alliance of liberal and conservative, secular and religious —working side by side to snare Jesus in a diabolical trap.

B. (:16) False Flattery – Preparing the Tax Trap

“And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.’”

Matthew McCraw: The Herodians were primarily **politically** motivated, whereas the Pharisees were primarily **religiously** motivated.

Under normal circumstances, these two groups may not even get along. However, when it came to trying to trick Jesus, they seemed to get along just fine.

Grant Osborne: The Pharisees don't believe a word of what they are saying, but they are unconsciously stating absolute truth.

Stu Weber: The Pharisees and Herodians approached Jesus first, beginning with **hypocritical flattery**. They addressed him as *Teacher*, partly to gain favor with the crowd, and partly to catch Jesus off guard. They claimed to know that Jesus was a **man of integrity** and that he **taught the way of God**, when in reality they believed him to be a **heretic**. . .

They also pointed out Jesus' commitment to truth without consideration for the rank or social status of those who might agree or disagree with him. Jesus was known for being **impartial** toward all people and forthright in his teaching. They were hoping to coax Jesus into saying something politically incorrect.

Their statements about Jesus' impartiality were intended to force him to take one side or another, thereby showing partiality. The question was whether it was right under Old Testament Law to pay the poll tax (we presume) to Caesar, the Roman emperor. The two groups that asked the question were on opposite sides of the issue. If Jesus answered, “Yes, it is right,” then he would

show partiality toward the Herodians, who supported Roman rule. Then the Pharisees would accuse Jesus of sympathizing with the Romans. This was not a crime, but it was not a popular position among the Jews.

If Jesus answered, “No, it is not right,” then he would show partiality toward the Pharisees, who opposed Roman rule and saw Roman taxation as robbing from God. Then the Herodians could arrest him and bring him before Herod Antipas on charges of treason against the Roman Empire.

In either case, they thought, Jesus would show himself to be partial. He would also alienate part of his following, and he might incriminate himself under Roman law.

Stanley Saunders: The Pharisees’ disciples have been well coached. They flatter him with effusive, fulsome praise, emphasizing his integrity and impartiality. In fact, the success of their plot depends on Jesus’ integrity and lack of deference to the powerful (**22:16**). A simple, politically naive answer—either yes or no—best accomplishes their purpose. But Jesus is not the country bumpkin they think he is. They claim to know a lot about his character (**22:16**), but he knows the evil in their hearts (**22:18**; cf. **9:4**; **12:24–25**). He tells them he is aware of their hypocrisy (**22:18**), and then asks for the coin used to pay the tax, which they readily supply.

C. (:17) Opposing Obligations -- Controversial Choice – Pay Poll Tax to Caesar or Not? Presenting the Tax Trap --

“Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”

Richard Gardner: It was not the amount, however, but rather the **principle of subjection to Rome** that aroused antagonism to the tax. Adding to the resentment was the fact that the coin used to pay the tax was stamped with a likeness of Tiberias Caesar, along with an inscription honoring him as the venerable son of the divine emperor Augustus (cf. w. 19-21a). Like others, the Pharisees found the tax distasteful, but reluctantly supported paying it.

Grant Osborne: There were three types of taxes for the Jews:

1. the temple tax of **17:24–27**;
2. indirect taxes like customs duties, sales taxes, etc.; and
3. the direct poll or head tax paid only by non-Roman citizens.

This is the third type, and it became a form of tribute paid by all subject peoples. The amount was **one denarius** paid annually by all adults, women as well as men. It was controversial and opposed by many Jews. Judas the Galilean led a revolt against this tax in AD 6. So the Pharisees feel this will get Jesus in trouble however he responds, either with the Jews if he says yes or with the Romans if he says no.

Matthew McCraw: So, we have the issue of paying money to the big bad rulers, and we have the issue with the actual image on the coin. All the while, the taxes are due. The religious devotees could accuse Jesus of supporting pagan rulers if He said to pay the tax and the political devotees could accuse Jesus of not supporting the government if He said not to pay the tax.

II. (:18-21) EXTRICATING HIMSELF FROM THE TAX TRAP – SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH OUR HIGHER ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

A. (:18) Exposing their Malicious Motivation

“But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, ‘Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?’”

Grant Osborne: Jesus wants them to know he has seen behind their charade and is fully aware their question is not an honest one but a “*test*” (as in **16:1; 19:3; 22:35**) designed not to ascertain truth but to entrap him. As a result of such dishonesty, they are “*hypocrites*” (on this see **6:2** and esp. **15:7** and throughout **ch. 23**), hiding their true purposes.

David Turner: “Jesus recognizes the daggers in the men’s smiles” (**W. Davies and Allison** 1997: 215). He sees the evil motive behind the flattery and asks his questioners why they are putting him to the test. Satan is the first to test Jesus (**4:1–11**; cf. **1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thess. 3:5; Heb. 4:15; Rev. 2:10**), and others follow (**Matt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35**). Their testing of Jesus bears similarities to incidents in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus’s opponents are often described as hypocrites in Matthew (cf. **6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51**). His severe language unmasks their insincerity and prepares the reader for the extended diatribe in **Matt. 23**.

B. (:19-21a) Examining the Coinage

“‘Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.’

And they brought Him a denarius.

20 And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’

21 They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’”

C. (:21b) Explaining the Fundamental Principle

“Then He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.’”

David Turner: Perhaps the Herodians expected a positive answer and the Pharisees a negative answer, but both are **astounded** by what they hear. The anti-Herod Pharisees are told to pay taxes to the Roman government, evidently because the providence of God has placed the Romans over the Jews (cf. **Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17; Abel** 1969). The Herodians are reminded that their allegiance to God supersedes allegiance to the emperor. Both should recognize that the inscription on the emperor’s coin is wrong—he is neither God nor high priest—and his blasphemous coin does not belong in God’s temple (**W. Davies and Allison** 1997: 215). Jesus does not support the Pharisees by opposing Caesar’s tax, but neither does he support the Herodians by affirming total loyalty to Rome. Ironically, Jesus has truly taught the way of God despite the insincere flattery of his questioners (**Matt. 22:16**). **W. Davies and Allison** (1997: 218) correctly say that there is “no precise theory of governmental authority” in the aphorism of **22:21**. Yet this passage is one of many biblical texts teaching that God’s providence places governments in authority and that **believers ought to obey government as long as such obedience is not disobedient to God**.

Charles Swindoll: Just as Caesar had minted coins with his likeness on them, God has placed His likeness on us (**Gen. 1:26**). As His **image bearers**, all humans owe Him our very selves. Physical, earthly treasures and powers are temporary. Why not give back to Caesar those trinkets of metal that have his image on them? God is much more concerned with what we do with the spiritual, eternal, heavenly dimensions of our lives. To give God the things that are God’s means to render to Him our whole being —to “*love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (**Deut. 6:5**).

(:22) EPILOGUE – RETREAT IN DEFEAT

“And hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have you ever interacted with believers who express the conviction that Christians should not pay their taxes to civil government? How did you respond?
- 2) Why are we not complicit with the injustice and corruption of civil government when we pay taxes to that government?
- 3) How could such authorities marvel at the wisdom of Jesus and yet not submit to His teaching?
- 4) What type of problem did both the Herodians and the Pharisees have with submitting to the authority of God in their lives?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Give to the state its due, whether it is worthy or not. Jesus is clear that government is to be respected and taxes are to be paid. Rome was not a godly government, yet Jesus commanded his followers to submit. The state is God’s servant and should be accorded respect in that role. This means that the believer is to respect the fact of government even if the particular government is not worthy, which was certainly the case with the Roman emperors.

Moreover, there is **no room for armed insurrection**. Jesus was not a supporter of the revolutionaries of his day. The Zealots did not appear in full force until AD 67–68, but there were many visible revolutionary movements (cf. “*Simon the Cananaean*,” **10:4**) and messianic pretenders in the first century, and these issues are partly in mind in this passage. Jesus did not countenance such movements and **demand respect for established government**. Yet this does not mean that protest of evil in government is wrong, as exemplified in Jesus and his early followers in their condemnation of the Jewish leaders. But there is a difference between prophetic warning (as in the OT prophets) and armed rebellion. The former is part of respect for government (trying to remove evil and forestall divine judgment), the latter is taking God’s judgment in our own hands.

God is in control and deserves submission in every area of life. As **Hagner** puts it: “If one rendered to the state its restricted due, all the more is one to render to God his unrestricted due—the totality of one’s being and substance, one’s existence, is to be rendered to God and nothing less.” Submission to government takes place as part of one’s complete submission to God in every area. If there is conflict, we must “*obey God rather than human beings*” (**Acts 4:19; 5:29**), for God is sovereign over government and over every aspect of one’s being.

Charles Swindoll: God isn't an elected official or a disinterested deity. God is King of the universe. We owe Him —and Him alone —our highest allegiance. No other do we worship. Our postmodern, pluralistic society tells us that all gods are simply metaphorical for the sense of the transcendent and all “good” religions are basically the same. This is patently false, for “*there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5). We owe our greatest love, highest honor, and humblest obedience to God, not to a political leader, nation, boss, parent, or even church. Our appropriate respect for and honor toward those other authorities in our lives will only be enhanced by an acknowledgment of God alone as our King. To worship any other person, thing, or idea is idolatry. We must render to God what is God's —our whole selves!

Donald Hagner: The design of the Pharisees to entrap Jesus failed because he was able to transcend the dilemma they forced on him. And in so doing, Jesus was at the same time able to articulate a fundamental principle by which the disciples could chart their existence as the people of God's kingdom living in a yet imperfect world governed by secular authorities. This logic served as the beginning point of what was to be elaborated centuries later in the Lutheran two-kingdom theory. The later NT writers regard the ruling powers as instituted by God and as worthy of honor, faithfulness, support, and intercession (e.g., **Rom 13:1–17**; **1 Peter 2:13–17**). It is right to render to Caesar what is Caesar's. Jesus was no Zealot or revolutionary who advocated the overthrow of the Roman government. But neither did he put priority upon loyalty to secular government. If one rendered to the state its restricted due, all the more was one to render to God his unrestricted due—the totality of one's being and substance, one's existence, was to be rendered to God and nothing less. **Loyalty to Caesar must always be set in the larger context and thus be relativized by the full submission of the self to God.** The bottom line for the disciple of Jesus is to “*render to God the things that are his.*”

John MacArthur: Our Obligation to God and Government

We are somewhat barraged from time to time by some in the Church, and some who are Christians who tell us we ought not to pay our taxes. I don't know if you ever hear that, but I get all kinds of things on that in the mail, that we're not to pay taxes; taxes are both unconstitutional and ungodly, and we shouldn't give the things that we have received from God back to those who are godless and back to secular governments and so forth. . .

But now it is Wednesday. He's back in the temple, which He has cleansed, and He's moving around in the temple teaching. And His teaching is on the kingdom, and His preaching is on the Gospel. And He's collected, as He always did by the magnetism of His personality and the dynamics of His teaching, a massive crowd of people who are intrigued and interested and fascinated by what He is saying.

Now, this makes the religious leaders irate. They resent Jesus Christ. They resent Him because He opposes them. He unmasks their pride, self-righteousness. They not only resent Him because He opposes them, they resent Him because He captures the hearts of the people. And envy and jealousy fills them. They resent Him because He claims to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and doesn't identify with Him. They resent Him because He cleaned the temple without getting their permission. He is everything they are not. He's genuine; they're hypocrites. He threatens the system that exists: the system of self-righteousness as opposed to God righteousness, a symposium of works as opposed to a system of faith. . .

Now, they've got Him in the corner, they think, where He now knows that they think so highly of Him, that He's got so much integrity, so much truth, so much conviction, and so much courage of that conviction that He's going to answer them truthfully. He's going to have to live up to His reputation now. What a commendation. It was all true. They didn't intend it that way, just lying flattery. What an ugly sin. . .

Now, there's a fourth word to look at. We've seen the aim, the approach, and the attack. Now watch this - the accusation. The accusation. **Verse 18**, marvelous. "*But Jesus, knowing their wickedness*" – the word there is to know by discernment. I mean He knew because He knew everything. You can't sucker Jesus Christ. You can't sneak up on His blindside; there is no blindside. He's omniscient. He knew everything. . .

And so, He says, "Why are you tempting Me? Why are you putting Me to a test you think I will fail? Why do you want me to fail, you phonies? Your flattery was fake; it was hypocritical." That's such an ugly sin – hypocrisy, flattery – one so condemned in the Old Testament again and again. Read the Proverbs sometimes. Look up all the places in Proverbs where it talks about flattery and a lying tongue. So, Jesus' accusation was very serious. And again, He turns the tables on them and unmasks them.

Now, from His accusation, He turns to His analogy, and here's the heart of the text. . .

And when He's answering their question, He says, "Give it back. You're not giving him a gift. You're giving him what belongs to him. It is a debt, and it must be paid. You know what the Lord says here? Pay your taxes. That's right, pay your taxes. The payment of a tax is a debt. It's a debt set by a government. Even a pagan, idolatrous government; even a blasphemous government; even a government about to be the executioner of the Son of God; even a government which will hammer nails into His hands, ram a spear into His side, and watch Him die, even that kind of government that executes the Christ, pay your taxes. It is not a gift; it is not a choice; it is a debt for the benefits received, the benefits enjoyed. Caesar has his rights. And for the provision of physical, social, economic benefits, protection, etcetera, he's due a debt; pay it. .

It's the second half of this things that's so dynamic; He says – "*and to God the things that are God's.*" Now, let me ask you this question: what was – with this coinage and all the rest, what was Caesar asking for that only God deserved? What was it? **Worship**. That's the issue. You can pay your tax to Caesar, but don't you dare render to him your worship. That's what He's saying, "Don't you dare give to him your adoration and your praise. Don't you swear to him your allegiance as your god and master." That's the issue.

And so, Jesus makes a beautiful hair-splitting statement, "You give the system what the system can demand out of you. And what it can demand is social and economic. What it cannot demand is spiritual and religious. And where this really becomes a problem would be if all of a sudden the president of the United States announced that he was god, and all the Senate and all the Congress were high priests, and everything we gave to them would be given to a religious system, and not only did we have to give it to them, but we have to worship them, and that's where we say – what? – "No. No."

J. Ligon Duncan: Render to Caesar

I. The unregenerate heart standing before truth flatters for advantage and schemes to destroy.

The unregenerate hearts of the Pharisees and their disciples are standing before the truth Himself, and yet their response to that truth is simply to flatter for their own advantage and to scheme to destroy Him. Bear that in mind as we look at this passage. The leaders of Israel had been strongly rebuked by Jesus Christ in the last three parables that we studied, and so being frustrated in that circumstance, being frustrated as I'm sure they felt shamed, in front of the people of Israel as Jesus spoke very directly about their sin and the wickedness of their hearts, they go off by themselves and they plot together to lay a trap for Jesus. . .

But there was an image of that emperor, and the emperor claimed to be divine. In fact, on one side of the coin, the inscription said, Tiberius Caesar Augustus, which literally translated means Son of the divine Augustus. The emperor was claiming to be the son of god, He was claiming to be a god. On the other side of that coin, it said Pontifex Maximus, literally translated, high priest. Therefore, the coin that was used to pay the poll tax was actually part of a claim by the Roman emperor to have not only political control over all those in his empire, but also spiritual control. Do you see why devout Jews would have grated against this command?

II. Jesus reveals His glory in His wisdom in His answer

And so Jesus once again makes them answer the tricky question that they had asked Him. Is it lawful to pay the poll tax? Jesus' response, and He makes them say it, is, who does the coin belong to in the first place? Caesar. He minted it. And so He makes them answer the question that they think that He is going to be tripped up on. . .

When you pay that poll tax, you aren't 'giving a gift to Caesar.' Caesar has already built you roads, Caesar has already given you justice courts, he has set up military protection for you, police and various other civil benefits. Therefore, if you have a problem with Caesar's provisions, you shouldn't be protesting the poll tax, you should have protested in the first place when he did the other things! You accept the roads, you accept the protection, and then you pretend to have religious scruples over paying him for it! So you give back to Caesar what already belongs to him! But you give to God what belongs to Him. And Jesus is saying, you know that only God is to be worshipped, only God is God, only God provides the high priest. So you don't worship Caesar as a high priest, you don't acknowledge him as a high priest, you pay him his money for his roads and for his protection, but you don't worship him as high priest. That belongs to God.

III. Despite the divine wisdom of Jesus' answer, hearts are unchanged.

Jesus' words pierce, and they amaze, and we look at **verse 22**, and indeed, even those who came to trap Him were flabbergasted. Hearing Jesus' response, we see them amazed, but still unbelieving. They're amazed by Jesus' wisdom. They don't know how He slipped this trap! They were expecting Him to be caught in its clinches, and Jesus slips the trap. But they still don't believe in Him. Once again we learn that despite the divine wisdom of Jesus' answer, their unbelieving hearts are unchanged. The tempters were filled with awe, wonder with amazement at how Jesus had responded to their question, but they were not converted. Look at the words of **verse 22**: "*Hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.*" Matthew Henry said: "You expect to read, 'they were amazed and submitted to Him.' That is what you expect to read; you expect to read, 'they were amazed and followed Him.' But what you read is, '*they were amazed and left Him.*'"

Bethany Bible Church: The Things That Are God's

We should, of course, be very careful to perform our duties as citizens of the earthly government

in which God has placed. But we should be *even more careful* to perform the greater duties and obligations we owe to the God of the universe—the God who made us for Himself, and who has absolute and complete Creatorship-rights over us.

To put it another way—a way that I'm sure you'll recognize—we shouldn't fail to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; but we should make even more certain that we render to God the things that are God's.

That, I believe, is the main point of this morning's passage. It's a passage that teaches us many important things; but the main thing I believe it seeks to teach us is that above all other obligations we have in life, we are obliged *first* to render to God His rights over us. . .

The word that Matthew uses—to "*entangle*"—is one that was used of the way a hunter trapped and ensnared an animal in order to take it captive. The means by which they intended to trap Him was through His own words; and the bait they proposed to use was this question. They had huddled together in order to craft the perfect question that would make it possible for them to bring Him before the authorities and discredit Him before the people—thus getting rid of Him without having to lay a hand on Him themselves. . .

That second obligation, it seems to me, is what really brought the conviction down on those who were seeking to trap Him with their question. Matthew tells us that, when they heard His answer, "*they marveled, and left Him and went their way.*" Luke tells us, that "*they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people*" (**Luke 20:26**). If they had given to God what first belonged to God, they would not only render to Caesar what was Caesar's, but they would have also bowed down before the Lord Jesus Christ and pledged their first allegiance to Him.

Scott Harris: Obligations to Caesar; Obligations to God

The **Herodians** were needed by the Pharisees to carry out their plan for their question was designed to put Jesus in the position of either supporting Rome or agreeing with common Jewish sentiment against Rome. If Jesus spoke in favor of Rome, then the Pharisees could take care of the matter themselves and rally the people against Jesus. However, if Jesus spoke against Rome as they expected, then they would need people who were pro-Roman present to then make charges against Jesus as a subversive to the Roman authorities. The Pharisees could not have done this without becoming suspect themselves because their anti-Roman sentiment was well known. Instead, the Herodians, though detested by the Pharisees, were now useful to them as credible witnesses against Jesus to the Roman government. . .

Flattery is excessive praise used from motives of self-interest. It is therefore insincere and used by a person only in an effort to get what they want out of the person they are flattering. Lying is usually a part of flattery, but here it is in its worse form, for it is using truth as a means to gain a wicked end instead of being spoken as true praise.

Their use of flattery in posing their question exposes their true character for both the Scriptures and the Talmud speak against the use of flattery. **Proverbs 20:19** warns us not to get involved with someone who has flattering lips. **Proverbs 26:28** warns that a flattering tongue works ruin, and **Proverbs 29:5** makes the point directly that a man that flatters does so to entrap his neighbor. **Psalms 12** states that the Lord will cut off those who flatter, and **1Thessalonians 2:5** tells us as Christians that we are not to use flattering words at anytime. Why? Because it is

insincere and really just a **cloak for covetousness**. It is a means to selfishly gain from someone else by inducing them to be favorable to you. . .

The **supreme wisdom** of this statement is often missed because it is so simple. It is a short statement. It is a pithy statement. It is an answer that could never have been anticipated by them. It is an answer that is neither rebellious against the government nor God. It is an answer that proclaimed clearly and practically God's command to meet our obligations and fulfill our responsibilities to both God and government. . .

Jesus' command to "*render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's*" turned out to be a two-edged sword against the Herodians and the disciples of the Pharisees. That same sword still hangs over people today. The Herodians sought to render to Caesar, but they did not render to God. The Pharisees and their disciples did not render properly to Caesar, and their claim to render to God was false. They were in constant rebellion against both. The Herodians and the Pharisees would remain under God's judgment.

David Thompson: NO MATTER HOW THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TRIED TO TRAP JESUS CHRIST, THEY COULD NOT EVER DO IT BECAUSE HE ALWAYS COMMUNICATED GOD'S TRUTH EVEN ABOUT TAXES, WHICH SHOWS THEIR HYPOCRISY.

Parting Thoughts:

1. Christians have the responsibility to honor and submit to governing rulers (**Rom. 13:1**).
2. Christians have the responsibility to honor and obey God.
3. Religious phonies reject God's truth and will not submit to any authority because they believe they are the authority.

TEXT: Matthew 22:23-33

TITLE: CONTROVERSY REGARDING MARRIAGE IN THE RESURRECTION

BIG IDEA:

THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION CAN BE DEFENDED BY UNDERSTANDING BOTH GOD’S WORD AND GOD’S POWER

INTRODUCTION:

The issue at stake in this controversy with the Sadducees is the **doctrine of the resurrection**. The hypothetical case study of how to handle marriage in the resurrection is a mocking attempt to make the doctrine of the resurrection appear ludicrous – thereby discrediting Jesus in the eyes of the people as a teacher sent from God. But Jesus once again turns the tables and completely embarrasses the self-proclaimed religious experts who prided themselves on a literal interpretation of the Torah.

David Turner: In both this encounter with the Sadducees and the previous one with the Pharisees, Jesus is asked a difficult question that is intended to discredit him. But both times Jesus discredits and amazes his interlocutors. Here the question concerns not a hot political issue, taxation, but theology and the interpretation of Scripture. The Sadducees evidently believe that Torah-based levirate marriage cannot be squared with the Pharisees’ notion of an afterlife. Perhaps they want Jesus to align with them against the Pharisees (**Hagner** 1995a: 640). Whatever their agenda, Jesus says that their denial of the resurrection is an **error caused by ignorance**. They think of resurrection and the afterlife as mere reanimation to life as before. They are ignorant that God’s transforming power means that people after resurrection are no longer sexually active (cf. **1 Cor. 15:35–39**). Sexuality is part of the goodness of creation, but life in the resurrection will transcend this aspect of creation. This renders the levirate law moot. Jesus’s argument from **Exod. 3:6** shows that the Sadducees are also ignorant of the scriptural inference that God’s covenantal loyalty to the patriarchs proves their eventual resurrection, along with that of all God’s people.

Charles Swindoll: Being presently earthbound creatures, our perspective is riveted to the created order outlined in **Genesis 1**: dirt and stone, water and air, drifting clouds and distant constellations. Experiencing these things day after day, year after year, we can’t help but think of all reality in terms of earth, sky, and outer space. It’s next to impossible for us to remove ourselves mentally from our earthly existence and really imagine what it would be like to dwell **in another realm**.

When the subject of the afterlife comes up, it’s our natural tendency simply to transfer a picture of our earthbound lifestyle to our notion of heavenly existence. But we need to recognize the vast difference between the temporal life and eternal life, life on earth and life in heaven. For starters, our bodies won’t be in their present, mortal condition. Rather, as we learn from the words of Jesus, we will be “*like angels in heaven*” (**Matt. 22:30**).

Donald Hagner: Since the resurrection of Jesus and hence of all the dead was to become so critically important in the church (cf. **Acts 4:2**), **much is at stake** in the present exchange.

Stanley Saunders: Since Peter's confession that Jesus is "*the Messiah, the Son of the Living God*" (16:16), Jesus has been warning his disciples that he will suffer and die in Jerusalem at the hands of the leaders with whom he now debates, and promising that he will be raised from the dead after three days (16:21; 17:12; 17:22–23; 20:18–19). This story roots his claim about the resurrection in the foundational theological conviction that **God is God of the living**. Jesus knows what will happen in Jerusalem because he knows his adversaries, but also because he knows who God is. Jesus' crucifixion is not merely a story of tragic human disobedience, but the story of God's defeat of death and of those whose power is rooted in death. For Jesus, the resurrection is neither an artifact of popular belief nor merely an assertion that God will make things right in the end. **The resurrection is the defining and crowning revelation of the nature and effect of God's power.** The crucifixion and resurrection are thus the **bedrock theological convictions** that call forth and sustain all Christian proclamation and practice.

I. (:23-28) THE ATTACK ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION BY THE SADDUCEES

A. (:23) The Attack Initiated by Resurrection Deniers Via a "Gotcha" Question

"On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Him and questioned Him, saying,"

This type of approach should remind you of that obnoxious student who would try to make the professor look bad in class by some convoluted type of argumentation. The Sadducees have no sincere interest in investigating the truth of the reality of future resurrection. Their only motivation is to try to discredit Jesus.

David Turner: Jesus has been telling parables, and now the Sadducees approach him with a sort of **riddle-parable** of their own (cf. **Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40**). The Sadducees, in their denial of an afterlife, disagreed with the Pharisees (**Acts 23:8; Josephus**, Ant. 18.12–17; J.W. 2.162–66). This was evidently due to their rejection of the Pharisees' oral tradition and their emphasizing the five books of Moses over the rest of the canon. Like others who are not Jesus's disciples in Matthew, they address Jesus as "*teacher*" (cf. **Matt. 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 36**).

Charles Swindoll: Having just dispensed with a plot of the Pharisees, Jesus had barely caught His breath when a group of Sadducees showed up. The pressure was mounting. Like a desperate military campaign to take a fortified city, Jesus' opponents were coming at Him from every angle with wave after wave of attacks. Little did the Messiah's enemies know that their unrelenting assaults were slamming against an immovable object. No political tricks or theological subtleties would be able to trap the One who could not only see through their devices but could also see into their hearts and minds. So when a small group of Sadducees came to question Jesus about His view on the doctrine of the resurrection, they had no way of knowing what they were up against. . .

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had developed a rich doctrine of the afterlife, including a bodily resurrection of the saved and unsaved, as well as teachings concerning rewards and punishments. Meanwhile, their theological rivals, the Sadducees, believed that the soul perished with the body and that the concept of resurrection was a myth. Since they accepted only the authority of the books of Moses, they rejected any teachings about the afterlife or resurrection that came from later prophets. They also denied the existence of angels and demons. Because

they rejected the notion of life after death, they did not believe in heaven and hell or eternal judgment and rewards. They believed that obedience to God brought blessing in this life and that disobedience brought retribution in the here and now. They were worried far less about losing their eternal souls in heaven than about losing their temporal control of political power. We might compare the Sadducees of Jesus' day to the very secular, theologically liberal clergy of our own day. In the book of Acts, Luke briefly notes the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees this way: *"The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all"* (Acts 23:8).

William Barclay: The Sadducees were not many in number; but they were the wealthy, the aristocratic and the governing class. The chief priests, for instance, were Sadducees. In politics, they were collaborationists, quite ready to co-operate with the Roman government if co-operation was the price of the retention of their own privileges. In thought, they were quite ready to open their minds to Greek ideas. In their Jewish belief, they were traditionalists. They refused to accept the oral and scribal law, which to the Pharisees was of such paramount importance. They went even further; the only part of Scripture which they regarded as binding was the Pentateuch, the law par excellence, the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not accept the prophets or the poetical books as Scripture at all. In particular, they were at variance with the Pharisees in that they completely denied any life after death, a belief on which the Pharisees insisted. The Pharisees indeed laid it down that anyone who denied the resurrection of the dead was shut out from God.

B. (:24-27) The Attack Framed in a Convoluted Test Case Regarding Levirate Marriage

"Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up an offspring to his brother. 25 Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 And last of all, the woman died.'"

Grant Osborne: The purpose of **levirate marriage** was to protect the name of a deceased brother without children and to guarantee that he would have legal heirs and thus the ancestral lands would continue in the family, as well as to take care of the widow who would often be left destitute. So when a man died childless, his brother was supposed to marry his wife and bear children in his name. In **Deut 25:7–10** the brother could refuse but would be publicly shamed for doing so. We do not know how extensively this was practiced in Jesus' time (no instance is recorded), but the point of law was well known (discussed in **Josephus**, Ant. 4.254–56; m. Yeb.).

The use of "seven" is due to its being the number of completion; this is a "perfect" example. So far this is a classic case of levirate marriage, a childless widow given to the deceased man's brother.

C. (:28) The Attack Launched Via a Ludicrous Question Aimed at Mocking the Doctrine of the Resurrection

*"In the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be?
For they all had her."*

Grant Osborne: The question itself assumes a stance against polygamy, and the Sadducees are trying to force Jesus into a **no-win situation**. Either he denies the afterlife or accepts polygamy.

It is clear that their entire purpose is to “ridicule the idea of life after death” and in so doing to “trap Jesus and discredit his teaching.”

II. (:29-32) THE DEFENSE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION BY THE ONE WHO IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

A. (:29) Two Errors of Self Deception

“But Jesus answered and said to them,”

1. First Error of Self Deception = Ignorance of the Word of God

“You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures,”

Daniel Doriani: First, they deny the resurrection even though **Scripture clearly teaches it.**

- **Isaiah** said, *“Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead” (Isa. 26:19).*
- **Job** said, *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another” (Job 19:25–27).*
- **Daniel** said, *“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).*

These Scriptures promise more than the immortality of the soul, that is, a soul that survives death. They promise a **new body**, one suited for the renewed creation, and one where wind still blows through our hair.

2. Second Error of Self Deception = Ignorance of the Power of God

“or the power of God.”

B. (:30-32) Two Lines of Defense to Address Each of These Two Errors

(Jesus takes up each of these two errors and addresses them in reverse order)

1. (:30) The Power of God Will Transform Human Existence in the Resurrected State

“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

This transformation and new creation makes the question of the Sadducees a moot point.

David Turner: Again Jesus does not directly answer his interlocutors. Instead he strongly rebukes them, telling them that their ignorance of Scripture and of God’s power has led to error (**22:29**). He first responds to their argument from **Deut. 25:5** by affirming that people, like angels, do not live as married couples in the afterlife (**Matt. 22:30**). The Sadducees evidently err in assuming that the afterlife will be just like the present life, extrapolating from the present to the future (**Hagner 1995a: 641**). They also err in not accounting for the power of God to transform human existence.

Stu Weber: Since there was no marriage in heaven, the Sadducees' question was invalid. The answer was that no one would be the woman's husband at the resurrection. This, together with **Ephesians 5:22-33**, can lead us to the conclusion that God's primary purpose for marriage is to paint a picture on earth of the heavenly marriage between the Messiah and his bride. When the actual marriage of Christ and the church takes place in heaven, there will be no more need for human marriage. It will be displaced by the greater reality toward which it pointed while we were on earth.

Donald Hagner: Modern disbelief in the future resurrection of the dead is the result of an entirely different set of circumstances, especially the **naturalism** of modern science. Such a viewpoint, however, is not dissimilar to that of the Sadducees, especially in the underestimating of the power of God and the misunderstanding of the NT view of the resurrection and the world to come. If God is truly God, then the raising of the dead can be no problem for him. **The power to revivify cannot be denied to the One who created life in the first place.** Furthermore, resurrection bodies and the world of the eschaton are neither to be misunderstood as “spiritual” or immaterial, intangible realities completely discontinuous with life as we know it nor, on the other hand, as flesh and blood, material realities completely continuous with the world we know. Although we know little concerning the nature of the world to come and our own existence in it, **that future reality will be both continuous in some ways and discontinuous in other ways with what we have known.** For one thing, we will have bodies, and thus we will not be disembodied spirits, yet those bodies will not be of flesh and blood but bodies of a new kind that we have yet to experience (the NT discussion of this subject is, of course, **1 Cor 15:35–50**). Then the creation will have become the **new creation of God.**

Daniel Doriani: This leads to a common question: will there be sex in heaven? We can link this to similar questions: Will there be golf in heaven? Ice cream in heaven? Rock and roll or hip-hop music in heaven? (For some reason, people simply assume Bach’s music is in heaven.) The answer to all these questions is the same: If the Lord wills it, then we will experience them in heaven. If not, we will not miss them, because the Lord will give something better. There will be no grief, no sense of loss, in heaven.

There will be a “*new world*,” a regenerated world (*palingenesia*, **Matt. 19:28**), a *new heaven and a new earth* (**2 Peter 3:11–13**). We know there will be some continuity with this life. For example, there will be music, for we will sing new praises to God (**Rev. 5:9; 15:3**). There will be food, for we will enjoy our marriage feast with Jesus (**19:9**). We will be strong, for we will rest, but not sleep at night (**Heb. 4:1–11; Rev. 22:5**).

2. (:31-32) The Word of God Offers Clear Testimony to the Reality of the Resurrection

a. (:31-32a) Covenantal Relationships with Each of the Patriarchs

“But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying,

‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ’?”

Grant Osborne: Now Jesus turns to the **witness of Scripture** itself and deliberately chooses a passage from the Pentateuch, the portion the Sadducees accept as canon. He begins with his typical challenge to their biblical understanding, “*Have you not read?*” (cf. **12:3; 19:4; 21:16, 42**). By introducing **Exod 3:6** with “*what was spoken ... by God*” (cf. **1:22; 2:15**), Jesus emphasizes the **divine inspiration** behind the passage, thus a double indictment (ignorance of God as well as Scripture). In v. **24** they asserted “*Moses said*,” so now Jesus trumps that by

saying, “**in actuality God said.**” The presence of “*to you*” (ὕμῖν) and the present tense participle “*spoken*” (λέγοντος) highlight the fact that through the OT passage God is speaking now directly to the Sadducees (so Bruner).

David Turner: God’s **ongoing covenantal relationship** with the patriarchs implies their eventual resurrection. God’s being the God of the patriarchs during the “intermediate state” between their death and resurrection is tantamount to and guarantees his relationship with them in their final resurrected state (cf. 1 En. 20.8; 22.1–14; 60.8; 62.15; 2 Macc. 7:9, 36; 2 Esd. [4 Ezra] 7; Josephus, J.W. 3.374). The Sadducees have no rejoinder to this argument (**Matt. 22:34**), and the watching crowd is amazed (cf. **7:28; 13:54; 19:25**). Jesus’s reference to angels in **22:30** may be intended to irritate the Sadducees, who do not believe in angels (**Acts 23:8; Blomberg 1992a: 333**; but see **W. Davies and Allison 1997: 227** for a contrary view).

b. (:32b) Clinching Truth – God Is the God of the Living
“*He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*”

(:33) EPILOGUE – RESPONSE OF AMAZEMENT

“*And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.*”

Stu Weber: As with the crowd at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (**7:28-29**), this crowd was also astonished at the authority with which Jesus dealt with his opponents. Not only did Jesus wield Old Testament Scripture accurately; he revealed new truth that the Old Testament had not revealed (**22:30**). Jesus had turned his challengers' trap into an embarrassment and an accusation against themselves.

William Barclay: The Sadducean case was shattered. Jesus had done what the wisest Rabbis had never been able to do. Out of Scripture itself, he had proved the Sadducees to be wrong and had shown them that there is a life after death which must not be thought of in earthly terms. The crowds were amazed at a man who could take command of an argument like this, and even the Pharisees must have felt like cheering.

D. A. Carson: Matthew does not tell us that the Sadducees are convinced but that the crowds are astonished at Jesus’ teaching. The cause of the astonishment is probably Jesus’ authority and incisive insight into biblical truth (cf. **7:28–29; 13:54; 22:22**). Luke (**20:39**) remarks that some teachers of the law, almost certainly of Pharisaic persuasion, responded, “*Well said, teacher!*”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the wisdom of Jesus allow Him to control such disputes rather than simply giving direct answers to questions that are asked from an insincere and mocking perspective?
- 2) Why is Jesus the best person to respond to such an attack on the doctrine of the resurrection?
- 3) How can we grow in our knowledge of Scripture and ability to apply God’s truth to specific issues and disputes?

4) Once we acknowledge God's power in creation, how does that fortify us to apply the sufficiency of His power in other contexts?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Gardner: God of the Living

Does individual life end with death, as many OT passages seem to assume (cf. **Pss. 6:5; 49:10-12; 88:4-5**), or will there be a **resurrection of the dead**? The question aroused considerable discussion in Jewish circles (cf. **Acts 23:6-8; Eccles. 3:19-21; Wisd. of Sol. 2:1ff.; 1 Enoch 102:6ff.; Sanh. 10:1**), with the **Sadducees arguing against belief in a resurrection**. Among the arguments the Sadducees cited was that the belief is not taught in the Torah, the only Scripture which they recognized as authoritative.

In the dispute before us, however, the Sadducees come at the question from a different angle: They present Jesus with a **hypothetical case** that mocks belief in resurrection by making it appear **ludicrous**. In the humorous story they spin, based on the **practice of levirate marriage** taught in the Torah (cf. **Deut. 25:5-6; Gen. 38:8**), a woman ends up married in sequence to each of seven brothers in the course of her life. Now then, the Sadducees ask, if they all are resurrected, in whose bed will the hapless woman sleep? It is clearly a story meant to evoke laughter.

By giving Jesus an apparently unsolvable puzzle, the Sadducees hope to demonstrate their superiority as theologians. Jesus, however, is more than equal to the challenge and offers a twofold rebuttal. First, he disputes the premise on which the puzzle rests, namely, that life in the age to come is simply an extension of life as we know it now. On the contrary, Jesus says, the power of God that makes resurrection possible will fashion a new world in which marriage arrangements no longer play a part. The Sadducees have too earthbound a view of God's possibilities.

Second, Jesus cites a text from the part of the Scriptures the Sadducees accept as evidence for the resurrection (**Exod. 3:6; cf. 4 Macc. 7:19; 16:25**). He stresses the present tense of God's word to Moses, "*I am the God of Abraham.*" On that basis Jesus argues that those whom God calls, he maintains in an **unbroken covenant relationship that death cannot destroy**, and that resurrection will fully renew.

Listening in on all this, the crowds sense the same **voice of authority** they heard in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Once again, they are **astounded** (v. 33; cf. 7:28-29).

Charles Swindoll: Jesus affirmed three theological truths that contrasted their heretical beliefs (22:30).

1. First, the dead will indeed rise. Jesus simply asserted this as a fundamental theological truth — "*in the resurrection . . .*" There will be a physical resurrection of our bodies.
2. The second truth relates to the discontinuity between our present relationships and those in the afterlife. In the new world of resurrection life, there will be no marriage —neither

marriages that carry over from the present world nor marriages that take place after the resurrection.

3. The third theological truth relates to the nature of the afterlife. Those who are resurrected will be “*like angels in heaven*” (22:30). Note that this doesn’t say that departed saints will actually become angels. This is nowhere taught in the Bible. Rather, there will be something about us that will more closely resemble the angels in heaven than it will our present condition here on earth. The emphasis here seems to be on the idea that angelic beings do not marry. Other attributes of angels we will presumably share: They are ageless, tireless, and deathless, and they delight forever in the worship and service of their Creator.

Grant Osborne: Theology in Application

It has always been the problem that we humans think we know more than we do and have little room for truths that go beyond our experience or challenge our commonly accepted axioms. This was true with the Sadducees of Jesus’ day. They thought all truth began with their presuppositions regarding the five books of Moses, both in the extent of the canon and regarding their narrow interpretation of those books. Jesus showed them that **they had little room for God’s true Scripture or for his actual power.**

Little has changed today. On the one hand, arrogant modernists and postmodernists make their solemn pronouncements regarding what God can or cannot do (or even whether there is a God!) with no regard whatever to the limits of their knowledge and for what God is doing and is going to do. . . . The resurrection is a reality and an essential component of true Christian belief (1 Cor 15:12–19). . .

The problem today is that too many theologians have no room for **mystery**. We must not pretend to know more than we do and fight over the wrong issues. Jesus here tells us two things.

(1) There will be an entirely **new set of relationships in eternity**, one in which there will no longer be any need for marriage or procreation. I believe I will have a deeper love for and knowledge of my wife and children than I do now, and we will have that level of intimacy with all who are in heaven! That is true blessedness.

(2) This new relationship will remove all boundaries, creating a **new union between the peoples of the world**. When we combine 22:32 with 8:11 (“*many from the east and the west will come sit down at the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*”), we realize the barrier between Jew and Gentile, between racial and ethnic groups, will be broken once and for all. As Paul says in Eph 2:14, the present reality is that the cross has “*destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,*” and the future reality is that at the resurrection, “*the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into*” the Holy City (Rev 21:24, 26), so that there will be **one people, one united heavenly culture.**

John MacArthur: The God of the Living

Now, keep in mind that there were four major sects in Judaism: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes. Essenes were sort of hermits down in the desert who spent all their time copying scrolls and most likely copied the Dead Sea Scrolls, which we have found. Then there were the Zealots who were political activists, who were very nationalistic, who were sort of the terrorists, who were giving trouble to Rome. And then there were the Pharisees, who were the

religionists. And then there were the Sadducees, and I'll give you a little bit of information about them so you'll understand what's going on here.

They were not many in number. They were a very small group. They were **extremely wealthy** and **very influential**. They were the **aristocratic ruling class** in Judaism. They were the highest echelon. In fact, the chief priest, the high priest, the noblest of the priests were Sadducees. We do not know where that word "Sadducee" comes from. The majority of the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body in Israel, were also Sadducees. So they had great power, they had great influence, they had great prestige, and they also were wealthy because it was they who ran the temple concessions, the money changing, the buying and selling and all sorts of things that went on there were under their power.

They were **not popular with the people**. First of all, rich people who tend to do things for the expediency of their own personal gain don't tend to be very popular. Secondly, their theology was not the theology of the people for it denied the resurrection. The Pharisees were more popular with the people, and so the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees even added to their unpopularity. They had structural power, they had money power, they gouged the people with the money changing, they gouged the people with the selling and the buying of the animals for the sacrifices, they were not a popular group.

Now, politically they were **pro Rome**, which even added to their unpopularity. They were pro Rome for this reason: they were fat cats. They sat in the place where they could really make it. They prospered in their role as priests. They prospered under the Roman tolerance. Rome let them have their way, Rome let them do what they wanted, Rome gave them the right to function and operate as they saw fit; therefore, they did everything they could to maintain Rome's presence. They did all they could to seek Rome's confidence and Rome's favor.

They knew their authority was a delegated permission from the Roman occupation, and their wealth and their position and their control and their influence and power and prestige, all that was dependent on Rome letting them stay where they were. And so they were pro Roman. Because of this, the people resented them, not only because of their wealth but because of their political alliance.

By the way, they completely went out of existence in 70 A.D. when the temple was destroyed because their power was only the power of money and the power of leadership, and once Judaism ceased to be self-governing in any sense and once the temple was destroyed and there was no more priesthood and no more power, at that point they had no more reason to exist so they completely passed from history. They were connected to that point in time as influential aristocrats who stood in the place of priests, therefore had some religious clout, but more than that, they were in the place of real rulers and those who profited off the people.

Now, religiously I want to tell you a little about them. That's sort of where they were in the political picture. Religiously, they were - they would be **hyper-fundamentalists**. They were very, very much **literalists** when it came to the Scripture. For example, **Josephus** tells us that in the application of the law to the people when they had to render a judgment, they were more savage than any other Jews. They were more narrow-minded, more cruel than the Pharisees. The Pharisees, says Josephus, were more lenient in the application of the law, and that's true because the Pharisees wanted to get around the law, so they invented all kinds of ways to beat the law, didn't they?

I mean if the law said don't divorce, they'd figure out a whole lot of ways to divorce. They were very lenient - very lenient. But the Sadducees were absolutists. They were fanatics for the literal Scripture. They refused the oral law, they refused the traditions, they refused the scribal law, they refused everything but the Old Testament. They were very rigid and they prided themselves on being those who preserved and guarded the pure faith - the pure faith. So they resented the looseness of the Pharisees, they resented their oral tradition, their written tradition, all the stuff that grew up around the text.

They were literally fastidious when it came to Levitical purity and followed to the very letter all of the Levitical order. Now, the key identification of their doctrine was that they **denied the resurrection**. You say, "Well, if they were literalists in the Old Testament, and you just read various Old Testament passages that speak of resurrection, how could they deny the resurrection?" Here's how: they **gave primacy and authority to the five books of Moses**. . .

So the Sadducees got in on the death plot with the Pharisees when they saw the potential for Jesus to bring about a revolution, which could mean Roman intervention, the holocaust of which could cause them to lose their careers or even their lives. And so they sought to kill Him. And then to add to that when on Tuesday He cleaned out their operation, they were only doubly angry and ready to take His life. . .

Now, here's their plan: They want to ask Jesus a question that'll make Him look like a fool, to discredit Him with the people. You see, if you can just discredit Jesus with all the people, then He's lost His influence, then it doesn't matter what He teaches anymore, and then it's no threat with the Roman situation because if nobody listens to Jesus, He's no threat anymore, right? So if they can discredit Jesus with the Jewish people, they've accomplished their goal. And they approached Him with what you could call a *reductio ad absurdum* in Latin, a **logical absurdity**. They asked Him a question that no doubt they had asked the Pharisees a myriad of times. . .

"*Jesus answered and said unto them, 'You are mistaken. You do err'*" - I want to stop there for a minute. I like that direct approach. "You are wrong. You have just put your ignorance on display." Lenski says, "The bubble blown by the Sadducees is punctured." He really discredits them. "*You are mistaken,*" and He uses the word *planaō*. The word - we got our word *planet* from it. It means to cause to wander, to lead astray, and it's in the middle voice reflective. It means **you are causing yourself to wander**. You are leading yourself astray from the truth. You are mentally cut loose from reality. That's really what He's saying. Put in the vernacular, you are spaced out. . .

God is not worshiped by corpses. He's not the God of people who don't exist. Who wants to be the God of people who don't exist? Now, note that each is individually singled out there, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, and He's talking about personal, intimate relationship of each of them. Now, the genitive here, of, the God of, the God of, the God of, can be seen two ways. It could mean this: the God to whom Abraham belongs, the God to whom Isaac belongs, the God to whom Jacob belongs. Or it could mean the God who belongs to Abraham, the God who belongs to Isaac, the God who belongs to Jacob. And I like to see both: I am the God to whom Abraham belongs and who belongs to Abraham. I am the God to whom Isaac belongs and who belongs to Isaac. I am the God to whom Jacob belongs and who belongs to Jacob. In other words, I am the God who continues to have an intimate relationship of life and worship with these who are dead, which means they still must be, what? **Alive**. . .

So we start with the approach, then we see the absurdity, then comes the answer from the Scripture, and finally the astonishment in **verse 33**. “*And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at His doctrine.*” Luke says, “*Some of the rabbis, not Sadducees, said, ‘Teacher, thou hast well said.’*” This new rabbi from Galilee answered the unanswerable question, gave the passage that none of the Pharisees or all of the Pharisees could discover, and it says they were *astonished*. It’s a very interesting word, *ekplēssō*. It means to strike out of one’s wits. They went out of their minds. **It blew their minds. . .**

For your thinking, listen, three things that I see as great confidence builders in this text:

- 1) One, I see here the majestic deity of Jesus.
- 2) Second thing I see is His commitment to Scripture.
- 3) Thirdly, I see His affirmation of resurrection.

J. Ligon Duncan: Not Knowing the Scriptures

I. (:23-28) Hardened hearts fixate on speculative questions in order to avoid gospel realities.

Hardened hearts will often fixate on speculative questions and difficulties in order to deflect the need to wrestle with the claims of Christ in the gospel. Let me put that another way. People will often grasp hold of Bible difficulty or a doctrinal difficulty in order to keep from having to deal with the clear claims and invitation of Christ in the gospel. . .

Let me just say in passing, have you ever noticed the fact that this is the only direct encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees recorded in the gospels? Could it be, could it be that Jesus had no time for skeptics? At least the Pharisees believed in the authority of the word. At least there was something that you could argue with them. But the Sadducees, this was the only time He spoke with them.

II. (:29-33) Ignorance of the Bible and doubt of God’s power are enemies of saving faith.

In other words, they have failed to comprehend and submit to the Scripture because of their moral rebellion against God in His truth. This is not an intellectual problem. It is not a lack of work and exegesis. Their problem is not intellectual. It is moral. They’re in rebellion against God and so they refuse to submit to His word. They use His word for games. They use His word to ask mocking questions but they do not submit themselves to the authority of the word. They do not bow the knee and recognize this as the word of the Lord spoken and written. . .

In His answer He shows how they don’t understand the power of God first and then He shows how they don’t understand the Scriptures. They don’t understand the power of God because they don’t believe that God is able to raise from the dead. Their god is too small, Their god is too small to transform. The saying of **verse 29** indicates that God has the power to change the nature of life at resurrection so that marriage is no longer necessary. Immortality makes procreation needless. And so, He responds to them that they have not grasped that. Calvin says, “The resurrection is far beyond the grasp of human sense. We could not believe it until our minds rise to envisage the unbounded power of God by which He is able to subject all things to himself as Paul teaches.” The resurrection is a doctrine that you don’t learn from looking out in nature and seeing how things are. The resurrection is a doctrine that you learn from the lips of your lord. And it’s a promise, a covenant promise, from God. And you can’t embrace it until you understand. You look up and you see the unbounded power of God.

TEXT: Matthew 22:34-40

TITLE: CONTROVERSY REGARDING THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BIG IDEA:

JESUS PROVES HIS AUTHORITY BY DEFINING LOVE AS THE HEART OF SPIRITUAL ETHICS – BOTH IN RELATION TO GOD AND MAN

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Some questions are asked **to make us think . . .** not to be answered. In fact, some of life's best questions are those that leave us sitting in silence, pondering them, rather than rushing to an off-the-top-of-our-heads, quiz-show response. Some of the smartest and wisest people I know impress me not because they have all the right answers but because they know how to ask the right questions. My best mentors and teachers have been the ones who have driven me deeper into exploring the profound questions of life rather than making me jot down their bullet-point lists of answers.

Richard Gardner: According to rabbinic tradition dating from the second century, the Torah contains no fewer than 613 laws (365 prohibitions and 248 commands). Already in Jesus' day, Jewish teachers were wrestling with the question of how all these commandments relate to each other, and whether the totality of them can be derived from one or more basic commandments.

Daniel Doriani: In **Matthew 22** Jesus says that **love for God** is the first and greatest duty of mankind. This text marks the fourth in a series of questions the Jewish leaders put to Jesus, always intent on testing or trapping him. They have asked him questions about his authority (**21:23**), about taxes (**22:15–17**), and about the resurrection (**22:23–28**). Jesus has answered each one, and answered well. In fact, his answer to the last question from the Sadducees was so successful that they resolved to ask him no more. When they heard "*that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together*" to try one last time to test or trap Jesus (**22:34**).

William Barclay: To be truly religious is to love God and to love those whom God made in his own image; and to love God and other people, not with a vague sentimentality, but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of others.

Donald Hagner: The two love commandments belong together, covering the vertical (relationship with God) and the horizontal (relationship with others) dimensions. The first entails the second; the second presupposes and depends on the first. It is obvious, however, that the use of the verb ἀγαπήσεις, "*you shall love*," does not mean the same thing in both places. In neither case is love construed as an emotion. **Love for one's neighbor means acting toward others with their good, their well-being, their fulfillment, as the primary motivation and goal of our deeds.** Such love is constant and takes no regard of the perceived merit or worth of the other person. Love of God, on the other hand, is to be understood as a **matter of reverence, commitment, and obedience.** It is at once an acknowledgment of his identity as Creator and Redeemer and a reflection of that reality in the ordering of our lives. With this orientation toward God and others, the law and the prophets have reached their ultimate goal. Further concern with commandments, further elaboration of ethical stipulations—these all depend upon the real manifestation of the love commandments for their legitimacy.

Stanley Saunders: This answer allows Jesus to affirm the two commandments as “*great*” and “*first*” without suggesting that they trump or diminish the rest. There is not one great commandment, nor even two, and then many subordinate commandments, but an integral whole that encompasses the law and the prophets. The greatness of these two commandments lies not in their distinction from the others, but in their capacity to articulate the root and foundation of the whole tradition.

I. (:34-36) THE FINAL EXAM

A. (:34) Final Attempt to Discredit Jesus

“But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together.”

Charles Swindoll: In Jesus’ muzzling of the Sadducees, the opposing party of the Pharisees saw an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. If they could swoop in and deal a blow to Jesus, they would not only put that rabble-rousing rabbi in His place, but they would also demonstrate their intellectual superiority over the Sadducees. **A. T. Robertson** even suggests that the Pharisees “could not restrain their glee” at the opportunity handed to them by the circumstances, as if on a silver platter.

But the Pharisees couldn’t afford to mess this up. If they, too, were soundly defeated by Jesus’ uncanny ability to deflect His opponents’ attacks, the end would be worse than the beginning. Remember, they were still licking their wounds after the “*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” defeat, in which their disciples had gone away in amazement at Jesus’ teaching (22:21-22). This time they had to hit Jesus as hard as they could and make it hurt.

B. (:35) Final Confrontation Crafted by the Pharisees’ Top Legal Expert

“And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him,”

Leon Morris: The restless attempts to trick Jesus into an answer that would discredit him either with the authorities or with the general public continued. His opponents never learned that they were on a futile quest.

John MacArthur: It’s unlike Matthew to use the word “*lawyer*.” In fact, some commentators think it shouldn’t be there because it’s so uncommon to Matthew. Well, that’s ridiculous. He can use a word he’s never used before, that isn’t any problem.

But I believe the reason it’s here is because it’s a word that may suggest that this guy was a cut above the average scribe. He was a **law expert**. And all scribes were, to some extent, lawyers, half attorney, half theologian because their understanding of law was that it was biblical law and traditional law, not just secular law, so they were sort of theologian attorneys and advocates and teachers. And so this may have been one who stood out from the many scribes as a real expert. And he is sent to ask the question on behalf of the rest of the Pharisees.

Charles Swindoll: The Pharisees determined to send one of their experts in the Law, whom the NASB calls “*a lawyer*” and the NLT calls “*an expert in religious law*” (22:35). The Greek word here is *nomikos* [3544], literally, “*a man of the law*.” These “*lawyers*” were usually scribes, men who dedicated their lives to meticulously copying the Hebrew Scriptures to preserve them from

decay or corruption. Consequently, their constant contact with God's Word made them extremely knowledgeable, and they would be called upon to explain and apply the Law. We can imagine that the Pharisees, desirous of dealing Jesus a rhetorical death blow, found the best trained, most brilliant scholar they could. It wouldn't have been difficult, considering that they were in Jerusalem, the center of the study of the Torah.

R. T. France: The question is not political like the previous Pharisaic question. Like the Sadducees' question it is essentially theological, but this time with a focus on the law which gives it a more strongly **ethical slant**. As an issue going to the heart of the Mosaic law it is appropriately raised by a Pharisaic lawyer. . .

By bringing these two texts [**Deut 6:5** and **Lev 19:18**] together Jesus asserts that the one principle of love applies equally to the two main aspects of religious duty, one's attitude to God and one's attitude to other people. It is these two foci which provide the framework of the Decalogue, with its two "tables" covering these two aspects in turn. If the Decalogue is itself a sort of epitome of the law, these two quotations in turn sum up the Decalogue. Commentators discuss whether Jesus was the first Jewish teacher to bring the two texts together in this paradigmatic way.

C. (:36) Final Exam Question Allows for a Wide Range of Responses

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

This was not a simple Yes/No Question.

Warren Wiersbe: This was not a new question, for the scribes had been debating it for centuries. They had documented 613 commandments in the law, 248 positive and 365 negative. No person could ever hope to know and fully obey all of these commandments. So, to make it easier, the experts divided the commandments into "heavy" (important) and "light" (unimportant). A person could major on the "heavy commandments" and not worry about the trivial ones.

The fallacy behind this approach is obvious: you need only break **one law**, heavy or light, to be guilty before God. *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* (**James 2:10**).

II. (:19-24) THE FOCUS ON LOVE

A. (:37-38) Love for God

1. (:37) Comprehensive Commitment

"And He said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

Donald Hagner: Jesus draws his answer from the **Shema**, which was recited twice daily by the Jews. After the opening words, *"Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,"* which are included in **Mark 12:29**, comes the commandment quoted by Jesus. The wording of the citation itself agrees nearly verbatim with the LXX of **Deut 6:5**.

Daniel Doriani: This passage [**Deut. 6:5**] fairly shouts, "This is the climax!" Moses tells Israel they have heard God's law and must now obey him because he redeemed them and because he has the power to bless them with a good, long life. Moses says, in effect, *"The one God is the*

Lord your God. Therefore love him.” On the basis of **6:5** and the sweep of **Deuteronomy 4–7**, Jesus says the first duty of mankind is to **love God**.

- We love God with heart and soul when we embrace him in our deepest convictions and commitments.
- We love God with the mind when we understand our past and our present as he does and dedicate our future plans and goals to him.
- We love God with our strength when we dedicate the physical body, its muscles and energy, to him. We love God with our strength if we follow him with a determined will and with moral resolve in the face of adversity.

Grant Osborne: Notice that it is not just “*love God*” but “*love the Lord your God*.” The object is Yahweh, the covenant God who never leaves or forsakes. Moreover, he is “your” God, so that one’s love for him is simply the response of one who has already been loved completely and absolutely.

2. (:38) Preeminent Priority
“This is the great and foremost commandment.”

B. (:39) Love for Your Neighbor

“The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Daniel Doriani: All duties to our neighbor **depend on love**. The word translated “*depend*” (*kremannymi*) literally means to hang, as in hanging a necklace around a neck or hanging an ornament on a tree. This “*hanging*” or “*depending*” means that everything the law says about our duty to our neighbor serves love and explains it. **Augustine** said, “All God’s commandments . . . are rightly carried out only when the motive principle of action is the love of God, and the love of our neighbor in God.” So love is the motive for all we do. It is also the organizing principle for all we do. The church father **Theodoros** said, “Love unites and protects the virtues.” New Testament scholar **Douglas Moo** put it another way: “love has primacy within the law, not over the law.” Love is the greatest command, but not the only command. He adds, “Perhaps if love were perfectly sincere, it would indeed fulfill all the particular commandments rightly.” But “in this life our love is never perfectly sincere”; therefore we still need the other commandments. God’s law teaches how to embody the love command. . .

So Jesus calls us to love the Lord and to love our neighbors. All the rest of the law is commentary on those two principles. Love is the most basic and most vital demand of the law. It is the true goal of the law. Love integrates and informs all our duties. Ideally, all that we do is for the sake of love.

C. (:40) Significance of the Combination of These Two Commands

“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Grant Osborne: It is commonly recognized that this is **fulfillment language**, and that these two complete and bring into fulfillment all of Scripture, “nothing less than a ‘hermeneutic program’ for the understanding and application of the law and the prophets.” In other words, following God in every area of life flows out of love for God, and that then makes it possible to love others, which itself is the basis for all relationships and ethical living on this earth.

Robert Gundry: The whole Law, plus the Prophets, “hangs” on these two commandments in the sense that they derive from and depend on these two, so that love for God and neighbor must permeate obedience to all the other commandments. This permeation keeps careful obedience from turning into mechanical rule-keeping.

D. A. Carson: There is no question here of the priority of love over law—i.e., one system over another—but of the priority of love within the law. These two commandments are the greatest because all Scripture “hangs” on them; i.e., **nothing in Scripture can cohere or be truly obeyed unless these two are observed.** Love is “the **primary hermeneutical principle** for interpreting and applying the law” (**Mohrlang**, Matthew and Paul, 95). The entire biblical revelation demands **heart religion** marked by total allegiance to God, loving him and loving one’s neighbor. Without these two commandments, the Bible is sterile. This pericope prepares the way for the denunciations of **23:1–36** and conforms fully to Jesus’ teaching elsewhere. “Love is the greatest commandment, but it is not the only one; and the validity and applicability of other commandments cannot be decided by appeal to its paramount demand” (**Moo**, p. 12). The question of the continuity or discontinuity of OT law within the teaching of Jesus is determined not with reference to the love commands but by a salvation-historical perspective focusing on prophecy and fulfillment.

R. T. France: The **comprehensive nature** of the love which these two texts demand makes them eminently suitable for the role of summarizing the law, as the Pharisaic lawyer has asked. Together they cover both the main foci of human responsibility under God. They summarize not only the law (which was the question asked) but also the prophets, since the whole scriptural revelation is understood to witness to the same divine will. For the graphic use of “hang” as a term for **dependence** cf. the famous rabbinic comment that the sabbath laws “are as mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty but the rules are many.” (m. Hag. 1:8) By contrast, the two texts chosen by Jesus are together sufficiently strong to bear the weight of the whole OT. This does not mean, as some modern ethicists have argued, that “all you need is love,” so that one can dispense with the ethical rules set out in the Torah. It is rather to say that those rules find their true role in working out the practical implications of the love for God and neighbor on which they are based. Far from making the law irrelevant, therefore, love thus becomes “the primary hermeneutical principle for interpreting and applying the law.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you think the Pharisees discussed in their scheming huddle?
- 2) How did they expect Jesus would respond to this question?
- 3) Does this command require that we first focus attention on loving ourselves?
- 4) What are some of the practical ways that you can love your neighbor as yourself?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jeffrey Crabtree: The greatest commandments are two and are foundational to all other commands. A sermon might explain the first command's importance:

- (1) its decisive action (love),
- (2) its object (the Lord thy God), and
- (3) its extent (with one's entire being);

and then the second command's

- (1) importance,
- (2) decisive action (love),
- (3) object, and
- (4) extent (as oneself).

Charles Swindoll: The question was not only a test of Jesus' ability to skillfully nuance His answer in order to keep from sounding like a breaker of the Law (by annulling 612 commandments), but it was also a test to see if He was aware of the ongoing scholarly debates concerning the proper ranking and ordering of the commandments. **D. A. Carson** explains,

The Jews quite commonly drew distinctions among the laws of Scripture —great and small, light and heavy. . . . Verse 36 shows that the question of the expert was probably a hotly debated one. . . . The scene is like an ordination council, where the candidate is doing so well that some of the most learned ministers ask him questions they themselves have been unable to answer—in the hope of tripping him up or of finding answers.

How would Jesus weigh in on the scholarly discussion? Would He even have the faintest awareness that there was a debate? We should probably picture this encounter as the ivory-tower scholar with the first-century equivalent of a PhD trying to show just how ignorant the amateur from Nazareth really was. . .

Note that Jesus didn't couch His response in carefully crafted qualifications. He didn't have to deliberate, didn't have to ponder, didn't have to wrack His brain evaluating each of the 613 commandments in the Law and weighing each one. Jesus gave a straightforward, immediate, and unequivocal answer to the scholar's question. But He didn't stop there. He also added the second most important command, quoting **Leviticus 19:18**: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (**Matt. 22:39**). Jesus thus placed the vertical love of God and the horizontal love of fellow men and women as the foundation and structure of the entire Law (**22:40**).

Jesus' response left the teacher of the Law with nowhere to go. The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark records that the lawyer was forced to agree with Jesus, essentially admitting that the rabbi from Nazareth had passed the test with flying colors.

Craig Blomberg: The relationship of all the Old Testament to the double love commandment shows that there is a hierarchy of law that above all requires one's heart attitude to be correct. If this is absent, obedience to commandments degenerates into mere legalism. Combining Jesus' teaching here with his approach to the law, as, e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount, demonstrates that while the principle of love remains constant, applications vary for different circumstances. Nevertheless, Jesus' words also strongly differentiate him from situation ethicists. Love does make specific moral demands, including certain absolutes. What is more, the proper motivation for correct interpersonal relationships always remains a profound sense of gratitude for what God

has done for us in Christ. Jesus' twofold answer should warn Christians against emphasizing either piety for God or social concern at the expense of the other.

Leon Morris: Anyone who loves God and people wholeheartedly is not going to come short in religious observances, nor in doing what is proper to other people. In short, when anyone loves in the way Jesus says, there is no need for a host of hair-splitting definitions of when an obligation has been discharged and when it has not. As I have written elsewhere, "Jesus swept aside all such pettifogging nonsense with his revolutionary insistence on the centrality of love and for good measure he added that the teaching of the prophets is included in this command. At one stroke he did away with any understanding of the service of God that sees it as concerned with the acquiring of merit or with an emphasis on liturgical concerns. What matters can be summed up in one word: love." This does not, of course, mean that all other commandments may be ignored and that all that one must do is love. The commandments of God are serious and must be observed. But Jesus is saying that it is only when we love that we can truly obey them and that without love we do not really understand what the commandments mean. In one way or another all the commandments are expressions of God's love. Love is the thrust of them all, and it is only as we love that we fulfil them.

John MacArthur: The Great Commandment

Alongside of these events in the life of our Lord has been the mounting, **rising animosity**, hatred, and venom of the religious leaders. They already resented Jesus Christ deeply. They already wanted Him dead. The Scriptures says they already were plotting His murder. You see, they resented Him for several reasons. Reason number one: He taught contrary to their teaching, and that irritated them. Perhaps reason number two: He was more popular than they were, He had a bigger following than they did, and that was hard for them to take because their egos really needed to be supreme. And thirdly, He demonstrated powers and abilities that they couldn't even conceive of. . .

They tried to test Him politically, they tried to test Him theologically with a major doctrinal issue, and now they're really probing in the spiritual dimension again, and they have one more shot that they want to give to try to discredit Him with the people. This is their last attempt. In fact, Mark 12, **verse 34**, paralleling this passage, says, "*When this was over, no man dared ask Him any more questions.*" This is it. . .

But they believe that Jesus is a **diminisher of Moses**. They believe that Jesus comes to postulate something beyond Moses, something above Moses, something greater than Moses, and they want Him to say that. They want Jesus to affirm that He has a word that supersedes Moses so that they can accuse Him of being a heretic and an apostate, who has apostatized; that is, departed from the faith delivered through the greatest of all, the greatest authority, Moses himself. If they can just get Jesus to say that He supersedes Mosaic authority, He will become a blasphemer, He will discredit Himself, He will become unpopular with the people who revere Moses as the greatest of all. So they want to put Jesus in a situation to attack Mosaic law by superseding it, and they believe that He will do that because they saw His teaching as something beyond. . .

But their approach is this: If Jesus is who we think He is, and that is a man with a huge ego trying to establish Himself as the Messiah - because they didn't really believe He was - if He is as false as we think He is, He's going to say something that supersedes Moses. He's going to set Himself up as the authority. He's going to give some law that comes out of His mouth and thus

we'll know He's apostate and He's a heretic. So what is the great law? Just give us one, the greatest law, and they figure if He's got something new to say, it can't be something old, right? If He's come with some new message, it can't be an old law. . .

But He quotes something with which they were all familiar. I'm not here to tell you anything different than what Moses told you. Same thing - same thing. The word in **Deuteronomy 6:5**, thou shalt love *ahelv* in Hebrew, the verb, refers primarily to **the love of will**, the love of the mind, the love of action, rather than the love of feeling, the love of emotion. It is that highest kind of love. Not - not the love that you just feel but the love of dedication, **the love of commitment**, the love that says this is right and this is noble, no matter what I feel. And that's the word, *agapaō*. . .

And so you can see here that in an overlapping sense, there are four channels for love to be perfectly balanced. It's an intelligent love, it's a feeling love, it's a willing love, and it's a serving love. It carries itself right out to how we act in our physical strength. So our intellectual part, our emotional part, our volitional part, our physical part all comes together to love God, to love God with the total being, all that we are. . .

And so we are those that **love Him** and **keep His commandments** - that love Him and keep His commandments - and that's the mark of a believer. A true believer is a lover of God, and that is made manifest because He keeps His commandments. You show me someone who doesn't have any interest in keeping His commandments, I'll show you someone who doesn't love Him, and I'll show you someone who doesn't know him - who doesn't know Him. . .

The second commandment follows the same track. It's of the same nature and the same character. "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" That ties right in with it - that ties right in with it. This flows from love for God. When you love God right, you love people right. That's the idea. And the Pharisees didn't do that. They bound heavy burdens on people. They used people. They abused people. They were cruel to people. Witness their treatment of the prophets, their treatment of Christ, and we'll get into that in **chapter 23** where it talks about the terrible things that they did.

They were not lovers of men. They were **haters of men**, users of men, abusers of men. They traded on them, they stole their money, they overcharged them, they made merchandise of them, and you can go back in the history of God's people Israel and see how they abused the poor, how they were not just, they took bribes, all kinds of things. See, people are not basically lovers of others as they ought to be, they're self-lovers. So you're to love your neighbor as yourself. What does that mean?

It means love is, again, the love of purpose, the love of intention, the love of will, the love of action. In other words, I take care of somebody else the same way I take care of me. Let's face it, we're very concerned with our own comfort, we're very concerned with meeting our own needs, we're very concerned with our own goals being met. Are we as concerned about somebody else's? I mean when I'm hungry I take care of me. When I see somebody else hungry, do I take care of them with the same alacrity, the same speed, the same concern? . . .

Christianity isn't that complicated, neither is Judaism. Just says love God, love men. If you love God, you'll do what He says. If you love men, you'll do what they need, that's all. That's life for us. That's the whole thing. Because **verse 40** sums it up. "*On these two commandments*" - like

two nails, two pegs - “*hang all the law and the prophets.*” Everything else God said in the Old Testament hangs on those two things. If you just love God with all your being and love everybody as you love yourself, you don’t need any more rules. That’s right. You don’t need any more - everything else is just a definition of that. Everything else is just an explanation of that.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Great Commandment

Opposition to Christ comes in spite of light because of the darkness of our own hearts. That’s a very important thing to understand. That the opposition to Christ here that we see on the Tuesday of the Passover week is not because Jesus hasn’t given enough evidence of who he is or the divine authority of His teaching. The reason that these people are conspiring against is because of the darkness of their own heart. The message is clear. The testimony is unmistakable. The light is bright. It’s blinding! But they’re blind and they can’t see it and so their opposition is not because of a lack of light, a lack of witness, a lack of evidence, a lack of testimony, it’s because their own hearts are hard.

I. The Pharisees attempt to tempt Jesus.

In spite of the fact that Jesus had just put to silence their arch rivals, the Sadducees. **The Pharisees aren’t pleased** by that at all. In fact, the Pharisees, immediately after Jesus is done dispensing with the Sadducees, they are immediately conspiring against the Lord Jesus Christ. They want to undermine Him. His testimony. His witness meant nothing to them. He had just upheld the precious doctrine of the resurrection of the body from the dead, and they didn’t care. All they cared about was that the people would follow after Him and they didn’t want that to happen and so they **seek to undermine Him**. **Matthew Henry** makes a very interesting comment about this. He says, “this is an instance of **pharisaical envy and malice**. They are displeased at the maintaining of a confessed truth because it was done by those that they did not like.” . . .

When we are praying for and witnessing to those who do not respond to the gospel, let’s remember that even Christ’s witness was rejected. But Christ’s witness was not in vain and God alone changes hearts. That’s the first thing I’d like you to see as we look at this passage together.

II. The lawyer’s question.

There’s another thing I’d like you to see if you’d look at **verse 36**. In verse 36 we see the testing question which this young lawyer, this expert in the Jewish religious law ask of Jesus. It’s a question of great importance. It’s a question much more significant than the silly question that the Sadducees had asked. The Sadducees had asked a question about the resurrection because they wanted to make fun of Jesus and they wanted to make fun of His belief in the resurrection and they wanted to make fun of the doctrine of the resurrection. But this was a **serious question**.
..

Whatever the sinful attitude of the Pharisees was, when they asked this question, this question prompts us to ask, do we reverently reflect on what our supreme duty is to God? Do we meditate on His word? Is it the authority of our lives? And when we disagree with it, we know who’s wrong. Do we delight in that word? Do we examine ourselves by that word? This question, what is the greatest commandment, presses that issue on all of us. What is our greatest duty? What is our supreme obligation to God? And it ought to have all our ears waiting to hear what Jesus thinks about that, because what He thinks about that matters a lot. And so we look at **verses 37 and 40**, to hear Jesus’ instructive answer to this question. . .

What is love? That is a hard question to answer in a few words. Here's my best shot at it this morning. Love to God means **delighting in God**. To love means to delight in God. And therefore, neighbor love means **looking out for your neighbor's best interest** because you delight in God. There's your definition. Love to God. Delighting in God. Love to neighbor. Looking out for your neighbor's best interest because you delight in God. And Jesus says, "Let Me tell you what, you can't love like that, unless you know God. You can't love what you don't know. You can't love who you don't know. And unless you know God, and unless you know Him savingly, unless you've experienced His grace, you cannot love as he calls Christians to love." Jesus here calls us all to wholehearted love. He calls us to love God for himself. Not for what He can give us, but for Himself. Love God for who He is. He calls us to love Him as much as we're able. With all your heart. With all your soul. With all your mind. With all your strength. He calls us to love God actively. To actively display that love of God. Not just to say that we love God, but to **practically live out our love to God**. . .

Isn't it brilliant how Jesus doesn't oppose love and law nor does he confuse love and law. Jesus doesn't say the law is love. And he doesn't say that love is law. They are distinct. But in the Christian, they work together. The law is the rails. It's the guideline. The pattern. The standard. Love is the energy which drives the train on the rails. Law without love cannot be kept, because the whole purpose of the law is that love might be guided in its expression. Let me put it this way: the function of law is to guide our practical expression of our love. Love to God. Love to neighbor. And so love needs law and the law needs love in the Christian.

John Piper: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

So loving others is the outward manifestation, the visible expression, the practical demonstration, and therefore the fulfillment of what the Old Testament is about. So there is a sense in which the second commandment (to love your neighbor) is the visible goal of the whole Word of God. It's not as though loving God is not here, or that loving God is less important; rather loving God is made visible and manifest and full in our visibly, practically, sacrificially loving others. I think that is why the second commandment stands by itself when the New Testament says that love fulfills the law. . .

The Law and the Prophets are hanging on—depending on—something before them, namely, God's passion that this world, this history of humankind, be a world of love to God and radical, other-oriented love to each other. . .

Which means that love is the origin (**Matthew 22:40**) and the goal (**Romans 13:8, 10**) of the Law and the Prophets. It is the beginning and the end of why God inspired the Bible. It's the fountainhead and spring at the one end, and the shoreless ocean at the other end of the river of redemptive history—remembered and promised in the Word of God. . .

In other words make your *self-seeking* the measure of your *self-giving*. When Jesus says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," the word "as" is very radical: "Love your neighbor *as* yourself." That's a BIG word: "As!" It means: If you are *energetic* in pursuing your own happiness, be energetic in pursuing the happiness of your neighbor. If you are *creative* in pursuing your own happiness, be creative in pursuing the happiness of your neighbor. If you are *persevering* in pursuing your own happiness, be persevering in pursuing the happiness of your neighbor. In other words, Jesus is not just saying: seek for your neighbor the *same things* you seek for yourself, but also seek them in the *same way*—the same zeal and energy and creativity and perseverance. The same life and death commitment when you are in danger. Make your own

self-seeking the measure of your self-giving. Measure your pursuit of the happiness of others, and what it should be, by the pursuit of your own. How do you pursue your own well-being? Pursue your neighbor's well-being that way too. . .

In other words take all your self-love—all your longing for joy and hope and love and security and fulfillment and significance—take all that, and focus it on God, until he satisfies your heart and soul and mind. What you will find is that this is not a canceling out of self-love. This is a fulfillment and transformation of self-love. Self-love is the desire for life and satisfaction rather than frustration and death. God says, Come to me, and I will give you fullness of joy. I will satisfy your heart and soul and mind with my glory. This is the first and great commandment.

And with that great discovery—that God is the never-ending fountain of our joy—the way we love others is forever changed. Now when Jesus says, "Love your neighbor *as yourself*," we don't respond by saying, "Oh, this is threatening. This means my love for myself is made impossible by all the claims of my neighbor. I could never do this." Instead we say, "Oh, yes, I love myself. I have longings for joy and satisfaction and fulfillment and significance and security. But God has called me—indeed he has commanded me—to come to him first for all these things. He commands that my love for him be the form of my love for me. That all my longings for me I find in him. That is what my self-love is now. It is my love for God. They have become one. My quest for happiness is now nothing other than a quest for God. And he has been found in Jesus Christ." . . .

Summary

It is a very radical command. It cuts to the root of sin, called pride. Remember, this root of pride that gives rise to all other sins, is the passion to be happy (self-love) contaminated and corrupted by two things:

- 1) the unwillingness to see God as the only fountain of true and lasting joy, and
- 2) the unwillingness to see other people as designed by God to receive our joy in him.

But that is exactly the contamination and corruption of self-love that Jesus counteracts in these two commandments. In the first commandment he focuses the passion to be happy firmly on God and God alone. In the second commandment he opens a whole world of expanding joy in God and says: people, human beings, everywhere you find them, are designed to receive and enlarge your joy in God. Love them the way you love yourself. Show them, give them—through every practical means available—what you have found for yourself in God.

TEXT: Matthew 22:41-46

TITLE: *GREATEST QUESTION OF ALL: HOW CAN CHRIST BE SUPERIOR TO DAVID?*

BIG IDEA:

THE SON OF DAVID MUST ALSO BE ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

The greatest question each individual must answer is “**Who is Jesus Christ and how will you respond to His authority in your life?**” The secularists and the humanists and the self-righteous religious leaders have no problem admitting the greatness of Jesus as a teacher, as a moral example, etc. But their characterizations of the identity of Jesus are woefully inadequate. Jesus must be acknowledged as the **Son of God who has ultimate authority over your life.**

David Turner: In this passage Jesus turns the tables and questions the Pharisees, not to trap them or even to win a debate but to win their hearts (cf. **23:37**). This is not a mere counterattack (contra **Schnackenburg** 2002:224). The paramount considerations at this decisive point in Israel’s history are Jesus’s identity and the source of his authority (**21:23**). His relationship to King David is worthy of their consideration. The Jewish leaders and Jesus agree that the Messiah is David’s son (**22:42**), but the real question is what it means to be David’s son in light of **Ps. 110:1** (**Matt. 22:43–45**). . .

The questions of the religious leaders attempt to trap Jesus and to discredit his teaching. All hope of rapprochement between Jesus and the religious leaders is dashed. His final question to them is unanswerable; the only way that David can call his messianic son “*Lord*” is if his son is divine. The Pharisees who wished to trap Jesus are now trapped by Jesus. But all dialogue has ceased, with ominous implications. This final confrontation leaves Jesus and the Jewish leaders at a hopeless impasse and leads inevitably to the woes of **Matt. 23**.

Stu Weber: Jesus is indeed the Messiah-King, having absolute authority and deserving worship and submission from all his subjects.

Donald Hagner: This pericope comes as the climax to the preceding series of testings of Jesus by his opponents, each one of which Jesus has brilliantly passed, demonstrating further his authority as a teacher. Now, however, he takes the initiative against his opponents, here again the Pharisees, by putting a difficult question before them. This question is not one designed for its cleverness but one that has to do with Jesus’ own identity and calling. The Pharisees are unable to draw the required conclusion, just as they have been earlier unable to accept Jesus, his message, or his personal claims. Whereas he has passed the tests they put to him, they fail in the test he puts to them.

Grant Osborne: Jesus is the Messiah and more; he is the royal Messiah, the Son of David, but he is also the Son of God, David’s Lord. This is **high Christology** and climaxes the section with the nature of this Jesus who has so decimated his opponents on points of law. It constitutes the second time in which he overcomes his “messianic secret” and reveals himself to the public as “*Lord*” of all.

Stanley Saunders: While they are still “gathered together” (22:41)—they have not yet abandoned their attempt to oust him from the temple—Jesus turns the tables and asks them a challenging question. **What about the Messiah?** Whose son is he? He probes their understanding of the Messiah in order to draw them into the open. The Pharisees have heard supplicants and the crowds repeatedly hail Jesus as “*Lord, Son of David*” (15:22; 20:30–31; cf. 9:27; 12:23; 21:9, 15), but have rejected this designation in favor of the claim that his power is from Beelzebul (9:34; 12:24). Jesus and the Pharisees both know that the Scriptures affirm that the messiah is the Son of David. If the Pharisees confirm this, it will lead by implication to the conclusion that Jesus the Son of David is also God’s messiah. If they deny it, they risk the wrath of the crowds, whom they fear (21:46). Jesus is thus inviting his opponents either to accept publicly his authority as the Son of David and messiah, or once again to claim that his power is from Beelzebul. Either way they face dishonor. The former would require them to give account for their continuing opposition to Jesus, while the latter would be an admission that Beelzebul’s son has persistently defeated them in public debates.

I. (:41-42) INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION REGARDING THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIAH

A. (:41a) Target Audience

“Now while the Pharisees were gathered together,”

B. (:41b-42a) Fundamental Question

*“Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying,
‘What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?’”*

Charles Swindoll: The Pharisees had asked Jesus about politics; the Sadducees had asked about the afterlife; the lawyer had asked about the Law. Now Jesus took a dive into the waters of deep theology. He asked the Pharisees what they believed about the identity of the Messiah: “*Whose son is He?*” (22:42).

Leon Morris: “*What do you think about the Messiah?*” is a question that might cover a very wide field, but Jesus narrows it immediately with “*Whose son is he?*” He is asking a question about ancestry; a query about the Messiah’s sonship might be understood in the sense that Jesus is looking for information about his father. But among the Jews son was used more widely than in many modern communities, and this question was meant in the sense, “Who is the **great man** from whom the Messiah is descended?”

C. (:42b) Inadequate Response

“They said to Him, ‘The son of David.’”

William Barclay: The most common title of the Messiah was **Son of David**. Behind it lay the expectation that there would one day come a great prince of the line of David who would shatter Israel’s enemies and lead the people to the conquest of all nations. The Messiah was most commonly thought of in nationalistic, political, military terms of power and glory. This is another attempt by Jesus to alter that conception. . .

The clear result of the argument is that it is not adequate to call the Messiah Son of David. He is not David’s son; **he is David’s lord**. When Jesus healed the blind men, they called him Son of

David (**Matthew 20:30**). When he entered Jerusalem, the crowds hailed him as Son of David (**Matthew 21:9**). Jesus is here saying: ‘It is not enough to call the Messiah Son of David. It is not enough to think of him as a prince of David’s line and an earthly conqueror. You must go beyond that, for the Messiah is David’s lord.’

What did Jesus mean? He can have meant only one thing – that the true description of him is Son of God. Son of David is not an adequate title; only **Son of God** will do. And, if that is so, Messiahship is not to be thought of in terms of Davidic conquest, but in terms of **divine and sacrificial love**. Here, then, Jesus makes his greatest claim. In him, there came not the earthly conqueror who would repeat the military triumphs of David, but the Son of God who would demonstrate the love of God upon his cross.

Grant Osborne: It was a common rabbinic ploy to harmonize two seemingly contradictory texts; here Jesus harmonizes two seemingly contradictory messianic ideas: Given that the Messiah is David’s “son” (v. 42), how then can the great king David address him as “Lord”? In other words, how can his son at the same time be his Lord?

II. (:43-45) INSPIRED ARGUMENTATION ELEVATING THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIAH TO THE AUTHORITATIVE SON OF GOD

A. (:43-44) Testimony of King David

“He said to them, ‘Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, The Lord said to my LORD, ‘Sit at My right hand, Until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet?’”

Stu Weber: Jesus then asked a **follow-up question**. He asked them to interpret **Psalm 110:1** in light of the identity of the Christ as David's son. This verse describes Christ's posture in heaven until he comes to reign on the earth (**Heb. 10:12-13**). In the psalm, David says, “*Yahweh said to my Lord*” (literal translation of the Hebrew text). In the English translations of this verse, the first usage of the word “*Lord*” is usually printed in capital letters, to show that it translates the Hebrew name of God, *Yahweh*. The second usage has only the first letter capitalized, showing that it translates the Hebrew title *Adonai*, meaning “*Master, Lord*.”

Leon Morris: He accepts the Davidic authorship of the psalm, which, of course, would not have been doubted anywhere in first-century Judaism (the psalm is headed “A Psalm of David”). And he accepts that David wrote the psalm under the leadership of the Spirit of God; the psalm is inspired Scripture. Further he regards the psalm as messianic; it teaches something about the Messiah who would come in due course and is not to be confined to statements about David. All this would have been common ground between Jesus and the Pharisees, and so far there would have been no problem. But Jesus draws attention to the fact that David calls the Messiah “*Lord*” (thus conceding his own inferiority to the Messiah).

B. (:45) Test Question for All Who Deny the Deity of Jesus

“If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?”

R. T. France: In **21:37** Jesus has implicitly laid claim to the status of **Son of God**. It is that implication which he now invites his hearers to draw out, for surely one who is the lord of David, the most distinguished of all historical Israelites, must be himself more than just another human king. If David calls him “*lord*” he is clearly the son of someone **far superior** to David.

David Turner: The initial question in **Matt. 22:43** seems to assume the **humanity** of the Messiah as David's descendant. If the Messiah is the human descendant of David, how does David call him Lord in **Ps. 110:1**? The follow-up question in **Matt. 22:45** puts it the opposite way: if the Messiah is David's Lord, how can he be David's descendant? In Matthew's narrative Jesus's humble Davidic roots (**1:1, 16–17, 20**; cf. **Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4, 11**) are not the whole story. Jesus is also the miraculously born, divinely attested **Son of God** (**Matt. 1:23; 3:17; 16:16; 17:5; 21:37; 22:2; 26:63–64**). That Jesus is greater than David is already clear (**12:1–4**; cf. **12:6, 8, 41**), but now Matthew explains why: the Messiah is the son of David and the Son of God. But the Pharisees will not accept a Messiah who, as David's Lord, is greater than David

Donald Hagner: The point of the question addressed to the Pharisees is apparently to elevate the concept of Messiah from that of a special human being to one who **uniquely manifests the presence of God**—and thus one whom David has also to address as his lord. This pericope serves thus in one sense as a kind of justification for the extravagant claims made by Jesus, or concerning him, earlier in the Gospel (e.g., **10:32–33, 40; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16**). As in Peter's confession, so here, the Christ, the Son of David, is to be recognized as uniquely "*the Son of the living God*" (cf. **Gibbs**, 460–64). He is the living Lord of the church (**Burger**, 88–89) who sits at God's right hand. The Pharisees accordingly reject Jesus at their very great peril. They have rejected not merely a human messianic claimant but the unique emissary of God, whom even David had called "*my lord*." κύριος, "*lord*," in reference to Jesus here, as **Fitzmyer** points out, suggested to the evangelist and his community that Jesus "was somehow on a par with Yahweh of the Old Testament" . . .

So too today repeated attempts are being made to explain Jesus in strictly human categories. Yet if we limit our understanding of Jesus to analogies that from the beginning rule out the supernatural and the divine, we will never arrive at an adequate view of Jesus. This is the very point the Gospel desires to press home to its readers. Jesus' question to the Pharisees—How then does David call him "*my lord*"?—must also be asked of those modern scholars who allow Jesus to be no more than a human teacher. The burning question "*Who do you say I am?*" (**16:15**) has only one adequate answer.

(:46) EPILOGUE – END OF DISCUSSION

*"And no one was able to answer Him a word,
nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question."*

David Turner: The silence of the religious leaders does not mean that they have come to agree with Jesus but that they have abandoned hope of publicly refuting him.

R. T. France: At this point there is no mention (as there is in Mark) of the reaction of the crowd to the brief and allusive argument just recorded, but Jesus will immediately go on to address the crowds in a way which assumes their sympathy with him rather than with the scribes and Pharisees, so that we must assume their continuing approval of his teaching.

Leon Morris: That finished the questioning session. The Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees had all tried to put questions to Jesus that would embarrass him and put him into disfavor with the people or the governing bodies or both, and while it could not be said that he had failed to answer, it could be said that he had produced answers that left him unscathed and

caused the people to marvel at him. He was **more admired** when they finished than when they started on this exercise. So it is no surprise that, finding they could not answer the question he had put to them, none of them dared any more to question him. This was a game in which they thought they held all the advantages (how could a layman from rural Galilee compete with the professionals who had been through the schools in Jerusalem?). **But in the end they had been defeated.**

Stanley Saunders: The Pharisees are prepared to say that the messiah is David's son, but not to grant Jesus the Son of David authority as "*Lord.*" So "*none of them is able to give him an answer.*" They are unable to answer because they have no will to admit Jesus' authority over them. After this day no one will dare to ask him any more questions (**22:46**). Jesus' successful defenses of his authority in the temple in Jerusalem mean that those who challenge his God-given power must now turn to violence.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can questions that appear simple on the surface actually expose great depths of meaning?
- 2) How do other religions and even secularists and humanists give inadequate answers to the question of the identity of Jesus?
- 3) In what sense is Psalm 110 a messianic psalm?
- 4) What encouragement can you take from seeing that the world's brightest minds have no response to the wisdom of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Michael Wilkins: If Jesus is truly who he declares himself to be, then we have a most unique message to proclaim. Jesus is unlike any figure ever to walk the earth, because he claims not to be simply a messenger of God, but the unique Son of God. The religious leaders' silence (**22:46**) is outspoken testimony that the straightforward implication of the text cannot be avoided. Their silence is also outspoken testimony of their own hypocritical avoidance of the implications for themselves. They should acknowledge Jesus as their own Lord and Messiah. But ultimately, none of us, Christian or non-Christian, can ignore the implications of Jesus for our personal lives.

Grant Osborne: This is one of the climactic points of Matthean Christology. Jesus is now uncovering the "messianic secret" in a public setting and going beyond the triumphal entry by showing that he transcends his earthly role as descendent of David and embraces his heavenly role as Son of God and "*Lord,*" stated clearly in the early creed of **Rom 1:3-4**, "*who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.*" Critical scholars at times have hesitated

to ascribe deity to this passage, for there is separation between Lord/Yahweh and Lord/Messiah in the **Ps 110:1** passage. However, Bruner rightly quotes Luther on this:

“‘Sit,’ says God to him, not at my feet, not over my head, but next to me, as high as I sit.... [But] sitting next to God, what else is that than being also God? For God is so jealous for his honor that as He said himself, **Isa 42:8**, he will give it to no other.... And yet here, says the Psalmist, sits one who is like Him. From this it follows that **He must be God.**”

The problem today is slightly different. It is not so much in our churches that members deny the deity of Christ¹³ as that they ignore it in their lives. One of the sad results of the denigration of theology in the popular church is the tendency to lower Jesus to the status of friend and companion rather than of cosmic Lord and “*very God of very God*” (the Christology of the Nicene Creed). It is time to worship Jesus as Lord with a new depth.

Stanley Saunders: Matthew’s persistent **warnings to religious people** are audible here again. The quest to hang on to power in its human forms is a key factor in the refusal of the Jerusalem leaders to admit the divine nature of Jesus’ authority. All of the Jerusalem authorities have now seen Jesus’ power firsthand and been silenced by it. They are nonetheless unable and unwilling to grant the reality the Canaanite woman, the crowds, the blind, and the children in the temple have named. Jesus has said that it is nearly impossible for a rich person to enter the empire of heaven. Apparently it is **also nearly impossible for a person who wields human power, especially religious power, to enter the heavenly empire.**

John MacArthur: Whose Son Is Christ?

It is absolutely prosaic to say it, that all false systems have a problem with the unique identity of the deity of Jesus Christ. And that is where the battle lines are ultimately drawn in terms of the Christian faith. These misrepresentations and misconceptions are not new. In fact, they even existed in the time of Jesus Christ. And they are essentially behind the scenes in this text. The Jews believed in a **non-deity Messiah**. They believed their Messiah would be a **human political military leader**. And this text comes as a corrective to that very serious error. . .

He says to them you thought Messiah would be but a man, I’m telling you Messiah is also God, and your failure to understand that is an indictment, is the cause of your judgment. You asked me by what authority I did these things back when this day began, now I’m telling you the authority. The authority is that I’m more than man - I’m God. This, **verse 41 to 46**, is the answer to the question in chapter 21, **verse 23**. By what authority? It is at the end of the conversation that He gives the answer. This is the authority. And it comes in a very, very marvelous way. . .

So Jesus says if Messiah is only David’s son - human - how is it, then, that David calls Him Lord God? Deity? Divine? That’s an important issue. You say, “Maybe - maybe David made a mistake. Maybe he was - maybe he was a little, you know, out of sorts at that point. Maybe he was acting independently. Maybe that was his opinion.” No. “Well, maybe it wasn’t David at all that said that, we just think it was.” No.

Look at **verse 43** again. “*How then doth David?*” - watch this one - “*in the Spirit call the Messiah Lord?*” There’s a qualifier there that’s very important, isn’t it? When David called the Messiah Lord, he was what? He was **in the Spirit** - he was in the Spirit. By the way, that’s the same Greek phrase used in **Revelation 1:10** and **Revelation 4:2**. **Revelation 1:10** talks about John

being in the Spirit on the Lord's day. It means to be under the control of the Spirit. And if you wonder what its interpretation is, all you need to do is compare **Mark 12:36**, the comparative passage, because in that text, Mark gives us the whole statement. "*The Savior said, 'How then doth David in the Holy Spirit call Him Lord?'*" So He's not talking about the human spirit, He's talking about **the Holy Spirit**.

Now, we say this, then, that when David said it, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, right? David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls the Messiah Lord. And uses a term for Him that refers to God. Say, "Well, where did he do that?" So in **verse 44**, the Lord gives the Scripture, and He quotes directly from **Psalm 110:1**, "*The Lord said unto my Lord.*" David wrote that Psalm. And David wrote, "*The Lord*" - Yahweh - "*said unto my Lord*" - Adonai - and we've got two Lords, folks. Lord number one talking to Lord number two. "*The Lord said unto my Lord, 'Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.'*"

God is called Yahweh, God is called Elohim, God is called Adonai in the Old Testament. And here, that God, that Yahweh God says to David's Lord, "*Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*"

Now, Jesus used **Psalm 110:1** for a lot of reasons but mostly because they all believed that **Psalm 110** was a **Messianic Psalm**. They just didn't understand the implications of that first verse. The Jews believe that. They acknowledge it as a Messianic Psalm. In fact, **Psalm 110** is the most often-quoted Psalm in the New Testament. It is the most frequently-quoted Psalm in the New Testament. It is quoted by Peter, quoted by Paul, quoted by the writer of Hebrews. It is quoted in Matthew, Mark, in Luke. Now listen carefully. In all three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this Psalm is attributed to David by Jesus. In all three gospels, this Psalm is attributed to David by Jesus.

Now, what is the Lord saying? I want you to listen very carefully, this is very, very important and this verse has been attacked. Anybody who wants to knock out the deity of Christ, got to deal with this verse. And it's really suffered the arrows of the critics. But listen carefully. When the Lord says David calls the Messiah Lord in this Psalm, the Lord is therefore interpreting this Psalm for us, and He's telling us three things.

Number one, He's saying **the Psalm is Messianic** because David is talking about Messiah. . .

Secondly, He is **affirming Davidic authorship**. He is saying David said it. You don't see David's name in **Psalm 110**, Jesus tells you David wrote it.

And that is the tradition of the Jews. Before Jesus' time, they assigned it to David. That's why it has that little indication at the heading that it was written by David, it is a Psalm of David. But Jesus affirms it.

Thirdly - and most important of all - **Jesus affirms the deity of Messiah**. When Jesus quotes **Psalm 110:1**, He says one, it is Messianic; two, it is written by David; and three, it affirms the deity of Messiah. That's its intent. . .

Son of David is not enough, that's the point. *Son of David* is inadequate. *Son of God* must be added - *Son of God* must be added. **Verse 45**, "*If David then call Him Lord, how is He his Son?'*" Frankly, it's a riddle they can't answer. "*And no man was able to answer Him a word.*" They

couldn't answer it. They couldn't answer it. These were the religious leaders, folks. This is the **brain trust of Judaism**. And they couldn't answer Him because they would not acknowledge what was clear out of that passage and that was that **He had to be God as well as man**. How can He be Son of David and David's Lord at the same time? He would have to be God and man. . .

The gospel says He's *born of the seed of David*, that's His humanness. He's *risen from the dead*, that's His deity. And the **God-man** is the only way to perceive Jesus Christ accurately, the two natures of Christ indivisibly fused in the God-man. That is the theme of so many elements of Scripture. Read **Philippians 2** again where He humbles Himself, thought it not something to hold onto to be equal with God, but abandoned that to become a man, humble Himself, obedient to death. And God highly exalted Him, giving Him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. **Yes, He is Son of David. Yes, He is David's Lord.**

J. Ligon Duncan: How Is David's Son, David's Lord?

Jesus' question to the Pharisees is the **most profound question of all**. The right answer to this question is the difference between life and death, the difference between heaven and hell, the difference between hope and despair, the difference between salvation and condemnation. In comparison to the other questions, this question is far greater. They pale by comparison to this question that Jesus is asking, right here in Matthew 22, **verses 41-46**. . .

For hundreds of years the rabbis of Israel, the teachers, the scribes, the priests, the Pharisees had taught the people of God in Israel that the Messiah was to be the son of David. They went to passage after passage out of the Old Testament showing and demonstrating that God had predicted in His holy word, the Old Testament, that the Messiah would come from the line of David. He would be an exalted descendant of David. He would be the coming Savior of God's people, Israel. He would be an heir to David. He would be a righteous ruler, appointed by God, who would foil the enemies of God's people and He would establish justice in the land. He would drive the oppressors of Israel out. He would reestablish the law of God amongst His people. Righteousness would flourish in the land. Injustice would be banished. He would be the ruler of rulers, this descendent of David – this Messiah.

And today, Jesus is standing before these Pharisees and He is saying, 'No, He'll be much more than that. He'll be more than you have ever dreamt of.' And His words to these Pharisees are just as relevant to us today as they were when He first spoke them to the Jewish leaders. You see, we are so familiar with Jesus that we have lost the sense of His greatness and His glory and His uniqueness. And Jesus is saying to us today, 'I am greater than you ever imagined.' 'I am greater than you have ever dreamt of.' 'I am greater than you ever dared hope for.' and so, I'd like to look at this passage today where Jesus points the focus very, very pointedly on 'who is the Messiah?' 'what is His identity?' 'what is His nature?' And I'd like you to look at the three phases of this discussion.

I. There is no more important issue in life than what you think about Christ.

And why was it that they couldn't see that Jesus was the Messiah? Because **they didn't understand their need**. They thought that the greatest need pressing upon the people of Israel was to stop this imperialistic cultural invasion of the land and the people of Israel that had been brought about by these pagan Romans, to sweep the land clean of their filthy influence and reestablish the torah in the land. They had no idea that the greatest problem that they had was themselves. The greatest problem in Israel resided in their hearts and in the hearts of their people who were hardened against the lord and who needed a new heart and a new spirit within them.

They thought that what their land needed was a king who would lead them out of the years of oppression from invading captors. And so they didn't see the glory of the Messiah that the lord had sent to them.

II. We are not trusting in the Jesus of the Bible until we acknowledge Him as the fully divine Son of God.

Have you come to grips to the claims of the divinity of Christ? Do you realize the importance of those claims? Do you realize that apart from the deity of Christ there is no hope of salvation? Do you realize that Jesus' ability to save you from your sin is absolutely, inextricably, connected to the truth that He is the son of God and lord of David? Jesus is saying to these Pharisees, "the Messiah is so much greater than you have ever imagined Him to be". And He's saying to you, "I am so much greater than you ever thought me to be. I don't care how big you think your problems are. I am so much bigger than those problems, and I'm not just a solution to those problems out there. I am the answer to everything. I'm the answer to the center of life and all the rest of your life will be out of joint until you deal with me. You can't put me aside. I am the boulder in the road and you'll either be crushed by Me or you'll embrace Me and I'll shower blessings on you that you can never imagine."

III. Silence is the wrong answer to the deity of Christ.

Now the sad response of that message, by the Pharisees, is recorded in **verse 46**. There we see the mouths of these mockers stopped, but we also learn that silence is the wrong answer to the deity of Christ. Jesus silences His opponents and, by the way, this is a foretaste of just what God had promised Him in **Psalms 110 verse 1**. He said that He would put His enemies under His feet and notice – His enemies stand before Him mute. They have not a clue what to say to Him. This is part of the conquest that had been promised to Him by God in **Psalms 110 verse 1**.

But I want to remind you that Jesus' words to these Pharisees are in fact words of love and grace, because, do you realize friends that here in Matthew 22, **verses 41-46** this is the last time, this is the last time, that Jesus ever had a conversation with the Pharisees? Jesus spoke about the Pharisees to His disciples and to others in the remaining days of His life, but do you realize that this is the last time Jesus ever spoke to the Pharisees and do you see what He is drawing their attention to? In His love He wants them to understand who the Christ is that they might be saved. But **their response is silence**. They did not know what to say. They continued to conspire against Him.

TEXT: Matthew 23:1-12

TITLE: BEWARE OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS (SCRIBES & PHARISEES)

BIG IDEA:

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS ELEVATE SELF AND SEEK NOTEREITY

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The issue as to whether **ch. 23** belongs to the previous or following section has already been discussed. . . it was decided that this chapter serves as a **transition**, both concluding **chs. 19–22** (indicting the leaders for their opposition) and introducing **chs. 24–25** (providing the evidence for the verdict against the nation and its leaders in the Olivet Discourse). As such it forms the first of two parts to the discourse of **chs. 23–25**. There is a certain **symmetry** between 23:1 – 25:46 and the Sermon on the Mount. These two frame Matthew and are of similar length, with the woes of **ch. 23** balancing the beatitudes of **5:3–12**. . .

The major thrust in this section is the contrast between the pride (and resultant hypocrisy) of the leaders and the humility (and resultant servanthood) demanded of Jesus' followers. The key is how each group conducts itself before others, the one to be seen and glorified by all, the other to serve and leave the exaltation up to God.

R. T. France: Within **ch. 23** there is an obvious division between **vv. 1–12** in which Jesus speaks to the crowd about the scribes and Pharisees, and **vv. 13–36** in which he speaks directly to the scribes and Pharisees. The latter section is marked by a series of **seven “Woe” pronouncements**, of which the last is extended into a more general charge of religious rebellion. This in turn provides the basis for the **lament over Jerusalem** in **vv. 37–39**, which stands as a coda to the rest of the chapter, and provides the **bridge to the temple-prediction** which follows at the beginning of **ch. 24**.

Stu Weber: Hypocrisy is primarily interested in **elevating self**. . . Theirs was a prideful, status-seeking ministry. Jesus' attitude was just the opposite. . . Not only were the hypocrites **unsympathetic**, but they were also **insecure**. They constantly advertised their “spirituality” and status in an effort to feed their weak egos through the attention of others. Their insecurity masqueraded as **arrogance**. They did everything in their power to cause others to think they were superior to the average Jewish citizen. They did their “good” deeds purely for applause. They even fooled themselves into believing they were righteous.

David Turner: Jesus's warning (cf. **Mark 12:38–39; Luke 20:45–46**) first points out the **inconsistencies** of the religious leaders (**Matt. 23:2–7**) and then enjoins his own community to be different (**23:8–12**). The disciples should do what the leaders say because they are Moses's proxies (**23:2–3a**), but the disciples should not follow the leaders' example (**23:3b**) because

- (1) they do not practice what they preach (**23:3c**),
- (2) they do not serve the people they have burdened (**23:4**), and
- (3) they perform their deeds to be applauded by people (**23:5–7**).

The disciples' countercultural community must eschew vain prestigious titles (**23:8–10**) and instead seek to serve others, mindful of the reckoning and reward to come (**23:11–12**). . .

The explicit contrast of Jesus's norms for his disciples with the ostentatious practices of the leaders in **23:2–12** provides a key for interpreting the seven woes of **23:13–36**. These rebukes not only are directed to the leaders but also are meant to prevent Jesus's disciples from similar errors.

(:1) PROLOGUE – PUBLIC ADDRESS

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying,”

Grant Osborne: Jesus addresses the crowds (to warn them against the leaders) and his disciples (to warn them against committing similar sins).

I. (:2-7) BEWARE OF THE PHONINESS OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

A. (:2-4) Characterized by Hypocrisy

1. (:2) Positions of Religious Influence

“The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

Grant Osborne: This could be a figurative image for the authority the Pharisees claimed as interpreters of the Torah of Moses. . . The meaning is that the Pharisees considered themselves to be the successors of Moses as **official interpreters of Torah**.

R. T. France: The immediate target, however, is the **scribes and the Pharisees**, two groups who belong naturally together and probably in fact overlapped to a large extent, most scribes being Pharisaically inclined (see on **5:20**). They enjoyed **popular respect** and **authority** as the recognized experts in understanding and applying the OT law and its subsequent elaborations, and Jesus' opening words note the authority of their office, though in the light of what follows there is surely an element of irony in his endorsement. His criticism focuses, however, not on the role they purport to fulfill but on the way they fulfill it. The charge of inconsistency in their behavior (**v. 3b**) is not developed at this point, but much of what follows in **vv. 13–36** will fill it out. But two more specific charges are developed, their lack of consideration for the problems their teaching generates for ordinary people (**v. 4**), and their concern for appearances and reputation (**vv. 5–7**). It is the latter which triggers Jesus' return to his disciples' **preoccupation with status**, which takes up the rest of the paragraph.

Donald Hagner: As the custodians of Moses' teaching they share in his authority and are accordingly to be respected.

2. (:3a) Practice of Religious Inconsistency –

Follow Their Legitimate Teaching but Reject Their Phoney Example –

Discrepancy between their Words and Deeds

*“therefore all that they tell you, do and observe,
but do not do according to their deeds;”*

Grant Osborne: The purpose is to read **v. 3a** in light of **v. 3b**—the teachers talk the talk (**v. 3a**, so approval only in principle) but do not walk the walk (**v. 3b**) (**McNeile, Garland, Hagner, Blomberg**) . . . The Pharisees and scribes know the truth (**v. 3a**) but fail to live it (**v. 3b**).

Charles Swindoll: Addressing the crowds, Jesus attempted to inoculate them from the deadly infection of pharisaical hypocrisy. First, He urged them to follow the pure teachings of Scripture

rather than the putrid examples of the Pharisees. Here Jesus acknowledged that the scribes and Pharisees did, in fact, serve an important function in reading and proclaiming the Law of Moses to the people from their seats of authority, the “*chair of Moses*” (23:2). **R. V. G. Tasker** puts it this way: “Jesus recognizes the rightful claims of the scribes, the legal experts of the Pharisaic party, to be exponents of the law; and so long as they confine themselves to that task, their words, He insists, are to be respected, even if the conduct of some of them is inconsistent with their teaching.”

Remember, the scribes and Pharisees strove for an **orthodox approach** to faith and practice. Their theological views tended to be much closer to Scripture than those of the Sadducees. However, for many scribes, the Bible had become just a textbook of information rather than a means of personal transformation. On one extreme, the scribes’ academic approach to Scripture could result in a head full of knowledge without a lifestyle that matched. On the other extreme, the Pharisees’ obsession with outward purity and perfection could result in an excessive number of man-made rules that nobody could live up to.

In the first century, the common people had **very little access to the Word of God themselves** and would have had to rely on the scribes to hear the reading of the Law and its explanation. So, Jesus affirmed, **what they heard from Scripture must be obeyed (23:3)**. God’s pure, unadulterated Word is true and reliable. But as soon as those scribes and Pharisees began applying Scripture or going beyond what it said, their interpretations should be held in suspicion.

3. (:3b-4) Portrayal of Their Bad Behavior

a. (:3b) Hypocritical Behavior

for they say things, and do not do them.”

b. (:4) Oppressive Behavior via Legalistic Burdens

“And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Grant Osborne: The image is similar to that of the “yoke” (placed on oxen) in **11:28–30**, and indeed there is an implied contrast between the “*easy yoke*” of Jesus in **11:30** and the “*heavy burden*” of the Pharisees here.

This is almost certainly a reference to the oral tradition developed by the Pharisees. They tried to “build a fence around the law” and protect it by adding further rules so that people would not inadvertently break the Torah regulations (so **Grundmann, Garland, Hagner, Schnackenburg**; contra **Gundry**, who takes this of attempts to win praise from people). The Pharisees add rule after rule on purity laws or Sabbaths or holy days, and they become a real “yoke” or “burden” around the shoulders of the people who have to follow these complex rules.

Charles Swindoll: Second, the scribes and Pharisees crushed common people with **unbearable demands (23:4)**. They lacked sympathy and modeled cruelty. As consummate **taskmasters**, the religious phonies established unreachable standards of manufactured “holiness” that nobody could live up to. This produced only guilt and shame among the people, who should have been able to respond to the Law with joy and peace.

B. (:5-7) Characterized by Seeking Praise from Others

1. (:5a) Motivation of Seeking Praise from Others
“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men”

Charles Swindoll: Third, the scribes and Pharisees did everything **for show (23:5)**. They lacked humility, and they modeled self-importance and conceit. It was all fake. When in public, they paraded their piety to be seen by the masses. They made a production of “glorifying God” when people were watching. Everything they wore, everywhere they sat, every word they uttered, every act they performed, and every title they took was actually to glorify themselves **(23:5-7)**. In short, the religion of the scribes and Pharisees was nothing more than an outrageous display of over-the-top **ostentation**. They went out of their way to call attention to themselves.

William Barclay: The religion of the Pharisees became almost inevitably a religion of **ostentation**. If religion consists in obeying countless rules and regulations, it becomes easy for people to see to it that everyone is aware how well they fulfil the regulations, and how perfect is their piety. Jesus selects certain actions and customs in which the Pharisees showed their ostentation.

2. (:5b-7) Examples of Seeking Praise from Others

- a. (:5b) Fancy Religious Dress
*“for they broaden their phylacteries,
and lengthen the tassels of their garments”*

- b. (:6) Privileged Seats of Honor
*“And they love the place of honor at banquets,
and the chief seats in the synagogues,”*

Grant Osborne: In the ancient world the order of seating had important social implications, as those nearer the host had greater status. The chief seats (or benches) in the synagogues are those up front near the speaker and the Torah scrolls. Again, the point is status in the community. Things are not that different in our day. Such things as power dressing, placement of furniture in the office, etc., are all designed with the same thing in mind: **power and authority over others**.

Stu Weber: **Banquets** and **synagogues** were only two examples from daily life where many people gathered. These places were prime opportunities for **advertising false spirituality**. Virtually any event was an opportunity for public honor and recognition. The place of honor and important seats were reserved for the most spiritual—those with highest authority and greatest wisdom. These people loved to be seen and to parade their spiritual accomplishments in public ways.

- c. (:7) Respectful Forms of Address
*“and respectful greetings in the market places,
and being called by men, Rabbi.”*

II. (:8-10) AVOID TITLES OF SPIRITUAL DISTINCTION (TO EMPHASIZE BROTHERHOOD AND THE UNIQUE DIVINE ROLE)

A. (:8) Avoid Being Called Rabbi (Teacher)

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

Grant Osborne: Again, this is a big problem today; witness the scramble of Christian leaders to be awarded an honorary DD (or to earn a DMin), often not to better serve the Lord but in order to be called “Doctor so and so.” Such is a sin. As **France** says, “It is not difficult for a modern reader to think of similar honorifics in use today, and to discern behind the titles an **excessive deference to academic or ecclesiastical qualifications.**”

B. (:9) Avoid Being Called Father

And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Charles Swindoll: Just as we should reject being placed on a pedestal by others, we should resist placing others on a pedestal (**23:9**). Granting teachers and leaders the revered title “*Father*” can essentially cross the line from admiration and appreciation to exaltation and worship. The more we exalt a human to a position of unparalleled honor like that, the more we rob our heavenly Father of that unique position in our hearts and minds.

C. (:10) Avoid Being Called Leader

And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

R. T. France: The third title, “*instructor*,” occurs only here in the NT, nor is it found in the LXX. Its original sense was “**leader**” or “**guide**,” one who shows the way, but it came to be more commonly used for teachers, those who show the way intellectually or spiritually. It may therefore be a virtual synonym of “teacher” in **v. 8**; perhaps our term “**mentor**” might convey the same sense. As in **v. 8**, Jesus is the only person who truly fulfills that role for his followers.

Donald Hagner: They are to avoid titles that would set them apart from, and above, others in the community of faith, not because the particular titles are reprehensible but because of the assumption of **superiority** and **elitism** that so often goes with them. The demeanor of the disciples is to be characterized above all by the virtues of **service** and **humility**. Christians of every era and every circumstance, especially those in leadership roles, must learn again that true greatness consists in service and that self-humbling now is the path to exaltation in the eschaton. Only by such a radical departure from the values and priorities of the world will Christians in authority be the disciples of the one Teacher and Lord.

III. (:11-12) EMBRACE A SPIRITUAL LIFESTYLE OF SERVANTHOOD AND HUMILITY

A. (:11) Lifestyle of Servanthood

But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

B. (:12) Lifestyle of Humility

And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can religious leaders remain genuine and authentic in their spiritual service?
- 2) Where do you see examples of hypocrisy and elevation of self in Christian leadership?
- 3) What are the issues that need to be examined in the context of conferring honorary titles of respect upon our spiritual leaders?
- 4) What are the practical implications for you of the principle that the way up is down?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Theology in Application

1. Keeping Oneself from Hypocrisy

Make certain that you are not guilty of hypocrisy (v. 3), ostentatious parading of the self (vv. 4–6) or pride (v. 7). It is clear that such people are not serving God but their true god, self. There is a certain idolatry in exalting oneself rather than serving God and others. To want to impress those around us by your knowledge, dress, office, and degrees is the height of hubris.

To ask others to do something when we are not doing it ourselves is the height of hypocrisy. We must all recognize that no matter what our gifts or accomplishments, we are superior to no one. Rather, the one God is so superior to us all that this fact evens us out and makes us all “brothers and sisters.” It is not the privilege of others to listen to us; it is our privilege to share with them in some small way what we have been given by Christ, our one teacher.

2. Seeking Humility and Servanthood

Seek humility and servanthood, leaving the glory up to God. This is the message of the Philippians hymn (Phil 2:5–11), using the incarnation and life of Christ as a paradigm (2:5) for Christians; like Jesus we should seek a life of humility (Phil 2:6–8) and let God glorify us in his own time (2:9–11). Therefore, Jesus is saying that we must refuse to go by titles that appeal to our pride (23:8, 10) or elevate anyone else to glorified status (23:9).

These things happen all too often in successful churches and ministries. Sadly, all too many well-known Christian leaders begin to believe the plaudits of others and become virtual demigods in their own fiefdom! This is one of the most disobeyed and ignored passages of the Bible. As so often before (cf. 10:38–39; 16:25; 18:2–5; 20:26–27) true discipleship is defined not by human achievement but by service to God and his people, by taking the road of servanthood and living a life of humility. Those guilty of self-glory (Gal 5:26; Phil 2:3) can expect no reward from God.

Again, this does not mean that one must eschew a fruitful ministry that results in becoming well known (Paul was certainly famous, cf. 2 Pet 3:15–16). Rather, it means that fame and attention must never be a goal. Our goal is not to create sacred listeners or readers who cannot wait to hear what we have to say but rather to create lovers of Jesus and the Word, who enjoy our exposition of God’s truth.

Daniel Doriani: Jesus mentions a series of problems with the scribes and the Pharisees; they all have the potential to speak to other classes of false religious leaders.

They fail to live what they teach. They lay heavy legal burdens on others, but they refuse the most basic duty: “*They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them*” (23:4). The lesson: False leaders promulgate laws they scarcely intend to observe. If we would lead spiritually, we must live what we teach or at least seriously attempt to do so.

They seek applause. “*Everything they do is done for men to see*” (23:5). Honor was perhaps the blessing most sought after in Jesus’ day. Plutarch once wrote a book entitled “How to Seek Praise Inoffensively.” The scribes and Pharisees appeared to have that very goal. They certainly loved the best seats and noble greetings. “*They love the place of honor at banquets*”—at something like our head table—“*and the most important seats in the synagogues*” (23:6)—perhaps the seats closest to the scrolls of the law. The lesson: Spiritual leaders should try to block out thoughts of gaining human approval by doing things that look powerful and popular. We should seek the Lord’s approval first and last.

They display their piety. “*They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long*” (23:5). A phylactery is a tiny box containing tiny copies of key passages of the law. Observant Jews of that time wore them on the arm and forehead at least part of the day. This practice literalistically followed the metaphor in **Deuteronomy 6:8**, which told Israelites to bind God’s laws “*on your foreheads.*” The Pharisees used broad boxes and long tassels (attached to garments to remind Jews to follow God’s law, cf. **Num. 15:37–40**), so everyone could see them.

Matthew uses a Greek word for these boxes (*phylaktērion*) that means an amulet or charm to ward off evil. The word hints that their display contains some **superstition**; the wearers think that if they dress correctly, God will bless them. If they also dress distinctively, people will know they are religious leaders. Display is the perennial temptation of religious people. Remember, Jesus warned his disciples not to pray, give gifts, or fast “*to be seen.*” Our good deeds should glorify God, not ourselves (**Matt. 5:16; 6:1–18**). The lesson: Spiritual leaders should hide their good deeds as much as possible. We should give quietly, or bring healing or comfort, and keep the results to ourselves. We should call attention to God, not to ourselves.

They love to be exalted. They love titles: “*They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’*” (23:6–7). Rabbi means “*my teacher*” or “*my master.*” The office of scribe or rabbi empowered men to tell others how to behave. They applied the law to the questions of the day and claimed so much authority that the Mishnah said the “words of the scribes” have more authority than “the words of the [written] Law.” The lesson: Even church people—who ought to know better—succumb to the human tendency to adore our heroes and identify with them. Pastors and other Christian leaders should be especially zealous to give glory to God and not to arrogate it to ourselves. If a church is prone to adulation of pastors, the pastor or pastors must be especially rigorous to spread appropriate recognition around and to praise God from whom all blessings do flow.

John MacArthur: The Characteristics of False Spiritual Leaders

And beginning then in verse 1 of chapter 23, the Lord gives His last sermon to the people of Israel. This is it. His ministry to them is over. This is the last public speech, and it is a

denunciation of these false religious leaders and a warning for the people to stay away from them. It is a very severe, a very serious presentation but a very necessary one. They are false shepherds, they are wolves in sheep's clothing, they damn people, and they must be avoided, and our Lord pulls no punches in making that abundantly clear. . .

And so He warns the people about the false spiritual leaders so that their hearts will be open to the true ones. And in a sense, He's setting us His disciples for their ministry. That's why down in verses 8 to 12, He calls His disciples to be distinctly different than these false spiritual leaders are. So it isn't just a denunciation of the leaders, it isn't just a warning of the people, it is both of those with a purpose, that the people might listen to those who are true spiritual leaders, who manifest in fact the very opposite kind of characteristics to the ones that He will denounce in the false leaders.

And there are five elements that false spiritual leaders lack, and I believe the Lord gives them to us right here.

1. They lack **authority**, -- self-appointed seats of authority
2. they lack **integrity**, -- usurpers, hypocrites
3. they lack **sympathy**, -- loveless; bind heavy burdens . . .
4. they lack **spirituality**, and
5. they lack **humility**.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Essential Problems of Pharisaical Religion

Jesus is speaking to a very religious people. The people of Israel, at the time the Lord Jesus ministered on the earth, were not secularized; very much different situation than our current situation in America today. These were very religiously committed people. Religion was part of the warp and woof of their lives, it permeated every aspect of their experience. But, the spiritual leaders of Israel were modeling an external religion which drew attention to itself and lacked the heart of the true religion of the scriptures. They wanted people to look at them and saw, "look how holy those men are." But their lives did not reflect the holiness which they possessed with their lips. and so, Jesus speaks against this religion of ostentation. And He calls His people back to the heart religion of holy Scripture.

I. (:1-4) Jesus Diagnoses the Problem of Religious Hypocrisy

Conversely, He teaches that true religion, saving religion, requires **integrity**. . .

We must guard ourselves against hypocrisy and heartlessness and cultivate true integrity in religion. Jesus is calling us here not to follow the example of religious hypocrites. He is calling us to integrity. Integrity means looking on the outside like you are on the inside. Integrity means not simply looking like you have a clean heart, but your actions actually flow from a heart which has been cleansed. Integrity requires that we are on the outside like we are on the inside. That our conduct is an expression of who we really are. Integrity means that our conduct is consistent with our profession of faith. . .

II. (:5-7) Problem of Hypocrisy Derived from Being Man-Pleasers

Their problem was pride. They wanted to look good in the eyes of men. And again, in verses 5 through 7, we learn that true religion aims to please God. True religion aims for humility before men.

III. (:8-9) Warning against Seeking Exaltation

True disciples neither seek to be exalted in their teaching and in their ministry, nor do they tempt others by exalting them too highly in the way they speak.

IV. (:8-12) Cultivate Humility and Servanthood

In the end He is saying, the way up is the way down. The way to true satisfaction, the way to true harmony, is to abandon the quest to be honored by men, and seek only to please the heavenly Father. And so in the end, the way to glory is the way of servanthood. . .

Jesus' message was pertinent. His message was just as pertinent for us as it is for these to whom He first spoke it because "Church greatness," Richard Baxter once said, "Church greatness consists in being greatly serviceable." The desire of the Pharisees was to receive honor and to be called master. But the desire of the true Christian is to glorify God, to do good, and to give himself in all that he has in the service of others. That is what Jesus is telling us, too, as He is warning against the hypocrite that wants to be seen to be a follower of Christ, when in fact the heart does not belong to Him.

David Thompson: CAREFULLY GUARD YOURSELF FROM EVER BECOMING A RELIGIOUS PHARISEE OR SCRIBE.

The scribes were rigid students of the Law. They copied the Law and studied it and they came to be known as real O.T. scholars. The Pharisees were religious separatists. They were very strict in their approach to not only the Law, but also to men's traditions and Judaistic religion.

CHARACTERISTIC #1 – Scribes and Pharisees seat themselves in Moses' seat. **23:2** Moses was a God-appointed leader of the nation Israel. He did not strive to become a leader; in fact, he didn't even want to be a leader but that is what God called him to be. Notice carefully the point Jesus makes—the scribes and Pharisees have promoted themselves to His position.

CHARACTERISTIC #2 – Scribes and Pharisees say one thing and do another. **23:3** Now when it came to obeying the Law, Jesus did not admonish people not to obey it; in fact, He demanded that they do obey it. Here is a great definition of a hypocrite—they say one thing and do another. That is how they work and that is how they operate. They have their rules and their traditions and their man-made codes and they are always telling others what to do—but they don't do it themselves.

CHARACTERISTIC #3 – Scribes and Pharisees heap heavy burdens on people. **23:4** There are burdens to be borne in the work of God, but scribes and Pharisees are continually placing burdens on people that they themselves aren't willing to have.

CHARACTERISTIC #4 – Scribes and Pharisees do all things for public notoriety. **23:5-10** Now there are certain specific Pharisaical public actions that scribes and Pharisees love to do:

Public Action #1 - They broadened their phylacteries. **23:5a** Phylacteries were little leather pouches which contained four main passages of Scripture— **Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Ex. 13:11-16; 13:10**. The phylacteries were worn on the forehead or forearm. What the Pharisees did is they made them larger so everyone could see them and then went out in public to be noticed by men. They loved to have people say these are great spiritual men who always have their Bible verses with them.

Public Action #2 - They lengthened the tassels on their garments. **23:5b** The Pharisees made their religious clothing more noticeable by expanding it. They loved for people to see them wearing their religious clothing. It made them feel important. They loved to get all dressed up in religious clothing and parade in front of people so people would say, my how great and spiritual those men are. These are men who want to kill Jesus Christ and are walking around with Bibles and all dressed up in their religious suits.

Public Action #3 - They loved places of honor at banquets . **23:6a** They love people to look first at them, not at God. They want the best seats at the banquets. They want to be served first.

Public Action #4 - They loved the chief seats in the synagogue . **23:6b** These guys want to sit up front in front of the crowds. They want the religious attention.

Public Action #5 - They love to be respectfully greeted in public places. **23:7-10**

- 1) They loved to be called rabbi . **23:7b** The actual Greek word means my master teacher. Pharisees loved this title for it showed that people recognized them to be a master over them (**Smith**, p. 395). Jesus says all are brothers and no religious leaders should be viewed as a master over them.
- 2) They loved to be called father . **23:9** The term father means they loved to be identified as being the religious father or parent. Jesus says there is only one Father and that is the Heavenly Father.
- 3) They loved to be called leader . **23:10** The word “leader” is one that refers to being a guide or master teacher, like a professor (**Smith**, p. 223). Jesus never wanted His disciples to walk around with a better than thou attitude.

(Concluding Point #1) - The greatest among you shall be your servant.

(Concluding Point #2) - One who exalts himself will be humbled.

(Concluding Point #3) - One who humbles himself will be exalted.

TEXT: Matthew 23:13-36

TITLE: 7 WOES DIRECTED AGAINST THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

BIG IDEA:

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS DESERVE SEVERE DENUNCIATION FOR THEIR IMPACT OF DESTRUCTIVE CORRUPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: The seven woes that make up the centerpiece of the denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees are constructed by Matthew for **maximal impact**. The fact that there are seven woes (cf. six woes in **Luke 11:42–52**) is itself significant symbolism, pointing to a **fullness of corruption**.

William Barclay: Verses 13–26 of this chapter form the most terrible and the most sustained denunciation in the New Testament. Here we hear what **A. T. Robertson** called ‘the rolling thunder of Christ’s wrath’. As **A. Plummer** has written, these woes are ‘like thunder in their unanswerable severity, and like lightning in their unsparing exposure ... They illuminate while they strike.’ . . .

To Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were men who were acting a part. What he meant was this. Their whole idea of religion consisted in outward observances, the wearing of elaborate phylacteries and tassels, the meticulous observance of the rules and regulations of the law. But in their hearts there was bitterness and envy and pride and arrogance. To Jesus, these scribes and Pharisees were men who, under a mask of elaborate godliness, concealed hearts in which the most godless feelings and emotions held sway. And that accusation holds good in greater or lesser degree of anyone who lives life on the assumption that religion consists in external observances and external acts.

David Turner: Jesus’s denunciation of the religious leaders must be viewed against the background of the biblical prophets, who frequently cried woe against Israel’s sins. These oracles blend anger, grief, and alarm about the excruciating consequences that will come upon Israel due to its sin. The form of such oracles includes an initial pronouncement of woe followed by a description of the persons upon whom the woe will come. This description amounts to the reason the woe is merited. Thus a woe oracle states the conclusion and then the premises on which it is based. Woe oracles may have developed from covenant curses (**Deut. 27:15**) or even from funeral lamentations (**Jer. 22:18**). (See **Clements**, ABD 6:945–46; **Westermann** 1967: 192–95.)[2]

In oracles of woe, the prophet’s attitude is anger tempered at times by grief and alarm at the horrible price Israel will pay for its sin. Prophets are angry because they are speaking for God against sin. But prophets are also stricken with grief because this anger is directed toward their own people. The palpable pathos of woe oracles is due to the prophet’s dual solidarities. The prophets must speak for God, but in announcing oracles of judgment, the prophets know that they are announcing the doom of their own people.

In light of this biblical background, Jesus's pronouncements of woe upon the religious leaders were not innovative. His severe language must have had a familiar ring in the leaders' ears. In light of the woe oracles in Second Temple literature, Jesus's woes would have sounded rather contemporary. His woe oracles were not merely an exercise of spite against his opponents; as is clear in **Matt. 23:37**, his words come at least as much from grief as from anger.

Charles Swindoll: These outcries aimed at the religious leaders were part **reproof** and part **lament**. Jesus' seven "*woes*" in **Matthew 23:13-36** were both cries of anguish for their stubborn, wicked hearts and cries of sorrow for the judgments they and their followers would suffer because of their rejection of the Messiah. **William Barclay** puts it well: "[*Ouai*] includes not only wrath but also sorrow. There is righteous anger here, but it is the anger of the heart of love, broken by stubborn human blindness. There is not only an air of savage denunciation; there is also an atmosphere of poignant tragedy."

R. T. France: Language: There are many places in the gospels where Jesus' language is far from "meek and mild," but nothing else at this level of invective except perhaps in the dialogue with "*the Jews*" in **John 8.16** . . .

Structure: The first six woes may be seen as three pairs with matching themes:

1. the first pair (**vv. 13–15**) speak of keeping people out of the kingdom of heaven;
2. the second pair (**vv. 16–24**) focus on the distorted perspective which puts concern with details before the basic principles of religion and ethics;
3. the third pair (**vv. 25–28**) contrast outward and inward purity.

The seventh woe then brings the denunciation to its **climax** with the charge of complicity in the murder of God's messengers.

Warren Wiersbe: As we review these **tragic woes** from the lips of our Lord, we can see why the Pharisees were His enemies. He emphasized the inner man; they were concerned with externals. He taught a spiritual life based on principles, while the Pharisees majored on rules and regulations. Jesus measured spirituality in terms of character, while the Pharisees measured it in terms of religious activities and conformity to external laws. Jesus taught humility and sacrificial service, but the Pharisees were proud and used people to accomplish their own purposes. The holy life of Jesus exposed their artificial piety and shallow religion. Instead of coming out of the darkness, the Pharisees tried to put out the Light, and they failed.

David Thompson: RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO ARE PHARISAICAL HYPOCRITES WILL SUFFER THE WORST KIND OF PUNISHMENT GOD CAN GIVE.

I. (:13) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN

A. How Accessible Should Heaven Be?

*"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,
because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men;"*

Stu Weber: Here "*woe*" is an expression of righteous anger and a pronouncement of impending judgment. Jesus himself is the judge who will judge every person.

Donald Hagner: The woe saying is a painful statement of displeasure involving an implied judgment . . . hence it serves as the opposite of the beatitude. Woe sayings are found elsewhere

in Matthew (11:21; 18:7; 24:19; 26:24), but the seven woes of the present pericope form a distinctive set (all are identical with the present formula [cf. vv 15, 23, 25, 27, 29] except for v. 16). Woe sayings are not uncommon in the OT, and a piling up of a succession of woe oracles is occasionally also found (cf. Isa 5:8–22 for a series of six; Hab 2:6–20 for five).

Grant Osborne: ἔμπροσθεν is strong here, meaning normally “in front of, before” and having the idea of slamming the door of heaven “right in the face of” their followers. The purpose of the Pharisees in “*building a fence around the law*” should have been to shepherd God’s flock through the gate or door to the kingdom. Their teaching should have made the reign of God . . . more apparent and meaningful in the lives of the people. Instead, they have closed the door to God.

Earlier Jesus had taught about the narrow and wide gates (7:13–14) and had given Peter (and the church) the “*keys of the kingdom of heaven*” (16:19), meaning the authority to open the doors of heaven. The binding/loosing metaphor that followed referred to the authority to open the kingdom truths by properly interpreting God’s Word. The Pharisees have rejected the final authority of Jesus as interpreter of Torah and so have **fallen into false teaching**.

B. How Inaccessible Do the Hypocrites Make It?

*“for you do not enter in yourselves,
nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”*

Charles Swindoll: Rather than drawing others into God’s kingdom life with the glorious message of forgiveness and hope, they intentionally resisted the truth themselves and stood in the way of others.

[**Jeffrey Crabtree:** Verse 14 is not in the Greek manuscripts of Matthew that the textual scholars rely on most, and so some translations do not include it or place it in brackets. However, **Mark 12:40** and **Luke 20:47** both record this woe, confirming that it was part of Jesus’ teaching that day.]

II. (:15) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP

A. How Important Is the Process of Discipleship?

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,
because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte;”*

Stu Weber: This pronouncement of judgment highlighted the zealous evangelistic activity of the hypocrites. They would travel the world (over land and sea) for only one convert. A convert was a Gentile who was won to faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel.

But the new convert would have been better off if he had not been found by the Jewish evangelist. By following the evangelist’s hypocritical example, the convert surpassed his teacher in hypocrisy and evil. As a result, he incurred an even harsher judgment. The new convert may have even convinced himself that he was following God, but he was actually following Satan. God intended Israel to be his ambassadors to the world to bring people to him, but these representatives of Israel were leading people into rebellion.

Charles Swindoll: They had become “missionaries of evil,” multiplying their numbers by spreading legalism like a disease. Their way included zeal without knowledge, capturing unsuspecting converts in deceptive, destructive false piety.

B. How Condemned Are the Disciples of Hypocrites

*“and when he becomes one,
you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”*

William Barclay: It was the aim of the Pharisees to turn these God-fearers into proselytes; the word proselyte is an English transliteration of a Greek word *prosēlutos*, which means one who has approached or drawn near. The proselyte was the full convert who had accepted the ceremonial law and circumcision and who had become in the fullest sense a Jew. As so often happens, ‘the most converted were the most perverted’. A convert often becomes the most fanatical devotee of the new religion; and many of these proselytes were more fanatically devoted to the Jewish law than even the Jews themselves.

Jesus accused these Pharisees of being **missionaries of evil**. It was true that very few became proselytes, but those who did went the whole way. The sin of the Pharisees was that they were not really seeking to lead others to God, they were seeking to lead them to Pharisaism. One of the gravest dangers which any missionary runs is that of trying to convert people to a sect rather than to a religion, and of being more concerned in bringing people to a church than to Jesus Christ.

Daniel Doriani: The teachers and Pharisees are **zealous**, but they **do more harm than good**. . . The first century was the heyday of evangelism by Jews, but because the Pharisees promoted a false religion, when they made converts, they were more proud, blind, and legalistic than the Pharisees themselves.

III. (:16-22) BLIND GUIDES – CORRUPTING INTEGRITY BY EVASIVE PRIORITIES OF ALLEGIANCE

A. (:16-21) How Do Blind Guides Corrupt Integrity?

Charles Swindoll: They went to great lengths to accommodate the Scriptures to their own desires. Their **self-serving interpretations** led to disobedience of the clear teaching of the Law. So twisted was their thinking, though, that they were **blind to their own deceptions**.

Warren Wiersbe: The Pharisees were blind to the true values of life. Their priorities were confused. They would take an oath and use some sacred object to substantiate that oath – the gold in the temple, for example, or the gift on the altar. But they would not swear by the temple itself or the altar. It was the temple that sanctified the gold and the altar that sanctified the gift. They were **leaving God out of their priorities**.

David Turner: The biting sarcastic expression “*blind guides*” is repeated in **23:24** (cf. **15:14**). Jesus condemns the casuistry of these oaths as an **evasion of duty** before God (cf. 15:4–6). Two different loopholes based on empty distinctions are exposed, one in **23:16–17** concerning the temple and the gold (**Josephus**, Ant. 14.34–36, 72, 106, 110; 15.395; J.W. 5.201–10, 222; Ag. Ap. 2.84) within it and another in **23:18–19** concerning the altar and what is offered on it. Although the leaders view some oaths as binding and others as nonbinding, Jesus rejects this as

empty casuistry and teaches that all oaths are valid (23:20–22). Previously Jesus has flatly denied the need for any oaths (5:33–37), even though oaths and vows were very important in Second Temple Judaism (m. Ned.; CD 15; 16.6–12).

1. (:16-17) Practicing Deceit by Prioritizing Gold over the Temple
*“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’
17 You fools and blind men; which is more important,
the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold?”*

Grant Osborne: Only in this third of the seven woes does Jesus alter his opening formula and insert “*blind guides*,” undoubtedly because he calls them “*blind*” again in vv. 17, 19. This emphasizes they are not only “hypocrites” but also “blind” to the truth. They were also “*blind guides*” in 15:14.

2. (:18-19) Practicing Deceit by Prioritizing Offerings over the Altar
*“And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’
19 You blind men, which is more important,
the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?”*
3. (:20-21) Conclusion: Validity of Oaths Based on Integrity
*“Therefore he who swears by the altar,
swears both by the altar and by everything on it.
21 And he who swears by the temple,
swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.”*

William Barclay: We have already seen that in matters of oaths the Jewish legalists were experts in **evasion** (Matthew 5:33–7). The general principle of evasion was this. To the Jew, an oath was absolutely binding, as long as it was a binding oath. Broadly speaking, a binding oath was an oath which definitely and without equivocation employed the name of God; such an oath must be kept, no matter what the cost. Any other oath might be legitimately broken. The idea was that if God’s name was actually used, then God was introduced as a partner into the transaction, and to break the oath was not only to break faith with others but to insult God.

The **science of evasion** had been brought to a high degree. It is most probable that in this passage Jesus is presenting a caricature of Jewish legalistic methods. He is saying: ‘You have brought evasion to such a fine art that it is possible to regard an oath by the Temple as not binding, while an oath by the gold of the Temple is binding; and an oath by the altar as not binding, while an oath by the gift on the altar is binding.’ This is to be regarded as an extreme description made to bring out the absurdity of Jewish methods, rather than a literal description.

The idea behind the passage is just this. The whole idea of treating oaths in this way, the whole conception of a kind of technique of evasion, is born of a **fundamental deceitfulness**. Truly religious men and women will never make a promise with the deliberate intention of evading it; they will never, as they make it, provide themselves with a series of escape routes, which they may use if they find that promise hard to keep.

We need not with conscious superiority condemn the Pharisaic science of evasion. The time is not yet ended when people seek to evade some duty on a technicality or call in the strict letter of the law to avoid doing what the spirit of the law clearly means they ought to do.

For Jesus, the binding principle was twofold. **God hears every word we speak, and God sees every intention of our hearts.** In view of that, the fine art of evasion is one which should be foreign to every Christian. The technique of evasion may suit the sharp practice of the world, but never the open honesty of the Christian mind.

Walter Wilson: It was customary at the time to avoid the risk of profaning the divine name by employing oath formulae that were linked to God only tangentially, for example, by using the word Korban (“*offering*”). The prevalence of such customs obliged the rabbis to deliberate over which circumlocutions were valid and which were not, discussions preserved especially in the tractate Nedarim, for example, m. Ned. 1:2 (“He who says to his fellow, ‘Konam,’ ‘Konah,’ ‘Konas’—lo, these are substitutes for Korban”). According to the opinion taken up in **23:16 and 18**, formulae that mention something that can be dedicated to God (e.g., gold, gifts) are substitutes for Korban, while an oath that mentions only items that already belong to God (e.g., the temple, the altar) is not valid. Jesus counters by arguing that the logic informing this distinction contradicts the obvious sacred hierarchy, in which the temple and the altar are “greater” (i.e., more holy) than the objects associated with them, since it is the former that sanctifies the latter (**23:17, 19**). This observation is then coupled to the argument in **23:20–22**: just as certain objects derive their sanctity from the temple and the altar, the temple and the altar derive their sanctity from the presence of God (**23:20–21**), a principle that applies by extension to heaven (**23:22**), since it is God’s throne (cf. **5:34**). Given the interconnected nature of the sacred hierarchy, **in reality every oath is an appeal to God and thus runs the risk of profaning God’s name.** The practice of making distinctions between binding and nonbinding oaths, then, is not only fallacious but also dangerous.

B. (:22) What Should Integrity Look Like? Heaven Deserves Highest Allegiance

*“And he who swears by heaven,
swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.”*

Grant Osborne: Here the point made in **23:16–22** comes full circle. Every oath, from the least to the greatest, involves God and his throne and so is binding. In this sense Jesus’ point in **5:34–37** is in full agreement. Since every oath by nature centers on God and is made in relation to God, there is no need to swear by anything, but instead a “yes” is a “yes” and a “no” is a “no” because all promises are made before the throne of God and will be judged by God (so also **Davies and Allison, Morris, Nolland**).

Donald Hagner: The conclusion is again clear: the implied distinctions are unjustified, and thus all oaths must be honored. Oath taking is always in effect an agreement in God’s presence.

Van Parunak: The real issue, missing in all their careful logic, is that these implements of religion are intended to **focus the worshiper’s attention on God.** The Lord makes this point by breaking the symmetry. The internal alternation in **20–21** would require that **21** end with the words, “by all things therein.” But the Lord shifts the reference to the Lord, and then expands it with a reference to oaths by heaven, which were also in focus in ch. 5,

Mat 5:33 *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.*

Lies are wrong, not because they violate a reference to holy things, but because “a lying tongue” is “an abomination unto” the Lord,

Pro 6:16 *These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

God commanded Abraham,

Gen 17:1 *I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

Our integrity must be based on our walk with God, not formulas we utter over our promises.

IV. (:23-24) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE ESSENCE OF GODLINESS BY MAJORING ON THE MINORS WHEN IT COMES TO GOD’S RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENTS

A. (:23) Majoring on the Minors

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”*

B. (:24) Missing the Essence of Godliness

“You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”

Stu Weber: Jesus' hyperbole in **verse 24** was humorous. His hearers would have chuckled at the picture of the Pharisees straining out a small insect (gnat) while swallowing a huge camel.

William Barclay: There is nothing more necessary than a **sense of proportion** to save us from confusing religious observances with real devotion.

R. T. France: The grotesque imagery of straining out the gnat (from wine or water before drinking)⁴⁰ and swallowing the camel belongs to the same class of burlesque as the splinter and the plank in **7:3–5** or the camel going through the eye of a needle in **19:24**. It depends on the relative size of the smallest and largest creatures in Palestine. The gnat, as an insect, was unclean (**Lev 11:20–23**; cf. also the “swarming creatures” of **Lev 11:41–44**) and therefore must not be ingested; but then the camel was no less unclean (**Lev 11:4**), and a lot bigger! The joke may have been helped by an Aramaic word-play between *qalmâ* (gnat) and *gamlâ* (camel).

V. (:25-26) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

A. (:25) Wrong Process = Only Cleansing the Externals

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish,
but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.”*

Grant Osborne: The next four verses are dominated by the “outside-inside” (ἔξωθεν-ἔσωθεν) distinction, forming the perfect definition of hypocrisy as stemming from the dichotomy between “outward” appearance and “inward” reality. Jesus uses as his example the care with which the scribes wash the outside surface of cups and plates.

B. (:26) Right Process = Prioritize Cleansing the Heart

*“You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish,
so that the outside of it may become clean also.”*

VI. (:27-28) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE TESTIMONY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (:27) False Facade

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful,
but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.”*

William Barclay: Here again is a picture which any Jew would understand. One of the most common places for tombs was by the wayside. We have already seen that anyone who touched a dead body became unclean (**Numbers 19:16**). Therefore, anyone who came into contact with a tomb automatically became unclean. At one time in particular, the roads of Palestine were crowded with pilgrims – at the time of the Passover Feast. To become unclean on the way to the Passover Feast would be a disaster, for that meant that such a person would be debarred from sharing in it. It was then Jewish practice in the month of Adar to whitewash all wayside tombs, so that no pilgrims might accidentally come into contact with one of them and be rendered unclean.

So, as people journeyed the roads of Palestine on a spring day, these tombs would glint white, and almost lovely, in the sunshine; but within they were full of bones and bodies whose touch would defile. That, said Jesus, was a precise picture of what the Pharisees were. Their outward actions were the actions of intensely religious men; their inward hearts were foul and putrid with sin.

Daniel Doriani: Tombs were whitewashed annually, during the Passover, so this whitewashing was occurring as Jesus spoke. Jews did this so no one would defile themselves by accidentally walking on a tomb. The beautification was incidental. Sadly, the Pharisees defile people as surely as tombs do. A properly marked tomb keeps people clean by telling them to stay away. But the Pharisees do just the opposite. “In their scrupulous regulations they appeared magnificently virtuous but were actually contaminating the people.” They appear to be clean—law-abiding—but they are full of wickedness. They seek disciples, then corrupt them.

B. (:28) Internal Corruption

“Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men,

but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Donald Hagner: The fundamental flaw of the Pharisees, their hypocrisy, was in their concerted attempt to appear to be what they unfortunately were not. While they wanted to appear righteous, in fact they were unrighteous.

Charles Swindoll: To those on the outside, they looked spotless, clean, pure, and holy. Their clothes no doubt gleamed in the light. However, like tombs painted with bright white paint, inside they were filled with the stench of death and corruption.

VII. (:29-36a) HYPOCRITES – CORRUPTING THE TREATMENT OF GOD’S PROPHETS

A. (:29-33) Indictment for Present Hypocrisy

1. (:29-30) Pretending to Revere the Prophets

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’”

2. (:31-33) Participating in the Guilt of the Persecutors

“Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?”

Donald Hagner: All of this, however, was again but a **facade** covering an endemic lack of receptivity to the messengers sent to Israel by God. It is an irony that the very claim that they would not have participated with their (“*your*”) fathers (cf. τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, “*our fathers*,” in v. 30) in killing the prophets (cf. 5:12) does establish them as the υἱοί, “*sons*,” of τῶν φονευσάντων, “*those who murdered*,” the prophets. The implication is that the sons are, at least in the present instance, inescapably like their fathers. In making their disclaimer, they inadvertently also bear witness against themselves (ὥστε μαρτυρεῖτε ἑαυτοῖς, “*so that you bear witness against yourselves*”). For the sons, by their hostile rejection of Jesus and his disciples, are repeating what their fathers had done in rejecting the prophets. There is a certain bitter and ironic inevitability in this—hence the sharp exhortation πληρώσατε τὸ μέτρον τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, “*Fill up the measure of your fathers*.” What the fathers began will be completed by their sons (cf. v. 34; and the fulfillment in Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15–16 [with ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἀμαρτίας, “*filling up of their sins*”]). And no rejection of God’s messengers is more grievous than the Pharisees’ rejection of God’s supreme messenger, Jesus.

Charles Swindoll: Characterized by **Hearts of Murder** -- They were poisonous and dangerous, like vipers ready to strike their unsuspecting prey. Specifically, they hypocritically praised the prophets of old, while in reality they would have been among those who persecuted and killed the prophets, just as they were plotting to murder Jesus in just a few days.

Daniel Doriani: Jerusalem at its worst represents false religion. Egypt at its worst represents oppressive government and brute force. Babylon (with Sodom) at its worst represents the seduction of wealth and sensuality. In God’s sight, all three oppose true religion. False religion,

false government, and false prosperity are all one. All stand united against the Lord and his people. They would slay God himself if they could, and they do slay God's people when they can. Therefore these wicked cities are ripe for judgment. They cannot "*escape being condemned to hell*" (**Matt. 23:33**).

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus called them snakes and the offspring of serpents (v. 33). They were snakes in their own right and their parents had been serpents as well, thus showing that they had both the heritage and character of snakes. Jesus' use of the question form "intensified the guilt" of these men and "emphasized the inevitability of their judgment" (**Gundry** 469).

B. (:34-36a) Indictment for Future Persecutions

1. (:34) Litany of Future Persecutions

"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,"

Michael Wilkins: The Jewish leaders could not take on capital punishment without support from the Roman occupying forces, so with their backing they were able to unfurl their wrath first on Stephen (**Acts 7:54-60**). Crucifixion of Christians would have been at the hands of the Romans but likely instigated by jealous Jewish officials.

2. (:35-36) Liability and Guilt Extend to Persecutions from the Beginning of Time

"that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."

Jeffrey Crabtree: There is no biblical record of this Zechariah's martyrdom. Many commentators suggest that Zechariah, son of Jehoiada (**2 Chr. 24:20**), was who Jesus meant. This Zechariah was stoned in the temple court and was the last martyr listed in the Hebrew Scriptures as they were ordered at that time (**Hagner** 33B:677). One respected manuscript of Matthew does not have "*son of Barachiah*" in Matthew's Gospel adding a little weight to this possibility. However, according to **Blomberg** (85), "later rabbinic traditions believed that the prophet Zechariah, son of Berekiah, who is depicted in the O.T. book that bears his name, was also killed in the temple."

Regardless, both Jesus and His audience knew of whom He spoke. His point was that His generation would be judged for all of the persecutions and martyrdoms since the first murder (v. 36). In other words, not only would God judge the religious leadership, He would also judge that entire generation of Jews.

R. T. France: It is because the current generation is continuing in the same tradition of hostility to God's messengers that it now faces judgment, and that judgment results not only from their own failings but from the whole tradition from Abel to Zechariah to which they are the willing heirs.

(:36b) IMMINENCY OF CERTAIN JUDGMENT

"Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation."

Stu Weber: Jesus finished the seventh and most sobering woe with his **pronouncement of judgment**. I tell you the truth assured the listeners of the validity of his prediction. All this included the persecutions and the judgment for them. This generation (cf. **Matt. 11:16; 13:39,45; 16:4**) should be taken quite **literally** in this case, since judgment on Israel did come in the form of the **A.D. 70 devastation**. Israel had broken covenant with Yahweh as completely in the first century as in any previous century, by murdering the greatest prophet, the Messiah, God's Son. As in centuries before, punishment would certainly come. This generation of false religionists living in the time of Christ would inherit all the guilt of their forefathers (cf. **Jer. 16:10-13**).

Jesus had just pronounced a **finality to his dealing with Israel**. He had determined that judgment for all the unfaithfulness of the nation through the centuries (Abel to Zechariah) would fall upon “*this generation*.” He was about to announce that your house is left to you desolate—a statement that shocked the disciples. Jesus would deal with their questions and this impending future judgment in **Matthew 24-25**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How strongly should we denounce hypocritical religious leaders in our day?
- 2) What can we do to maintain integrity and not resort to escaping God’s requirements by deception or some type of mental gymnastics?
- 3) When have we focused on relatively minor issues of righteousness to avoid dealing with more major responsibilities?
- 4) Where are we tempted to put on a façade and present ourselves to others as more spiritual than we really are?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: The structure is . . . heavily debated, with several distinct possibilities suggested:

1. they are individual, related by code words and increasing in length and intensity (**Luz**)
2. the first three center on scribal teaching, the next three on Pharisaic conduct, the last on national sin (**McNeile**)
3. there is a 2–3–2 pattern (**Nolland**)
4. there is a chiasm (1 = 7, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, with the fourth the centerpiece (**Carson**))
5. the first two relate to 23:4, the next four to 23:5–7, and the last forms a climax (**Witherington**)

6. there are three pairs of judgments (1–2, 3–4, 5–6), with the seventh forming a climax (Sabourin, Davies and Allison, Hagner, Blomberg).

This final one is the simplest and fits the organization best, as this commentary will seek to demonstrate.

- I. Woes on the Negative Effect They Have on Others (23:13–15)
- II. Woes on the Misleading Effect of Their Teaching and Conduct (23:16–24)
- III. Woes on Their External Religion (23:25–28)
- IV. Woe for Participating in the Sins of Their Ancestors (23:29–32)
- V. Conclusion (23:33–36)

There are two primary aspects to these seven “woes,” the diatribe and warning to the historical generation of Jesus about the religious sins of the leaders, and the warning to Christians of every generation regarding the **danger of hypocrisy**.

Daniel Doriani: Let me suggest three practical questions to test for possible hypocrisy.

1. First, is your religious practice the same in public and in private?
2. Second, do you live for the divine audience or the human audience?
3. Third, are you consistent?

John MacArthur: The Condemnation of False Spiritual Leaders

So here you have a rather pitiful pronouncement of doom on spiritual phonies who masquerade as if they are spiritual leaders when, in fact, they are not at all spiritual leaders. Now I want to add another thought. When Jesus says woe, woe, woe all these times, this is not a wish, this is the statement of a fact. His condemnations here are factual, not wishful. It isn't like people today might say well damn you which seems to be a rather popular phrase. It is not just a wish that you be damned, it is a fact. It is a statement of absolute fact. Divine judgment is set in motion when Jesus says you're cursed. That's not a wish, that's a fact.

And so this is indeed a curse that worked its way out in reality and the death and eternal damnation of these false religious leaders. Now as we look at it, I want us to see not only its historic import, but I want us to see its contemporary significance, because it is equally true today that false spiritual leaders are condemned by God in the same way and we need to deal with them in the same way and we need to be warned about them in the same way with the same kind of strong language and the same kind of confrontiveness that Jesus confronted them and warned the people, so do we need to confront them and warn the people today. . .

First of all, false spiritual leaders are cursed for **exclusion**, for keeping people out of the Kingdom, **verse 13**. “*For you shut up the Kingdom of heaven against men for you neither go in yourselves, neither permit them who are entering to go in.*” What does He mean by the phrase “*them who are entering*”? It has the idea of people who are continually endeavoring to enter. . .

Secondly, **verse 15**, false spiritual leaders are cursed not only for exclusion - that is, excluding people from the Kingdom - but **perversion**. They pervert the people who come into their influence. They not only shut them out of heaven, they usher them into hell. Here come along some people seeking religion, here come people seeking some kind of moral change in their life, people with some kinds of emotional, psychological needs, some kind of spiritual desires, and they not only shut them out of heaven, but they pervert them into children of hell. . .

Thirdly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for subversion, not just exclusion and perversion, but **subversion**. They subvert truth. They have developed reasoning that undermines truth. It is a mark of one who is in any sense possessing the life of God that truth is important. God is a God of truth. The God who cannot - what? - lie, says Paul. God is a God of truth. God says, "I hate lying and every false way." God is a God who speaks truth. And so any false system is a lying system.

In other words, "Have you forgotten that God is everywhere, as creator of all and Lord of all? You better tell the truth." They subverted the truth. They developed reasoning that undermined truth. False spiritual leaders don't tell the truth, folks, but they parade piety. Try to cover up for their lying pretense. We need to be careful of that. They subvert whole houses. They, by their great covetousness, says Peter, use feigned words to make merchandise out of you. They lie. They say they need money when they don't need money. They say God told them something when He never told them anything. They say Jesus led them into something when He never led them into anything. They lie. Beware of those liars who are false spiritual leaders. . .

Fourthly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for **inversion**. Not only subversion (that is, undermining truth) but inversion (that is, reversing values, reversing divine priorities). This, in **verse 23**, is most fascinating. . .

False religious leaders get wrapped up in inconsequential minutia and have no capacity to deal with the weightier matters.

And they had no faith. They walked by sight. They walked by works. They walked by law. They walked by their own efforts. And so He says you're real great at counting out kitchen seeds used to flavor food, and you've missed the whole point of what is really important - justice, mercy, and faith. Spiritual matters you've lost. False religious leaders - listen - can get all wrapped up in the minutia of their system. It's just the real spiritual stuff they don't have. At the end of verse of **23**, He says, "*These ought you to have done and not to leave the other undone.*"

It's amazing how fastidious religious people can be and so far from the reality of what God seeks. So many false spiritual leaders reverse divine priorities, substitute insignificant forms and outward acts of religion for essential realities of the heart, see, that's the point. So the false spiritual leaders are condemned for exclusion, perversion, subversion, inversion. How about extortion for a fifth? **Extortion**.

"*Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the platter*" - and platter is an interesting Greek word. It has to do with a plate used to serve delicacies. You clean the outside of the cup and the platter, and within they are full of extortion and excess. You're real big at extortion. You have a ministry that looks pious, but the whole thing is based on taking advantage of other people. You use people. You make merchandise out of people.

The idea is this: Here comes a guy with - he's going to offer you a lovely meal. He's got a plate, on it are all the lovely delicacies. He's got a cup and in it is the fruit of the vine and he offers it to you, and the plate and the cup have been cleaned ceremonial, they've been ceremonially prepared. All the ritual, all the whole deal is prepared. Only problem is the food on the plate and the wine in the cup were stolen - stolen. Very - "Oh, we've ceremoniously prepared the platter.

We've ceremoniously prepared the cup. It all is so religious, and everything in it and on it was gained by extortion. . .

So the Lord is saying they appear so scrupulous. They appear so religiously meticulous. They appear so pious in their system, and everything they serve you was gained with their filthy desires. Gained by the abusive people. They are greedy rapists and robbers who steal and plunder the souls and the money and the hearts and the minds and the goods of everybody they can touch. . .

Sixthly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for **deception**. This is unbelievable. Deception - and we're going to cover these very quickly as we close. Deception. "*Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees,*" **verse 27** says, "*hypocrites, for you are like whited sepulchers which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead bones and all uncleanness.*" Now, follow this. He says you are guilty of deception. You contaminate people. You aren't what you claim. . .

Then the last one. The last one, false spiritual leaders are cursed for **pretension**, for pretending to be so much better than everybody else. **Verse 29**, "*Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.*" May I inject here? Nothing God hates worse than pride. "*You build the,*" the memorials literally, "you build the mnēmeia, from the verb to remember. "*You build the memorials of the prophets and you decorate the tombs of the righteous.*" You're really into memorializing the saints. You're really big on lifting up the heroes of the past. Oh, we honor Saint This Guy. Oh, we honor Saint That Guy. . .

This is the ugly pretense of spiritual pride. Great at building monuments, great at honoring men of the past and claiming to be better than their fathers. Jesus had told them in the parable earlier in chapter 21 about how they had - the people of Israel had killed all of the prophets and the messengers from God and the parable of the vineyard and the landowner and the servants and the son. But they claim, oh, we're - we would never have done that. And Jesus' answer in **verse 31** is a direct hit. "*Wherefore, you are witnesses*" - right now on the spot - "*you give testimony against yourselves that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets.*"

J. Ligon Duncan: Woe to the Scribes and Pharisees

In this great passage, the Lord Jesus Christ pronounces curses upon those religious leaders of His people who were hypocritical, who were outwardly holy, but who inwardly loved not God and cared not for the souls of His people. He specifically catalogues the chief sins which they had committed. And then He delivers what is simultaneously a gracious response and a terrifying warning. In verses 13-33, you will see Christ, on eight occasions, pronounce a woe, a denunciation, a curse. That curse is against hypocrisy. But you will also see eight particular sins which reflect that hypocrisy denounced by the Lord Jesus Christ. And then finally in verses 34 through 36, you'll see Jesus' response to that hypocrisy, in both a word of grace and a word of judgment. And that's what I would like to look with you about today.

I. We must appreciate that the truly loving thing is not to ignore but to confront/denounce soul-killing error.

The truly loving thing for the man of God, for the preacher of God's word to do is not to ignore soul-killing error and hypocrisy, but to confront it and to denounce it. It's always easier for the man of God to try and pretend like it is not there, because he gets less criticism. But that's not the kind thing, that's not the loving thing to do for those who are deluded by that kind of error. And

the Lord Jesus Christ loved the Pharisees and scribes enough to tell it like it was, to show them their own hearts and to call them to repentance.

What in the world was Jesus doing?

- First of all, Jesus was showing God's people God's attitude towards hypocrisy.
- But secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ is offering another general warning to these scribes and Pharisees.
- And then finally He is telling these things to these scribes and Pharisees because He wants the crowd and His disciples to be warned that we too are susceptible to the same temptations to which they had fallen prey.

Let me also say that by denouncing this hypocrisy and yet affirming the reality of God, affirming the reality of the teaching of Scripture, affirming the reality of a saving relationship with God, Jesus is also not falling into that trap of making a shallow deduction that says because there are hypocrites in the church, therefore Christianity is not true.

II. We must examine our own hearts and pray for our spiritual leaders in light of Jesus' words here.

- First, in **verse 13** He says, you keep people from eternal fellowship with God and you refuse it yourselves. How? By opposing the gospel message.
- Then in **verse 14** we see Jesus say, you men, you practice your religion for personal gain. You look holy for the sake of gaining the confidence of God's people and then exploiting them. And so He charges them with practicing religion for personal gain.
- In **verse 15** He goes on to say, you make your converts into worse hypocrites than yourselves.
- Notice again in **verses 16 through 22**. He says, you make subtle distinctions in your teaching to - God's people about what kind of oaths are binding and what kinds of oaths are not. And those subtle distinctions undercut the truth and they encourage God's people to be untruthful.
- Again in **verses 23 and 24** He says, you have majored on questionable minutia.
- In **verses 25 and 26**, He says, you appear to be holy, but in your heart of hearts, you're self-indulgent. You are hard on everybody else but you are soft on yourself. You'll allow yourself all manner of flexibility and you will be harsh on others.
- **Verses 27 and 28**, you appear to be holy but in your heart of hearts you're hypocritical and you're lawless. You proclaim with your lips that you love the law but in your life you don't.
- **Verses 29 through 33**, you act as though you honor God's messengers, but in fact you hate God's messengers, because you hate God's message.

Bob Deffinbaugh: In **verse 13**, the “woe’s” begin. In **verses 13-15**, Jesus reveals the ultimate reason why men should not submit to the leadership and authority of the scribes and Pharisees. They should not follow the scribes and Pharisees because they are headed for hell, and they will lead their followers after them. The masses (who, at this moment, are the only ones who still have respect for our Lord’s authority “ see **Matthew 21:45-46**), who are somewhat favorable to Jesus, find the scribes and Pharisees barring the door to the kingdom by utilizing the full extent of their influence to keep people from following Jesus. And the very few whom the scribes and Pharisees invite to join their elite group become twice as much a child of hell as their mentors. . .

Verses 16-22 focus on oaths = things they not only say, but swear to; **verses 23-24** focus on tithing. The scribes and Pharisees make false distinctions, thus providing a way of escape from what they have promised. If one swears by the temple, he is not obligated to keep that vow. But if one swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to keep his vow. Jesus shows that these distinctions are false, and that one is obliged to keep his vow, without distinction.

In **verses 23 and 24**, our Lord indicts the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy in regard to tithing. The Law taught tithing. The scribes and Pharisees were meticulous about tithing, when it came to trivial things. They made much of tithing when it came to small things like mint, dill, and cumin. But in making much of small things, they made little of very important things like justice, mercy, and faith. In our Lord’s assessment, they “*strained gnats and swallowed camels.*” Their attention to little things was a pretext for ignoring the most important things of all.

Verses 25-28 have something in common -- they call attention to an undue interest in outward appearances, rather than on what is on the inside. This should come as no great surprise to us. In **Matthew 6:1-18**, Jesus warned about performing our righteous deeds (charitable giving, prayer, and fasting) before men, for their praise. Earlier in **chapter 23**, Jesus has said that “*they do all their deeds to be seen by people*” (**Matthew 23:5**). Since the scribes and Pharisees loved to be esteemed as more spiritual than others, we would expect them to be preoccupied with external appearances, rather than the heart. . .

Pharisaism assumed that if the outside looked good, everything else must be good. Hypocrisy is a concerted effort to mask our failures (otherwise known as “sin”) by making appearances look good. Jesus tells us that true cleansing begins on the inside “in the heart” and expands to the outside. . .

How can one be guilty of crimes that were committed long before you were born? First of all, they will be guilty for rejecting Jesus, and for killing Him. They will also be guilty for murdering some of the righteous of their own generation. Somehow, there must be a connection between the rejection of the prophets of their own day and the rejection of the prophets of old by their forefathers. Here is the way I understand this connection. Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, goes to great links to prove that the events of our Lord’s birth, ministry, and death are the fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures.

Our Lord Himself has emphasized the connection between His ministry and that of John the Baptist, who was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Since the scribes and Pharisees are aware of the connection Jesus has made between Himself and the Old Testament prophets, then the rejection and murder of Jesus is, in effect, the rejection and murder of all of our Lord’s predecessors.

TEXT: Matthew 23:37-39

TITLE: CHRIST'S LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:

SORROW OVER JERUSALEM'S DESERVED JUDGMENT CANNOT CANCEL THE EXECUTION OF THAT JUDGMENT (DESPITE THE HOPE OF ESCHATOLOGICAL RESTORATION)

INTRODUCTION:

Craig Blomberg: The harsh tone of vv. 1-36 lessens dramatically. **Verses 37-39** disclose Jesus' profound sorrow and compassion at the state of events that has brought him to this point of antagonism with the Jewish leaders. These verses play a role in the larger discourse of **chaps. 23-25** somewhat comparable to the role of **Rom 9:1-5** in the context of **Rom 9-11**. Jesus, like Paul, demonstrates the extent of his identification with his people despite the harsh words he has for them elsewhere. Jesus' outburst also reminds one of David's tragic lament for Absalom in **2 Sam 18:33** and **19:4**. Jesus is a Jew, these are his people, and this is his holy city. To the extent that he is conscious of the divine presence within him, his agony is greatly multiplied. God's chosen people, specially loved and specially blessed, are now spurning and killing his true representatives. How Jesus wishes it had been otherwise!

Still, even during Jesus' ministry, this generation had more opportunity than any other to change the too frequent pattern of Israelite behavior. Even now the whole point of appealing to the crowds with such warnings is that some might still repent. "*Jerusalem*" is a **metonymy** (the use of one name or object to refer to a closely related item) for the corrupt leadership of the people. Jesus' words betray great tenderness and employ maternal imagery. . . Here Jesus wishes he could gather all the recalcitrant "children" of Israel, to love, protect, and nurture them like a mother hen does with her baby chickens. Similar imagery recurs frequently in Jewish literature (e.g., **Deut 32:4; Ps 36:7; Ruth 2:12; Isa 31:5**)

Jeffrey Crabtree: The scribes and Pharisees had become the enemies of Jesus set upon destroying him; nevertheless, they too were invited to the new reality of the dawning kingdom. Despite Jesus' stern criticism of them, he has longed for them to receive him and his message so that he could bring them into the fold of those who enjoy his benefits. If they had only allowed him, he would have gathered them with the tenderness of a bird gathering her young—thus his lament over Jerusalem, its inhabitants, and especially its religious leadership. But as it is, only tragedy awaits the capital city. Judgment is soon to come upon the temple, and the Jews would not again see their Messiah until the coming of the eschaton. Again all turns upon the reaction to Jesus. Acceptance means salvation; rejection of him means inevitable judgment (cf. **10:32–33, 40; 12:41**).

Gaebelein: What a loving, sublime lamentation this is! The King is a King of Love and His heart yearns over His city Jerusalem. How He did long for them! The illustration He uses is one they fully understood, not alone by its simplicity, a hen gathering her chickens, but also because their elders had mentioned this very fact. The Rabbis spoke of Messiah under the name of the Shekinah and declared that Israel would be gathered under the wings of the Shekinah, where they would find rest and blessing. And now the Shekinah was with them. The promised One has come

and they would not have Him. They turned away from Jehovah, their King. Their house -- no longer “the Father’s house” -- is to be left desolate. They would see Him in no wise henceforth. That this has a national significance, the rejection of them is evident. And no sooner were the words spoken than He left the temple and went away.

Grant Osborne: The lament flows right out of the preceding context. Jesus had to indict first the leaders for their hypocrisy and sin, and then in the previous verse had to extend that judgment to the whole nation. This caused Jesus deep sorrow, and he wants them to know the deep love of both God and himself for them.

By using the metaphor of a hen and her chicks, Jesus reveals his tender concern to see the people of Jerusalem get right with God. At the same time, they have already rejected his offer, and so their future is “*desolate.*” Yet one thing is certain: he will return as the royal Messiah.

I. (:37a) LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM’S PERSECUTION OF GOD’S PROPHETS

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!”

R. T. France: The almost wistful note of this lament over Jerusalem provides an important counterbalance to the sharpness of the preceding polemic. As Jesus contemplates what lies ahead of the people he came to save, it gives him no pleasure. He had “*wanted*” to gather them, not to condemn them.

Donald Hagner: Jerusalem had become heir to a tragic tradition wherein God’s messengers were persecuted and killed (cf. the ironical remark in **Luke 13:33**). This was true of the past, and it was to be true of the future.

David Thompson: The Greek simply repeats Jerusalem twice (Ἰερουσαλημ Ἰερουσαλημ). When this construction is used in Scripture, it is often an expression of **deep sympathy**. For example, David repeated Absalom’s name three times when he was grief-stricken over his death (**II Sam. 18:33**). Now carefully notice a very important point about God: just because Christ’s emotions are grieved by what could have been, **His emotions did not prevent His judgment.**

II. (:37b) LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM’S REJECTION OF LOVING PROTECTION FROM HER PROMISED MESSIAH

A. Desire of the Loving Messiah

*“How often I wanted to gather your children together,
the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,”*

Jeffrey Crabtree: Even in the first century, the image of the mother hen protecting her chicks carried the same connotation as it does today. This was the kind of affection Jesus has always had for his wayward people, always wishing to gather them together in unified obedience, in covenant relationship with him, and in forgiving grace. No matter how deeply his people had sinned, the Lord wanted them back.

B. Rejection by the Rebellious Nation

“and you were unwilling.”

Grant Osborne: There is an interesting development from all the second singulars earlier in v. 37 to the second plural of “*you were willing*” (ἠθελήσατε), continued in vv. 38–39. As **Carson** says, “The effect is to move from the abstraction of the city to the concrete reality of people.” Jerusalem is made up of people who have joined her in rejecting God’s Messiah, and they personify the nation as a whole.

Matthew McCraw: However, we hear these sorrowful words concerning the people’s attitude towards Jesus’ compassion: “*but you were not willing!*” Unlike those baby chicks that run to their mother for protection and sustainment, the people would not come to Jesus. They rejected Jesus’ love. They rejected Jesus’ protection. They rejected Jesus’ Messiahship.

III. (:38) LAMENT OVER THE TEMPLE’S IMMINENT DESTRUCTION

“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”

Jeffrey Crabtree: ἰδοῦ, “look,” here introduces an emphatic statement of judgment.

Richard Gardner: The judgment to befall the temple is characterized by the twin tragedies of God’s withdrawal from the sanctuary (that is the loss of God’s protective presence) and the desolation that will come at the hands of Israel’s enemies (cf. **1 Kings 9:7-8; Jer. 12:7; 22:5; Tob. 14:4**).

Grant Osborne: It is debated whether “**your house**” is Israel as a whole (**Hill**), Jerusalem (**McNeile, Manson, Senior**), or the temple (**France, Luz, Nolland; Davies and Allison** say the latter two), but it is best to see not an either-or but all three as intended (**Carson, Hagner**).

The idea of being left “*desolate*” (ἔρημος) pictures the **absolute destruction of AD 70**. The noun (and verb) are also used in **Rev 17:16; 18:17, 19** to depict the “ruination” of the great prostitute and Babylon the Great; in **Rev 18:2, 21–23** it is described as a virtual desert, a ghost town. Such is the picture of Jerusalem (and the temple) here, soon to become a **wasteland**, virtually uninhabitable (for OT background, see **2 Kgs 21:14; Jer 12:7; 22:5**). This connotes both abandonment by God (**Ezek 8:6, 11:23**) and destruction.

R. T. France: Jerusalem’s failure to respond is to have **drastic consequences**. “*Your house*,” especially when spoken in the temple courtyard, naturally refers to the temple building⁶ which would be visible from there, and the more explicit prediction of **24:2** confirms this reference. In that case there is a sad irony in that what was described in **21:13** as God’s house is now “*your house*,” and it has been left “*to you*,” because **God has abandoned it**, as Jesus himself is about to do in **24:1**; see comments there on the echo of Ezekiel’s vision of God leaving the temple. There is a special poignancy in the juxtaposition of “*house*” (a place meant to be lived in) and *erēmos*, “*uninhabited*,” which describes not so much its physical dissolution as its being deserted; its consequent destruction will merely complete the process. The desolation of God’s house was predicted in similar terms by Jeremiah (**Jer 12:7**; cf. **26:6**), and *erēmos* here perhaps echoes the LXX *erēmōsis* in **Jer 22:59** (cf. **24:15** with its echo of similar *erēmōsis* language from Daniel). See the comments on **16:14** for Jesus’ echoing of Jeremiah’s prophecies of disaster on Jerusalem. For the theological background to this theme see **1Kgs 9:6–9**: when God’s people forsake God’s way, the “*house*” will be “*cast out of my sight*” and ruined.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus meant judgment. The temple (**24:15**) and the city proper ("*your house*") would fall (**Lk. 21:20-24**). Instead of life and prosperity there would be physical desolation and ruin (v. **38**). The destruction of the city in A.D. 70 fulfilled this prophetic warning (**Osborne** 862). Jesus gave this warning during Passover week when Jerusalem was literally overflowing with people. It would have been hard to imagine that Jesus' words would be fulfilled, especially so soon.

IV. (:39) LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM'S SEPARATION FROM HER MESSIAH UNTIL THE SECOND COMING

"For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

David Turner: a bittersweet promise that the abandonment will cease only when Jerusalem genuinely understands **Ps. 118:26**, the text shouted by the crowd at the triumphal entry (**Matt. 23:39**; cf. **21:9**).

Michael Wilkins: The Christological implications of Jesus' quotation of **Psalm 118:26** are profound. The same words were cited in **21:9** at Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem, shouted by those identifying him as the messianic Son of David. Now as Jesus cites the same passage, he identifies himself with God, Israel's Savior, the Coming One, who will once again come to his people after a time of great judgment, when they will have no other choice but to acknowledge him as Lord, either in great joy or in great sorrow.

David Thompson: Christ's Judgmental Promise to the City

Things are dark for the nation Israel right now and it has been for a long, long time. However, there are bright, shining rays in the future for Israel. God is not through with Israel forever. There will come a day when the nation will see Jesus Christ again and she will be praising God for His appearance; in fact, they will be saying, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*" They will see the One they pierced (**Zech. 12:10**). Zechariah predicts the day they will see Him will be a time of great mourning, and that is so true. They will be in the Tribulation and the antichrist will be trying to exterminate every Jew and were it not for the grace of God, he would succeed. But in the darkest hour of Israel's night, Jesus will come and she will say, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*" Now it is important to see that not every Jew will be thrilled when Christ returns, but a remnant will. The Pharisees and scribes won't cry blessed is He who come; they will be burning in hell (**Matt. 23:33**).

Charles Swindoll: Yet even in spite of the just judgment of the people of Jerusalem, sent on account of their hardness of heart, Jesus never ceases to reach out His hands to gather them into His embrace. **Matthew 23:39** looks forward to a day when the hearts of the Jewish people will be softened, and they will say, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!*" The apostle Paul echoed this same hope for the future restoration of Israel when he wrote, "*A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved*" (**Rom. 11:25-26**). This is certain because "*the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*" (**Rom. 11:29**).

D. A. Carson: So Jesus leaves the temple and goes away (**24:1**); and his words, which have dealt with judgment on Israel and with the consummation, evoke his disciples' two-pronged question (**24:3**) and lead to the Olivet Discourse (**chs. 24-25**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can Jesus at the same time speak such harsh words of denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees while expressing His love and compassion and longing for their repentance?
- 2) How is the rejection, persecution and crucifixion of their Messiah the culmination of a pattern of persecuting and killing God's appointed messengers?
- 3) What is the significance of the abandonment and subsequent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem?
- 4) Does this passage support the view that God is finished dealing with Israel as a nation and has switched His focus permanently to the church?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Turner: This passage illustrates the mysterious relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Jesus wished (ἠθέλησα, *ēthelēsa*) to gather the people of Jerusalem, but they did not wish (οὐκ ἠθελήσατε, *ouk ēthelēsate*) to be gathered (cf. **22:3**; **Acts 7:51**). Yet in **Matt. 11:27** Jesus accomplishes his purpose in revealing the Father to whomever he wills (cf. **16:17**). Despite the judgment announced in **23:38**, the tension continues into the future according to the conditional prophecy in **23:39** (**Allison** 1983). Until the people of Jerusalem utter the words of **Ps. 118:26** in faith, they will not see Jesus again. But when they do bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord, they will receive the eschatological blessings they have previously rejected.

William Barclay: This passage shows us four great truths.

- (1) It shows us the **patience of God**. Jerusalem had killed the prophets and stoned the messengers of God; yet God did not cast her off; and in the end he sent his Son. There is a limitless patience in the love of God which bears with human sinning and will not cast people off.
- (2) It shows us the **appeal of Jesus**. Jesus speaks out of love. He will not force his way in; the only weapon he can use is the appeal of love. He stands with outstretched hands of appeal, an appeal which men and women have the awful responsibility of being able to accept or to refuse.
- (3) It shows us the **deliberate nature of human sin**. Men and women looked on Christ in all the splendour of his appeal – and refused him. There is no handle on the outside of the door of the human heart; it must be opened from the inside; and sin is the open-eyed deliberate refusal of the appeal of God in Jesus Christ.
- (4) It shows us the **consequences of rejecting Christ**. Only forty years were to pass, and in AD 70 Jerusalem would be a heap of ruins. That disaster was the direct consequence of the rejection

of Jesus Christ. If only the way of power politics had been abandoned in favour of the Christian way of love, Rome would never have descended on Jerusalem with its avenging might. As history has shown, rejection of God often brings with it disaster.

John MacArthur: Jesus' Last Words to Israel

For 2,000 years nearly, the nation Israel has had to live its life without God and without His protection, that's the difference. Why is it the way it is? Because God has removed His protecting hand. He has preserved them as a people. He has left them unprotected from all the holocausts that the world could bring to bear. Why? Because of what it says in **verse 37**. Jesus came and said, "*I wanted to gather you. I wanted to protect you. I wanted to bring you under my wings and you would not.*" That's the issue right there. Why? Because they refused their Messiah. . .

Now, this passage closes the sermon of **chapter 23**. It is a sermon, its one sermon, this chapter, and it's the final sermon the Lord ever gave publicly, and it is a sermon against false spiritual leaders who have led the nation to this point of rejection. Who have led the nation in their sin. It doesn't mean that the people weren't as guilty - they were, for following - but nonetheless, the leaders led them there. And so the chapter is against those leaders. It is a furious diatribe against those leaders.

But it ends with this pathos. It ends with this grief. It ends with this lament because though God is going to judge that nation by removing protection and letting Satan go full blast at them - and may I suggest to you something very important here? You say, "God has His hand of protection off a lot of nations," that's probably right. You say, "Why is it worse with Israel?" Because Satan wants to exterminate Israel more than any other nation. Because they are the nation in the plan of God which Satan wants to thwart. Therefore, for God to remove His protection from Israel is to expose them to the worst furies that Satan could ever bring upon any nation.

Because he desires to eliminate them so that Christ can never inherit them and fulfill the promise of God to them, you see. So these false leaders have led the people in a rejection of their Messiah, and God has removed His blessing. But the heart of God is grieved as ours ought to be. We don't gloat over that. God says, "*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*" In **Jeremiah chapter 13**, God speaks through Jeremiah the prophet and calls for the people to glorify Him and to obey Him, and then says, "*And if you don't, mine eye will run down with tears,*" you see. This does not make God happy, this grieves Him. . .

You have filled up the cup and now it's going to be poured out. And it started in 70 A.D. in that terrible destruction of Jerusalem, and it's still going on right now. Still going on right now. And you want to hear something else, folks? It will get worse. That's right. The persecution of Israel isn't over. The hand of God is off, and Satan's doing his thing. And you want to know something? There's a time described in the Bible as the tribulation, the great tribulation. It's also called the time of Jacob's - what? - trouble. We're going to learn more about it when we get into **chapter 24**, but that is going to be a holocaust like no other holocaust Israel has ever seen. The worst is yet to come. The cup is still being poured out. . .

Now, you ask the question, "**Why has Israel suffered so long?**" This is why. Because for so long they rejected God. For so long they killed His messengers. For so long they stoned those that were sent. Finally, they filled the cup up when they executed their own Messiah. And God says, that's it, you are desolate. I take my hand of blessing off, and all hell will break loose on

you, culminating in the tribulation time when Revelation tells us the mouth of the pit is opened and the demons that for centuries have been bound are released to run rampant across the earth. .

You know what's going to happen? When they have - when the cup is empty and the wrath is fully poured out, God is going to turn the tables, and God is going to destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem. And on Jerusalem pour out the spirit of grace. And the scales are going to come off their eyes and they're going to look again at the One they pierced. Who's that? Christ. And they're going to mourn as for an only son. Is He an only son? Yes, because there was only one Messiah and they're going to say, "Oh, oh, oh, now we see. Now we understand why our history's been like this. Now we understand it all. We mourn for we have killed the only Son, the firstborn, the Messiah."

S. Lewis Johnson: Christ's Lament Over Jerusalem

The warnings to the scribes and the Pharisees and the disciples are over, and the woes are completed, and now the Son of God yearns over the ancient theocratic city with great intensity, and then he offers a **solemn sentence of abandonment**, "*Behold your house is left unto you desolate.*" And concludes with the fact that Israel shall suffer discipline for an indeterminate period of time until they shall say, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* . .

There is **no vindictiveness** in this prophecy of doom. And yet on the other hand, our Lord unflinchingly pronounces it. He doesn't hesitate to say, *behold your temple is left unto you desolate*, but at the same time there is no vindictive spirit about him. . .

So when we read here that how often would I, we are not to understand our Lord to be speaking here of the **decretive will** of God – that is inflexible, it is invariable, it is unchanging – and God's decretive will is always carried out. That's the error of our Arminian friends. They've failed to understand the difference between the decretive will of God and the human affection of our Lord Jesus. Or perhaps we could put it, the **preceptive will** of God – the things that please him but which may not necessarily be carried out according to his good pleasure.

You see, if the Arminians were really right, if their cannons and their rockets are to be really so powerful as to destroy the interpretation of the other company of people – I won't name'em – it would be essential for them to show that Jesus Christ, as God, as God, said, I would have gathered you but you prevented me. And further, it would be necessary for them to show that he said that to everybody, giving everybody the same grace and then to have the Scripture read, ye would not. This they have not done. This they cannot do—they shall never be able to do. It will be easier to nail a drop of water to a wall than for them to prove their point. So this text is all smoke.

And then it becomes a wonderful revelation of the love and affection of a great God who in the midst of his sovereign purposes loves and has **genuine affection** for even those who reject the gospel message. . .

And when the Lord Jesus says, "*Behold your house is left unto you desolate,*" that's judgment. And that has come to pass. The temple in a short time, was desolated, but the passage does not close on judgment. "*For I say unto you you shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" There is a time coming when Israel shall respond, when as a result of the **sovereign work of the Holy Spirit** in the heart of the nation, they shall be returned. He shall work in their hearts. They shall look upon him whom they have pierced by

means of the spirit of grace and supplications that shall be poured out upon them, and they shall believe in this Lamb of God that they have crucified.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus' Prophetic Lament

Here is a picture of your God never to forget. The Lord Jesus stands in the temple precinct. He has, in no uncertain terms, just condemned the religious leaders of His people. The most highly respected religious leaders of the land, He has denounced as hypocrites, and with those denunciations still ringing in the ears of the crowd, He begins to openly express His heart, His broken heart, for the very people He has just condemned. His heart is breaking for those hypocrites and for the crowds around him who in a matter of hours will be crying, "*Crucify Him, crucify Him.*" His heart is breaking for those whom He has labeled hypocrites and those who will soon put Him to death. . .

I. A warning against unbelief.

First of all I'd like you to look at **verse 37**. It's very interesting. When we see Jesus' word in **verse 37**, we see that God's people have rejected God's overtures of grace. It has not been that God has not been gracious to the people of Israel. He has been gracious. He has been faithful in sending them messengers to teach them the way of salvation, but they have rejected those messengers. And Jesus laments this . . .

But we note also that not only this clear testimony to Jesus' deity, we also note the very clear warning. Jesus is the one who sends the prophet, but it is very possible that many will reject their overtures of love, many who even profess to be part of the people of God. But it's very clear from this passage that those who are lost are lost through their own fault and their own choice. If a person is saved, it is wholly of God. If a person is lost, it is wholly of his own doing. Listen to what **J.C. Ryle** says: "Let us understand that the ruin of those who are lost is not because Christ was not willing to save them, nor yet because they wanted to be saved, but could not. But because they would not come to Christ."

This passage makes it very clear, Christ is far more willing to save than we are to be saved. **Matthew Henry** puts it this way: "It is wholly owing to the wicked wills of sinners that they are not gathered under the wings of the Lord Jesus. . .

II. A warning of judgment to come.

Then we look in **verse 38**, we not only see that the danger that many who profess the name of God and profess to be the Lord's people reject His love, but we also see that those who reject Him choose desolation. . .

III. Christ returns on clouds of glory.

Bethany Bible Church: "But You Were Not Willing"

1. WHAT THE KING LONGED TO DO FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Jesus wants to be everything to us that we need. And He *can* be!

As the Bible tells us, He offers to be:

- our *Advocate* to rely on as sinners before a holy God (**1 John 2:1-2**);
- our *Armor* to wear while in an evil world (**Rom. 13:12-14**);
- our *Completeness* to rest in for all the fullness of God (**Col. 2:9-10**);
- our *Cornerstone* to build on for assurance of salvation (**1 Pet. 2:6**);
- our *Deliverer* to turn to in order to be set free from sin (**John 8:36**);

our *Door* to go through as sheep in God's flock (**John 10:9**);
 our *Example* to follow as a pattern for serving others (**John 13:15**);
 our *Food* to eat for eternal nourishment of the soul (**John 6:51**);
 our *Foundation* to build on for a life that pleases God (**1 Cor. 3:11**);
 our *Fountain* to drink from for eternal satisfaction (**John 4:13-14**);
 our *Head* to be attached to as a member of the Body (**Col. 1:18**);
 our *Hope* to trust in for salvation before God (**1 Tim. 1:1**);
 our *Horn* to be defended by in preserving salvation (**Luke 1:68-69**);
 our *Life* to hope in for heavenly glory (**Col. 3:1-4**);
 our *Light* to look to in spiritual darkness (John 12:46);
 our *Name* to appeal to when asking anything of God (John 15:16);
 our *Peace* to rest in for reconciliation with God (**Eph. 2:11-17**);
 our *Passover Lamb* to feast on as the sacrifice for sin (**1 Cor. 5:7-8**);
 our *Propitiation* to trust for satisfaction of God's wrath (**1 John 4:10**);
 our *Refreshment* to rest in when weary and burdened (**Matt. 11:28-30**);
 our *Resource* to depend on for the supply of every need (**Phil. 4:19**);
 our *Resurrection* to hope in for life beyond the grave (**John 11:25-26**);
 our *Righteousness* to lay claim to for favor in God's sight (**Jer. 23:6**);
 our *Strength* to trust in for doing all things (**Phil. 4:13**);
 our *Temple* to worship God in throughout eternity (**Rev. 21:22**);
 our *Treasure* to lay hold of for all wisdom and knowledge (**Col. 2:3**);
 our *Way* to follow for eternal life with God (**John 14:6**); and
 our *Vine* to grow from for real, lasting fruitfulness (**John 15:5**).

2. WHY HE COULD NOT DO IT FOR THEM.

3. WHAT MUST HAPPEN TO THEM AS A RESULT.

He says, "*See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'*" (**vv. 38-39**).

"House", as it's found here, may mean the temple. After all, the next thing we find in Matthew's Gospel is the disciples admiring the buildings of the temple—and Jesus then shocking them by telling them that "*not one stone will be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down*" (**Matthew 24:2**). Others have said that it refers to the nation itself. In other places in this Gospel, Jesus refers to the people as "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (**Matthew 10:6; 15:24**). Personally, I believe we're meant to understand that He is speaking of both the nation of people *and* the temple. The temple was the prized possession of the city of Jerusalem—and remove the temple, and the nation would lose its most distinguishing landmark.

And, in fact, that's exactly what happened. Some forty years later, the temple—and the city itself—were leveled by the Roman general Titus. The people of Israel lost their temple, their chief city, and their status as a nation. They didn't want the King; and so they lost the kingdom. And as Jesus said, "*See! Your house is left to you desolate . . .*"

Now; I hasten to add my conviction that **their loss is not permanent**. God has not revoked His promises to Israel (**Romans 11:29**). He still loves Israel, and it is still in His plan that "*all Israel*

will be saved" (**Romans 11:26**). And I believe we can see a hint of this in Jesus' words. He quotes **Psalm 118:26**; saying, "I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (v. 39).

There's a "till" in God's plan. The people of Jerusalem had already said these words about Jesus as He first rode into the city (**Matthew 21:9**); but because they were about to crucify Him, that wasn't the fulfillment of those words. It could only be a hint of their fulfillment, because they were about to reject Him and crucify Him. But there is still a great "till" that is told us in **Zechariah 12:10**; where God says,

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn" (Zech. 12:10).

But in all of this, let's not miss the greater lesson of this passage. The people of Jerusalem suffered the loss of the good things that they could have received from their King—His protective care and love—because they would not receive it. I dare to say that this is why the Jewish people—the most remarkable people group on the face of the earth—has suffered more than any other people group in history. They didn't want to get under the protective wing of their King—and so, He removed His care and let them have what they wanted.

Bob Deffinbaugh: These words of Jesus in **verses 37-39** speak of the destruction of Jerusalem, which will come upon that generation that rejected and crucified Him. History tells us that this judgment did come, just as Jesus said it would. If history has verified our Lord's authority and accuracy regarding that generation, it is only right that we acknowledge His authority and accuracy about the judgment which is still future, the judgment that will come upon all men who reject Him as the Messiah, and as God's only provision for eternal salvation. Do our Lord's words in **Matthew 23** sound severe? They are, and they are true. His severe words should convey to us how serious the rejection of Jesus is. The rejection of Jesus by Israel's leaders, and by the people of Jerusalem, led to His crucifixion and to the destruction of Jerusalem. Rejecting Jesus as God's promised Messiah is a most serious matter. It leads to God's eternal judgment.

The good news of the gospel is that receiving Jesus as the Messiah leads to eternal blessings. Those who can say, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*" are those who will have their sins forgiven and who will spend eternity enjoying Him, and the blessings He provides. Let the severity of our Lord's words serve to indicate how serious the decision is to accept Jesus or to reject Him, as Messiah, as God's only provision for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

TEXT: Matthew 24:1-3

TITLE: QUESTIONS PROMPTING THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

BIG IDEA:

TEMPLE MAGNIFICENCE WOULD SOON BE REDUCED TO TEMPLE RUBBLE

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Impending judgment has been the dominant theme since the symbolic actions of the cleansing of the temple and cursing of the fig tree in **21:12–22**. This theme culminates in the **Olivet Discourse** (named for the place it was presented), or the **Apocalyptic Discourse** (named for the content), the fifth and final discourse of Jesus in Matthew. The reason for this judgment was presented in the woes and lament of the previous chapter. Now Jesus combines the imminent destruction of the temple and Jerusalem with the events of the eschaton. . .

Jesus has spent most of Passion Week in the temple, first cleansing it and then debating the leaders in it. Now he is about to cap the woes against the scribes and Pharisees by pronouncing imminent judgment on the temple. In **23:35–36** the people were guilty of “*all the righteous blood*” spilled, and in **23:38** her future was “*desolate*.” Now that desolation is spelled out. The prophecy of this section will dominate the next two chapters.

Charles Swindoll: The subject of biblical prophecy is like one magnet interacting with another. For many people, it pulls them in. For others, it drives them away. Those drawn to prophecy long to know about the future. They speculate about how current events might relate to their future and how their own lives may be affected by both. Those repelled by the subject of prophecy often fear the implications of coming judgment, find the biblical language and imagery confusing, or don’t believe the future has any practical application for their everyday lives.

Donald Hagner: It should be remembered, however, that much of the discourse refers to phenomena of the interim period preceding the *parousia*—if only to indicate that the sufferings of the present are not themselves the end nor even necessarily the harbingers of the end. . .

As far as the apostles were concerned, the ominous words of Jesus concerning the destruction of the temple could point in only one direction: to the experiencing of the eschatological judgment. This was a subject to which Jesus had often alluded in his teaching ministry and therefore something they may well have expected him to indicate. They were accordingly eager to know how soon this might occur and what sign they might anticipate to indicate its approach. Their concern was not one of idle curiosity, for mere information’s sake, but concern that they might be properly prepared for the time of judgment. From their perspective, the destruction of the temple must have meant the coming again of Jesus, not as he now was with them when his glory was veiled but as the clearly revealed Son of God for all to see. Jesus had now to instruct them more closely about these matters, about the future he had intimated in his dramatic oracle of judgment.

Stu Weber: **Be prepared.** The purpose of all Bible prophecy, such as that in **Matthew 24**, is to motivate us to live well today. It is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It is to intensify our purity in the present (see **1 John 3:3**). Jesus was determined to prepare his disciples for their

critical mission. And his word motivated them to live faithfully to gain future reward in the coming kingdom. In **Matthew 24** he gave his followers a glimpse of the future. But he did not do it so they could get excited about future events. He did it so they would become thoroughly motivated to follow his commission in the present.

I. (:1-2) PROPHECY OF THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

A. (:1) Enamored with Temple Magnificence

“And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.”

R. T. France: The traditional chapter division leads most commentators to treat these verses as the start of the long discourse which follows in **24:3 – 25:46**, and it is true that they form the basis for the question which will launch that discourse in v. **3**. But they are also in an important sense the climax to the whole section **21:23 – 23:39**, which has depicted Jesus in the temple. Now, having entered the temple dramatically and controversially in **21:12–16**, he leaves it with an equally emphatic and more far-reaching statement about its future. He is abandoning it, never to return, and after that it has no future except to be destroyed. What has been hitherto the earthly focus of the presence of God among his people is so no longer. There is a direct sequence from **23:38**: the “*house*” which is now being left deserted (by God and by Jesus) is ripe for demolition, to make way for “*something greater than the temple*” (**12:6**); cf. Mark’s language, surprisingly not taken up by Matthew, of a temple not made by hands to replace the one made by hands (**Mark 14:58**).

John Walvoord: The temple had been under construction since 20 B.C., and, though not actually completed until A.D. 64, its main buildings apparently were largely finished. To the disciples, the temple seemed an impressive evidence of the solidarity of Israel’s religious life and of God’s blessing upon Jerusalem.

Grant Osborne: The disciples have not understood the meaning of the temple cleansing and cursing of the fig tree, nor of the woes and lament at the wickedness of the leaders and the city. They are still **enamored with the wonder of the temple**, which certainly deserved such exclamations on the face of it. The temple was indeed considered, even by the Romans, to be one of the most beautiful structures in the ancient world (**Josephus**, J.W. 6.267). The walls were made of huge stones, some up to forty feet long, and the top was adorned by pure white marble, with gold plates on the façade so numerous that people were almost blinded when the sun shone on it.

William Barclay: The summit of Mount Sion had been dug away to leave a plateau of 1,000 feet square. At the far end of it was the Temple itself (the naos, G3485) . It was built of white marble plated with gold, and it shone in the sun so that a man could scarcely bear to look at it. Between the lower city and the Temple mount lay the valley of the Tyropoeon, and across this valley stretched a colossal bridge. Its arches had a span of 41 1/2 feet, and its spring stones were 24 feet long by 6 inches thick. The Temple area was surrounded by great porches, Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch. These porches were upheld by pillars, cut out of solid blocks of marble in one piece. They were 37 1/2 feet high, and of such a thickness that three men linked together could scarcely put their arms round them. At the corners of the Temple angle stones have been found which measure from 20 to 40 feet in length, and which weigh more than 100 tons. How they

were ever cut and placed in position is one of the mysteries of ancient engineering. Little wonder that the Galilean fishermen looked and called Jesus' attention to them.

Henry Alford: From Mark we learn that it was Peter and James and John and Andrew who asked this question.

B. (:2) Enlightened Regarding Temple Destruction

“And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.’”

Charles Swindoll: This unexpected response to their enthusiasm over the temple complex may have felt like a slap in the face, but it was a necessary correction to their fixation on the physical and their obsession with the opulent.

Leon Morris: The disciples were doubtless moved by admiration for the magnificent building, and they probably expected some expression of appreciation from Jesus. *But* (there is adversative force in the conjunction) they got nothing of the sort. Instead Jesus invited their attention to all these things and went on to prophesy solemnly the total destruction of the temple. He uses the emphatic *“Truly I tell you,”* goes on to employ the emphatic double negative, and supplies the detail that *a stone will not be left upon a stone*. Jesus is making clear that, while the temple was undoubtedly a wonderful building, the disciples should not be beguiled by its beauty. What matters is that God’s people should live godly lives. When they do not, disaster in some form is inevitable. For the Jews that was going to include the destruction of their beautiful place of worship.

G. Brooks: The Destruction of Jerusalem

- I. An illustration of the instability of all earthly grandeur.
- II. An instance of God’s punishment of sin in the present world.
- III. An example of the fulfilment of Scripture prophecy.
- IV. A proof of the abolition of the Mosaic economy.
- V. A cause of the dispersion of the Jews.

Stu Weber: In spite of the temple's outward beauty, Jesus was more concerned with the inward condition of God's people. Israel had broken its covenant with Yahweh, this time by rejecting the Messiah. Of little consequence was the time interval before his judgment broke through the dam of his forbearance. Judgment was certain to come. So Jesus did not see the beauty that should have been reflective of a submissive people and an accepting God. Rather, he saw horrible destruction wrought by the rebellious hearts he had been debating that week in the temple courts. In fact, the purpose of the Great Tribulation to come would be the purging of God's covenant people Israel in preparation for the Messiah-King's return to the throne of David.

Jeffrey Crabtree: This much is certain: the return of Christ and its accompanying judgment are at the ultimate point of this discourse. Among all the lessons these chapters teach, **Barclay** (2:367) rightly highlights two.

1. First, Jesus wins. There is no doubt that the one who rides the clouds is victor.
2. Second, this world is going somewhere. Life on earth is not an endless, meaningless continuum.

II. (:3) QUESTIONS REGARDING THE COMING MESSIANIC AGE

*“And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives,
the disciples came to Him privately, saying,”*

A. When?

“Tell us, when will these things be,”

Grant Osborne: The disciples clearly link the destruction of the temple with the arrival of the eschaton. Moreover, since Jesus in **23:36** said the judgment was to take place during “*this generation*,” the disciples assumed everything would happen soon. Their question is twofold, centering on the time (“*when*” [πότε]) of “*these things*,” namely, the whole complex of events the disciples associated with the OT “*day of the LORD*” and in their minds would be inaugurated by the destruction of the temple; and the “*sign*” (σημείον) they should look for to herald those events. Jesus will answer the first question negatively when he tells them, “*you do not know on what day your Lord is going to come*” (**24:42**) and “*you do not know the day or the hour*” (**25:13**). The time is not for them to know.

Thomas Constable: The disciples asked Jesus two questions. The first was, “*When will these things be?*” The second question had two parts as is clear from the Greek construction of the sentence. It linked two nouns, “*coming*” (Gr. *parousias*) and “*end*” (Gr. *synteleias*), with a single article, “*the*” (Gr. *to*), and the conjunction “*and*” (Gr. *kai*). The second question was, “*What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” By asking the question this way we know that the disciples believed that Jesus’ coming (**Matthew 23:39**) would end the present age and introduce the messianic age. [Note: See **Edersheim**, *The Life . . .*, 2:434-45, for an explanation of the Jewish expectation connected with the advent of the Messiah.] The first question dealt with the time of the **destruction of the temple**. The second dealt with the sign that would signal **Jesus’ coming and the end of the age**.

B. What Will Be the Sign?

“and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

Grant Osborne: The second question is in fact addressed by Jesus. He will spend the first part of his address telling what are not the signs (vv. 4–14, 23–26), and then will elucidate what are, namely, the “*abomination that causes desolation*” of v. 15, the “*great tribulation*” of v. 21, and especially “*the sign of the Son of Man*” coming in v. 30. The coming and the eschaton are considered a single event by the disciples, as indicated by the article governing both. They have also **connected both of these to the destruction of the temple**.

Brian Bell: The signs are: Spiritual Deception. International Disruption. Physical Destruction. and, Religious Discrimination. Though these have always been with us, obviously they will accelerate.

Marvin Rosenthal: It may appear obvious, but signs are for seeing. That is, men are called upon to see, look at, behold signs. Signs are intended to be conspicuous, not hidden. . . Signs are also miraculous. . . Signs were to confirm, identify, or mark out someone as genuine, authentic, the “*real McCoy*.” Signs were posted to reveal truth and were authenticated by a miracle or wonder.

If God chose to authenticate truth with signs, it should not be surprising that Satan attempts to authenticate his lies with counterfeit signs or miracles (**Matt. 24:24**).

Signs relate primarily to the Jewish people (**1 Cor. 1:22**). . .

Signs are more directional in nature than chronological. They tell men *which* way rather than *what time*. When the disciples inquired of the Lord, “*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?*” (**Matt. 24:3**), they were not so much asking *when* will the end occur, but *how* will men recognize it when it does? . . .

There was a sign to authenticate and substantiate when the Messiah appeared on earth – the virgin birth. There was a sign to authenticate and substantiate all that He did in life and death – His resurrection. Now the disciples inquired, “*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?*” It was the one question, above all others, that cried out to be answered.

Van Parunak: Some people think that the second question is really two, but the disciples are **asking for only one sign, not two**. To see the identification of the two parts, we should understand that “*world*” is *αἰών* (Strong 165, = Hebrew עולם), and is **chronological**, not geographical. The Jews distinguished “the present world of toil (*‘olam ha-zeh*)” from “a Sabbatical millennium, ‘the world to come’ (*‘olam ha-ba*’...). The coming of the Messiah would be a distinctive feature of the future age. This distinction is reflected elsewhere in the NT:

Mat 12:32 *And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

Eph 1:20 *Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

The “*world to come*” is the day of the Lord, the Millennium, **the Messianic age**. So “*thy coming*” and “*the end of the age*,” in their minds, refer to the same point in time. They recognize that the degree of destruction the Lord has anticipated in v. 2 can only reflect the **promised Day of the Lord**, and want to know more about it.

Marvin Rosenthal: The phrase *end of the world* (**Matt. 24:3**) is more accurately translated *end of the age* and is speaking of the completion of this era in preparation for entrance into the next (the Millennium). The Day of the Lord [after the Great Tribulation, at the end of the 70th week of Daniel] will be the transition period from this age to the kingdom age.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the value of studying end time prophecy?
- 2) What was the reaction of the disciples upon learning that the temple was going to be left desolate?

3) What was the expectation of the disciples regarding the establishment of the Messianic age on earth?

4) Why were the disciples so eager to know the answers to these particular questions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: Another problem is the connection between the destruction of Jerusalem and the events at the parousia (e.g., the “*great tribulation*,” **Rev 7:14**). How do we explain the seeming discrepancy between the historical perspective and the apocalyptic expectation/imminence?

There are several suggested solutions:

1. Many classical dispensationalists assert that this passage is entirely future and **24:29–31** is not the rapture (before the tribulation) but the revelation (after it) as seen in the Jewish nature of the disciples; among critical scholars some also take it as entirely future (**Schlatter, Zahn, Gnilka**).
2. The parousia is not found here; instead the whole relates to the destruction of Jerusalem, with the shaking of the heavens symbolizing political disasters (**Isa 13:10, 34:4**) and with the parousia referring to Jesus coming to take his people back from exile (**France, Wright, McKnight**).
3. Jesus describes only the destruction in vv. **4–28**, and the parousia is found in vv. **29–31** with the tribulation period in vv. **32–35** (**Wenham, Gnilka, Carson**).
4. This is apocalyptic language, in which the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows the tribulation period in vv. **4–28, 32–35** (esp. vv. **8, 14, 15, 21–22, 27–28**) and the parousia in vv. **29–31** (**Hill, Ladd, Gundry, Turner, Davies and Allison, Wilkins**).

In light of the nature of apocalyptic language, the centrality of Daniel in the discourse, and the use of similar motifs in **2 Thess 2** and the book of Revelation, the fourth view is the most probable (hinted at in the question of the disciples in v. **3**).

David Turner: A crucial interpretive question concerns the relationship of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE to the ultimate eschatological judgment of God. There are three basic views, with shades of difference within each of them. The preterist (past) view holds that most or all of the predictions in the discourse were fulfilled in 70 CE, when the Romans quashed the Jewish revolt by besieging Jerusalem and destroying the temple (**France** 1985: 333–34; **Kik** 1948; **R. Sproul** 1998; **Tasker** 1961: 223–24). Partial preterists take **24:1–35** as describing the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and **24:36 – 25:46** as referring to the coming of Jesus. Full or comprehensive preterists attempt to explain the entire discourse as fulfilled in 70 CE. The opposite, futurist approach understands the discourse to speak primarily, if not solely, of events just before the second coming of Jesus to the earth (**Barbieri** in **Walvoord** and **Zuck** 1983: 76–77; **Toussaint** 1980: 266–72; **Walvoord** 1974: 179–82). In Walvoord’s view (1974:182), Christ does not answer the first part of the disciples’ question in **24:3**, concerning the destruction of the temple. The preterist and futurist views are both reductionistic and cannot handle the complexities of the passage that stem from the disciples’ dual question about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. A valid approach to the passage must handle both of these

matters.

The preterist-futurist view understands the discourse as addressing both the historical destruction of Jerusalem and the yet-future coming of Jesus. Some advocates of this view interpret certain portions of the discourse as concerning 70 CE and other portions as concerning the end times. Others interpret the events of 70 CE as an anticipatory fulfillment of events that are consummated at Christ's coming (Barnes 1868: 251; Blomberg 1992a: 352; Carson 1984: 495; Hagner 1995a: 685). This viewpoint accepts the concept of prophetic perspective or foreshortening, in which more than one event fits the typology of the prophetic prediction. At times this has been called generic, double, multiple, or near-and-far fulfillment (Blomberg 2002; Broadus 1886: 479–80; Hendriksen 1973:846–48; Ladd 1974: 310–11; D. Turner 1989).[2] The present commentary advocates this approach. Jesus answers both parts of the disciples' question. His prediction of the fall of the temple provides the reader with a picture that anticipates the eventual end of the world. (See W. Davies and Allison 1997: 328–33.)

John MacArthur: The Signs of Christ's Coming

They long also to see the coming of their Messiah because they know when Messiah comes He'll make things right. He'll throw over the oppressors. He'll settle the issues that need to be settled, and He'll establish again the kingdom in Israel and things will be the way that God promised they would be and should be. And so they're filled with eschatological anticipation. Eschatological comes from the word *eschatos* in Greek which means "the last thing," so it's the study of the last things, and the Jews were really into the last things. They had had enough of all the difficulty. They had experienced Assyrian oppression in the taking away of the ten tribes from the north. They had experienced the Babylonian captivity in the taking away of the southern kingdom, Judah. They had gone through the Persian rule and the Greek rule and now the Roman oppression, and they'd had enough of all of that. And in their spirits, as they articulated in **John 8** to Jesus, they were never servant to any man. They were looking for the day when they would be free again and they would be ruled again by a righteous king and they would know the kingdom God had promised them with the flourishing of all of its benedictions and blessings promised in the Old Testament. . .

Let me see if I can't draw you to a source that'll outline this for you. This, to me, is a very fascinating point. A man by the name of Schurer wrote a book entitled *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*. This man, who has no particular eschatological view to champion, at least certainly not the view that we would hold, tells us what it was that the Jews believed in that time, and it's most fascinating, and he draws it out of their contemporary literature as to what they were writing. Let me give you the sequence. First of all, Schurer says the Jews believed that before the Messiah came, there would be a time of terrible tribulation so that before the Messiah arrives, there would be a time of birth pain. As a woman has birth pain immediately before life comes out of her womb, so before the kingdom of Messiah is established, the nation will suffer some tribulation, some pain. . .

The second thing that they had in their eschatology was that into this turmoil would come a forerunner and a herald announcing the immediate arrival of the Messiah and he would be like Elijah. As the Messiah is not David but like David, so the forerunner is not Elijah but like Elijah. As the king himself comes in the spirit, as it were, and the power of David, even to a greater extent so the forerunner comes in the spirit and power of Elijah to even a greater extent. And so they anticipated that one like Elijah would come. That's why they were so drawn initially to John the Baptist because he was so much like Elijah. And John the Baptist would

have been that Elijah, fulfilling that prophecy, if they had received Jesus Christ and His kingdom. But because they rejected Him and the kingdom was postponed, therefore, there has to be another like Elijah coming prior to the second coming of the King. . .

The next thing they saw was the coming of Messiah. First a tribulation time, then a herald, and then the coming of Messiah Himself, the one who was the King. The great, divine figure who would come and end the present age and establish the age of glory, the kingdom, and vindicate God's people.

The next thing they saw in their eschatology, according to Schurer, is that the nations would ally themselves and gather to fight against the Messiah. Amazing. For example, in the Sibylline Oracles, again we read this Jewish teaching: "The kings of the nations shall throw themselves against this land, bringing retribution on themselves. They shall seek to ravage the shrine of the mighty God and of the noblest men whensoever they come to the land. In a ring round the city, the accursed king shall place each one his throne with his infidel people by him, and then with a mighty voice God shall speak unto all the undisciplined, empty-minded people and judgment shall come upon them from the mighty God and all shall perish at the hand of the eternal." . . .

Now, that takes us to the next thing that they taught in their eschatology, and that is that the result of that battle against the Messiah would be total destruction of all these nations. There would be a total devastation of the nations that oppose Messiah. . .

Then they believed the next event would be the renovation of Jerusalem. There would be a wholesale renovation of Jerusalem. This would be the purification of that city so that it would be the Jerusalem of the great Millennium, the Jerusalem of the great kingdom, and the Jerusalem of the great eternal glory of the king. In fact, in Enoch it says, the book of Enoch, "All the pillars were new and the ornaments larger than those of the first Jerusalem, as it were," it says. So they saw this renovating of the whole of Jerusalem.

The next event they saw was that the dispersed Jews who had been scattered all over the world would be collected back. They'd be re-gathered back into the city of Jerusalem. In fact, to this day, the Jewish daily prayer says this, in part: "Lift up a banner to gather our dispersed and assemble us from the four ends of the earth." That's part of the daily Jewish prayer. They look for the day when Messiah comes, defeats all these nations, renovates Jerusalem, and then re-gathers all the Jews from all over the world. . .

And then after that, they believe Palestine will become the center of the world. That was the Jewish belief. Palestine would become the center of everything. The whole world would be subject to it. All the nations would be subdued. And the nations would come to Jerusalem to worship the king. . .

So they're leaving the temple sort of scratching their heads about **how it's going to become desolate**. But their eschatology tells them it is. And there's going to be a temple described by Ezekiel in chapter 40 to 48, they're probably thinking about that. They just don't know how it can happen. . .

So they say: “*When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming in the end of the age?*” See, they connect these things with “*Thy coming and the end of the age.*” **They don’t see any space.** Destruction of Jerusalem is a part of the whole thing. So they’re just – this is the most excited they’ve been, I think, in the whole ministry of Christ. I mean how would you feel if you thought you were living in the eminency of the kingdom of Jesus Christ any time? And He was sitting there telling you that He was going to destroy the temple, leave the city desolate, and the next time you saw Him, He’d be in glory coming in the name of the Lord? Boy, they were excited. And so they pose the question and the question is: When and what? What’s the sign? I mean how do we know it’s going to happen? Give us the indicator. Something’s going to happen first, what is it? Darkness? A brilliant light? What is it? An angel? A trumpet? What is it? And when is it? And they were really excited and anxious. . .

So now you understand. We go into **chapter 24** and what are they thinking? **Right now is the kingdom**, right now is the second coming, right now is the judgment, right now is the establishing of the eternal kingdom of the glory of Messiah, right now it’s going to happen. The whole point of this sermon is to tell them this: “Guys, it’s not right now.” The whole point. Now you understand Matthew 24 and 25. “**It’s not right now.** You’re wrong.” That is the purpose.

Now look back at **verse 3**, just a couple of things to draw it together. I want to draw to your attention the word “*coming.*” What are they asking when they say, “*What should be the sign of their coming?*” You say, “Well, they’re talking about the second coming.” No, they’re not. You see, **they didn’t even believe in a second coming as such.** They didn’t see any distinction. They didn’t see any first coming, then long period, second coming. They saw – boom! – it all happens. Why? Because that’s the way the Old Testament outlined it. I mean that’s the way it happened by the Old Testament prophet view. The Old Testament prophet looked ahead and **compressed all the time factors** and just saw Messiah coming, setting up His kingdom, and all that. Didn’t see the big gap. As I said, that’s why it’s called a **mystery**.

So they see it all at once. So they’re not talking here about a second coming. What are they talking about? Well, you look at the word “*coming,*” it’s the word *parousia*. Comes from two Greek words, *para* and the verb “*to be.*” Means **to be around** – to be around, to be present. The best way to translate it might be, “And what shall be the sign of Thy full presence, of Thy being here?” It isn’t so much the idea that it conveys coming as much it conveys a **permanent presence**. The word “*parousia*” is used four times in this chapter, **verse 3, verse 27, 37, and 39**, and then, having been used by Jesus, it becomes a key word used by the New Testament writers. It’s used by James, it’s used by Peter, and it’s used by John. It becomes a technical term for the arrival of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom, His second coming, His coming in glory. But they’re simply saying, “When are You going to arrive in full presence? When are You going to be here in Your full Messianic revelation? When are You going to be here to be all that we anticipate You’re going to be? Your coming?” In other words, the point being it isn’t that He has to go away and come back because the issue of the word isn’t the actual coming, it’s the presence. So they’re saying, “**When are You going to enter into the fullness of Your Messianic presence?**” That’s the idea. . .

The Lord’s answer begins in **verse 4**. Okay? Now, listen very carefully. The Lord’s answer begins in verse 4, and from verse 4 on, listen carefully – He is answering their question. And their question has to do with the full coming of Christ and the end of man’s age, and that is the

question He answers. He says nothing about the destruction of Jerusalem from now on. That was outside the Olivet Discourse in **verse 2** before the question was even asked. That judgment on Jerusalem was for that period of history, for that time and that unregenerate, ungodly, Christ-rejecting people. And it's only a small example of the kind of judgment that God is going to bring in the end of the age when the Messiah comes in full glory and full presence.

And so what He's saying to them is, "Look, what you have seen is not the end of the age. What you have seen is not preliminary to the full coming of the Messiah in glory. Let Me show you what is the indication of His full coming. Let Me show you what are the signs of His second coming. Let Me show you what does indicate the end of the age." And that is the theme of the sermon in the Olivet Discourse. Takes them from where they are to what will be the character of the time when the Lord comes. And so He lifts them from their historical moment into the far future, a future which we have yet not entered into, and describes all the events surrounding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Al Mohler: After a day of controversial confrontations with the religious elite, Jesus and his disciples depart from the temple in Jerusalem (**21:23 – 23:39**). On the road to Bethany, the neighboring town where they are staying (cf. **21:17**), they pause at the Mount of Olives, which gives a spectacular view of the temple behind them. When the disciples call Jesus' attention to the magnificence of the temple buildings, he prophesies the temple's destruction (cf. **Mk 13:1-2**). This prophecy is fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman army sacked Jerusalem and the temple.

Baffled, the disciples privately ask Jesus for clarification. They ask when the destruction will occur, and they ask for a sign to recognize the event of his coming and the end of the age. In reply, Jesus launches into a final discourse (**chs. 24-25**; see also **chs. 5-7; 10; 13; 18**) that warns his disciples of the crisis coming in the near and distant future. This discourse is often called the Olivet discourse because it was delivered while Jesus was sitting on the mount of Olives. It is a prophetic discourse meant to prepare his disciples both for the catastrophic events of judgment that will befall Israel with the temple's destruction and for the interval before Jesus' glorious return.

S. Lewis Johnson: Advent Questions

Now they asked him about the future, and the striking thing is that our Lord did not rebuke them. He did not say, now I don't want you to be occupied with prophecy. I want you to be occupied with spiritual life-truth, because if you study prophecy you'll be led astray into bizarre views. Or, on the other hand, you will find it a very daunting subject, and you cannot understand prophecy. He didn't say that. He didn't rebuke them. He didn't chide them because they had the desire to peer in the future. In fact, he actually acceded to their desires by giving them the longest answer to any question that he ever gave, according to the New Testament. Two long chapters are given in answer to their questions, tell us when shall these things be and what is the sign of thy coming

and of the end of the age. In fact, I would think, that looking at Matthew **chapter 24** and **25** is complete justification for engaging intensively in the study of the prophetic word. . . evidently in their minds they had thought that there must be a **connection** between the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and the end of the age, because they remembered that when Solomon's temple was destroyed that was the sign for the great and lengthy captivity.

Great things happened in the program of God when Solomon's temple was destroyed. If this temple is going to be destroyed they couldn't help but associate with it great events in world

history, and in the light of what he had said, they associated the end of the present age with it. So they asked him, *when shall these things be and what is the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?* . . .

the destruction of Jerusalem is also a **typical event**, just like the prophecies of the Old Testament in which **the local merges into the distant future**. So in our Lord’s prophetic discourse – incidentally he was prophesying out of the old covenant period of time; the cross had not taken place yet – so the local event merges into the future, final destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, just preceding the second advent, the consummation of the age. . .

Van Parunak: Olivet Discourse – Contributions from the Synoptic Gospels

Period	Mt 24,25	Mk 13	Lk 21	Description
1. Beginning of Sorrows (Mt 24:8)	24:3-13	5-13	8-19	The NT period, before the fall of Jerusalem. Corresponds to the first four seals of Rev 6.
2. Days of Vengeance (Lk 21:22)	(Lacking)		20-24a	Desolation of Jerusalem under Titus, AD 70.
3. Times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24)	24:14	10	24b	Jerusalem is subdued by the Gentiles (Luke) and the gospel goes forth throughout all the world (Matthew).
4. Great Tribulation (Mt 24:21)	24:15-28	14-23	(Lacking)	"The abomination of desolation" (Dan 9:27), at the middle of Daniel's seventieth week.
5. Appearing of Son of Man (Mt 24:30)	24:29-31	24-27	25-28	Cosmic signs, return of Christ in glory, gathering of his saints
(6. Interlude)	24:32-25:30	28-37	29-36	Parables about, and exhortations to, watchfulness
7. Separation	25:31-46	(Lacking)		Final Judgment

Table 4: Synopsis of the Olivet Discourse

F. Godet: The destruction of Jerusalem was not merely a prelude to the day of judgment, nor merely a type of it, as is commonly supposed, but it was a part of it. The day of judgment, which is to come upon the whole world, began with the destruction of Jerusalem; and God having struck one blow in one place, is now waiting, with sword still uplifted, to strike again and finish His work. The corresponding account in Luke tells us that God is waiting “*until the times of the Gentiles be come in.*” The Jew was first in grace; he is likewise first in judgment. But the turn of the Gentiles is coming on. Judgment has begun at the House of God, but it stays not there. The awful drama of the end of the world has two acts, and **the time in which we are living is due to a suspension of the judgment already begun.**

Stanley Saunders: Like many present-day “apocalyptists,” the disciples may imagine that there are signs and fixed dates for the end of the age. They may also presume direct connections between the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Son of Man, and the “end of the age.” Their questions suggest that they want to be apocalyptic insider traders. Jesus responds in the language and imagery of Israel’s prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, but in ways that subvert the disciples’ expectations. He tells the disciples that

- (1) they will observe many traditional apocalyptic signs and events, most of which are not, in fact, signs of the end (24:6–8, 9–12, 15–21, 29–30);

- (2) they will encounter periods of internal conflict (24:9–12) and intense suffering (24:15–21), which also may not signal the end;
- (3) these crises will give rise to “*false prophets*” and messianic pretenders, who prey on the burdened and vulnerable (24:4–5; 11:23–26);
- (4) awareness of the true nature of events and of the promised presence of the Son of Humanity enables the elect to endure to the end (e.g., 24:6–8, 13);
- (5) the end is not fixed, but will follow the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world (24:14; cf. 28:18–20);
- (6) Jesus himself does not know the day or hour of the end—only God knows (24:36); and so,
- (7) as they suffer for his name, the disciples must stay awake, ready at all times for the coming of the Son of Man, whose revelation generates both dread and hope (24:42–51, esp. 24:44).

Donald Hagner: Several possibilities lie open to the interpreter. A strictly futurist interpretation denies any reference here to events of the first century, including the fall of Jerusalem (e.g., Schlatter, Schniewind, Zahn, Gnilka, Agbanou, Dupont, Harrington). Dispensationalism also takes this view, asserting that everything in the passage lies yet in the future even for us (cf. Walvoord; for a refutation, see Carson, 494–95). Diametrically opposed is the preterist view, which regards the material up to v. 35 as referring exclusively to the fall of Jerusalem (thus, e.g., Kik, Tasker, France, S. Brown, Garland). There are mediating views that find reference here both to the fall of Jerusalem and to the parousia of the Son of Man. As described in Turner’s useful discussion, the “traditional preterist-futurist” view regards vv 4–14 as referring to the present age, vv 15–28 to the fall of Jerusalem, involving a double reference also to the end of the age, vv 29–31 to the parousia, and vv 32–41 to the certainty of the fulfillment of prophecy. With a variety of mutations (but with rejection by many of the idea of double reference), the preterist-futurist view is widely held (e.g., Barclay, Lambrecht, Gundry, Beasley-Murray, Carson, Blomberg).

Stu Weber: The best solution should probably begin with the assumption that Jesus was looking ahead toward several acts of judgment, spread throughout history, and foretelling them as a **conflated, composite unit**. Some details of Jesus' prophecy have been and will be fulfilled at more than one point in history. This is not without precedent in biblical prophecy. For example, Daniel's prophecy of the “*abomination of desolation*” was fulfilled at more than one point in past and future history. . .

Jesus' central purpose in the discourse. The disciples wanted to go straight into the privileged life in the eschatological kingdom, skipping the intervening hardship. But this was not to be—and the challenge remains for us also. We are to steward our time wisely and our opportunities for kingdom advancement wisely, investing ourselves in “risky” (faith-filled) obedience, as did the first two servants in 25:19-23.

TEXT: Matthew 24:4-14

TITLE: SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING AND THE END OF THE AGE

BIG IDEA:
JUDGMENT ON THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE DOESN'T SIGNAL THE END OF THE AGE

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Now, you understand that the whole of the Olivet Discourse is **future**. Now, that is not to say that some of the things that will happen then don't happen now, but they'll happen then at a scale and on a level and on proportions that are far beyond anything we've ever known now. We have war now, we have earthquake now, we have famine now, we have trouble in our world now, we have killing now, we have persecution now, we have hatred now, we even have some things happening in the sky that disturb us now, but nothing compared to the incredible display that's going to take place in that compressed, brief period of time called the birth pains of the kingdom when God sends the earth into wracked pain as it brings forth the King in His kingdom.

Richard Gardner: Stressed repeatedly in this material is the conviction that such happenings, painful as they may be, are part of a larger plan or design by which God will fulfill the divine purpose for history. It is in this sense that these events, sometimes called the **messianic woes**, must take place (cf. **Dan. 2:28; Rev. 1:1; Matt. 18:7**).

John Walvoord: Taken as a whole, the opening section, ending with **Matthew 24:14**, itemizes general signs, events, and situations which mark the progress of the age, and, with growing intensity, indicate that the end of the age is approaching. These signs, however, by their very characteristics and because they have occurred throughout the present age, do not constitute a direct answer to the question of "*the sign*" of the coming of the Lord..

R.V.G. Tasker: It would seem that the disciples, by placing these two questions in **juxtaposition**, associated very closely in their minds the impending fall of Jerusalem and the coming of Jesus which would mark the end of the present age. In one sense they were right to do so, for in the fall of Jerusalem judgment would be passed upon the old Israel, so that it would no longer be exclusively the people of God; and at the *Parousia* the Son of man would "*come again*" to "judge both the quick and the dead". But Jesus seems anxious that the disciples should not suppose that these two "judgments" would of necessity follow in immediate chronological sequence. Accordingly, in the teaching recorded in **verses 5-14** He warns them not to be misled by the deceptive utterances of false Messiahs who would appear from time to time, and not to imagine that events which might seem to be cataclysmic in character, such as wars between nations, earthquakes, and widespread famines, were infallible signs that the end was near. Such happenings would in fact constitute the **prolonged birth-pangs** of the new age. The end would only come, as He states explicitly in **verse 14**, after **world-wide evangelism**; and that evangelism would be continually hampered by persecutions, martyrdoms, the hatred of the world for those who professed the name of Jesus, loss of faith, the treachery of friends and the failure of love to endure in the face of widespread lawlessness – conditions which would call for the supreme quality of **steadfastness (9-13)**.

I. (:4-8) FALSE INDICATORS OF THE END OF THE AGE

A. (:4-5) Deceptive False Messiahs

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.’”

Leon Morris: This will surely be a reference to the **last days**, for there is little evidence that any of the turbulent men so active preceding the fall of Jerusalem ever claimed to be the Messiah. Some claimed to be prophets, but that is not the same thing.

Warren Wiersbe: The Jews have often been led astray by false prophets and false christs. The rider on the white horse in **Revelation 6:1-2** is the Antichrist, that final world dictator who will lead the nations astray. He will begin his career as a peacemaker, signing a covenant with Israel to protect her from her enemies (**Dan. 9:27**). Israel will welcome this man as their great benefactor (**John 5:43**).

Grant Osborne: Jesus calls out for unceasing vigilance (present tense “*watch out*” [βλέπετε], used at key points of Mark’s discourse [**Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33**] to call for spiritual watchfulness) in light of the great deception to come. “*Deceive*” (πλανάω) is used often in this discourse (**24:4, 5, 11, 24**) to signify false teachers who lead others astray into apostasy.

John MacArthur: Second Thessalonians 2: “*And now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto Him that you be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from us as that the day of the Lord is present.*” Somebody was telling the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had already started, that they were already in it. And he says, “Don’t believe it. Don’t you get disturbed by anybody, not a letter or anything, not anybody, not a spirit, not anybody. Don’t let anybody make you think we’ve entered the day of the Lord.” Why? **Verse 3:** “*Let no one deceive you by any means for that day can’t come except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.*” And Paul is in line with Daniel. And Paul is in line with Jesus. And Paul is in line with Revelation and saying the very same thing. Before the coming of the Lord, there will be the revealing of this man of sin, the son of perdition, the willful king, the king with fierce face, the beast who deceives the world. He opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped so that he, as God, sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

And it says, **verse 8:** “*Then shall that wicked one be revealed.*” **Verse 9:** “*Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness in unrighteousness in them that perish.*” He comes and deceives the whole world.

You see, the Bible is tremendously consistent. The whole thing, that second half of the Tribulation, the last three and a half years, begins with the **ascendency of the false Messiah**. Prior to him, there will be a whole lot of them. And even perhaps during his reign, a whole lot of them, fighting against him unsuccessfully. So the first sign of the end of man’s age is deception. Deception that is so effective, it literally ultimately results in the deception of the whole wide world. And it’s no wonder that the Lord says, “You better beware.”

David Thompson: This coincides with the first seal judgment in **Revelation 6:2a**. There will be many who will actually claim they are coming in the name of Christ and actually claim they are Christ. There will be a major masquerading of people during the Tribulation claiming to be Jesus. There will be religious confusion.

[**Note:** Explanation of the **Pre-Wrath Rapture** position -- Many commentators use the designation "*Tribulation period*" to refer to the entire 70th week of Daniel. This can be confusing since believers experience tribulation on a constant basis ... just varying in degree and intensity in the end times. The specific period designated at the "*Great Tribulation*" starts in the middle of the 70th week and the time is cut off for the sake of the elect. The Rapture than occurs to deliver believers followed immediately by the judgments of the Day of the Lord that finish off the 70th week.]

B. (:6-7) Destructive Wars and Natural Catastrophes

1. (:6-7a) *Wars and Rumors of Wars*

“And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.

7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,”

Charles Swindoll: We see the ultimate expression of this in **Revelation 13**, where the beast from the sea exercises unchecked military power, waging war against the saints and subduing “*every tribe and people and tongue and nation*” under his authority (**Rev. 13:3-7**). Similar to how the birth pangs of a pregnant woman intensify as labor progresses and delivery approaches, warfare will increase throughout the world as the end nears, culminating in full-on global conflict.

John MacArthur: Now, you say, “Well, we’ve always had this.” You’re right. We have always had it. Oh, we’ve had time periods of brief peace in the world, and most nations themselves have had times of war and times of peace. And we’re not denying that that will be true throughout all of man’s day. There will be times of war and there will be nations fighting nations and kingdoms fighting kingdoms. But still, what our Lord is saying here is that in the end, the beginning of sorrows that bring the kingdom, there will be **worldwide warfare on a scale unknown prior to that time**. In **massive proportions**, there will be an intensification of war across the earth. And the wars will be national, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be great groups of people, cultures against cultures. . .

The point that I want you to see is that Daniel looks to the end, and talk about a world war – he sees a world war that’s mind-boggling, where you have the whole force of Western power in Europe and perhaps even some way the United States could be linked into that, though there is nothing in Scripture to say that. You have the great force of the Russian confederacy, you have the great amalgamation of all that is in Africa, which today is agitated to the point of boiling over. And then you have the Orient, Red China and all of that, and all converging in Israel for a holocaust of war at the end time. And so, says Daniel, we anticipate this kind of battle.

Look at Zechariah chapter 14, and the prophet Zechariah sees the same thing. As Zechariah looks to the end time, in verse 1 he says, “*Behold, the day of the Lord cometh and thy spoils shall be divided in the midst of thee*” – listen to this – “*for I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle.*” The whole world is going to converge on Jerusalem in a final, incredible battle. “*The city is taken, the houses are rifled, and the women are ravished. Half the city goes forth into captivity, the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. And then shall the Lord go*

forth and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle.” And that’s exactly the way Daniel ended his prophecy, that he will come to his end and he’ll not be able to find anyone to help him then. So there’s going to be a worldwide war, again converging on Jerusalem, and Zechariah points it out in the same, exact way. So this is a very consistent picture from the prophets as well as from our Lord Himself.

At the end of the prophet Haggai, verse 22 of chapter 2, *“I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them and the horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother. ‘In that day,’ saith the Lord of hosts, ‘will I take thee, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the Lord, ‘and make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee,’ says the Lord of hosts.”* It’s as if Zerubbabel is seen in his descendant – in that final time when God sends His own army to destroy the armies of the world and then sets up that one who comes out of the loins of David, out of the loins of Zerubbabel, to be the King, none other than Messiah. . .

So you can see that the Revelation, as well as the prophets of the Old Testament, support the words of our Lord that that will be a time of war and rumors of wars and nations rising against nation.

David Thompson: This coincides with the second seal judgment in **Revelation 6:3-4**. Just before Christ returns there will be worldwide unrest and lack of peace and war. Now **verse 6** seems to suggest that wars will initially be civil wars and **verse 7** means wars will be national. In other words, there will be war talk locally, nationally and internationally. During the Tribulation [the 70th week of Daniel], no one will be immune to threat of war no matter where one lives.

2. (:7b) Famines and Earthquakes

“and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.”

Charles Swindoll: The third sign of the end involves the proliferation of famines, earthquakes, and other natural disasters (**Matt. 24:7-8**). Geological disturbances will coincide with spiritual deception and political turmoil, adding further panic and widespread desperation. Starvation and the spread of diseases will add to the misery. We can imagine that the disasters will include the decimation of crops and livestock, the drying up of streams, wells, and reservoirs, and the destruction of natural and man-made infrastructures necessary for delivering vital resources, like food, water, and electricity. Supply lines will be disrupted, and lives will be lost. Today, on a limited scale, we can already observe the effects of natural disasters on cities and nations. These things are merely a **foreshadowing** of the intensification of catastrophes associated with the **Tribulation period [the 70th week of Daniel]**.

David Thompson: This coincides with the third seal judgment in **Rev. 6:5-6**. Famines and earthquakes will cause major worldwide social, geographical, financial, physical and medical chaos and crises. It will be these first three signs that will lead to many people dying (seal judgment four–**Rev. 6:7-8**). In fact, one-quarter of the world’s population will die through these first three signs. Predator animals will attack and kill and eat people for food. Now having listed three terrible signs, Jesus makes a startling statement in **verse 8**–this is just the beginning of trouble. The beginning of birth pangs is not the worst pain.

C. (:8) Described as the Beginning of Birth Pangs

“But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.”

Warren Wiersbe: The image of a woman in travail is a picture of the tribulation period (**Isa. 13:6-11; 1 Thess. 5:5**).

Grant Osborne: The image of labor pains at birth was a common metaphor for calamities like death (cf. **2 Sam 22:6; Ps 18:4**) or national crises (**Isa 13:8; Jer 6:24**), and it was a natural image for eschatological cataclysm (**Isa 26:17–18; 1 En. 62:4**). It normally referred to the messianic woes that would usher in the final events of history, but here it is the “*beginning*” of that period Jesus is referring to. His point is the same as v. 6—wars, famines, and earthquakes do herald the start of the last days, but they do not constitute the eschaton itself, nor do they signify that it is near.

Leon Morris: Jesus places the happenings of which he has been speaking in their proper place in the scheme of the **last things**. *All these things* is comprehensive; the totality of the tumults and troubles does not mean simply an especially disastrous period in the history of the race. It means the **beginning of the process** that will usher in the final state of affairs; it is the *beginning of birth pangs* (REB brings out the meaning with a little addition, “*first birth-pangs of the new age*”). Among the Jews there was a widespread expectation that before the Messiah came to set up the kingdom of God in a form that would last forever there would be **trouble on the largest possible scale**. The powers of evil will not give up without a struggle, and thus there will be disaster after disaster. Jesus is pointing to this period which was so widely expected and speaking of it in traditional language.

II. (:9-14a) FUTURE EVENTS SIGNALING THE END OF THE AGE

A. (:9-10) Great Treachery

1. (:9) Severe Persecution

*“Then they will deliver you to tribulation,
and will kill you,
and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.”*

Charles Swindoll: The fourth sign of the end is that believers will experience severe persecution from those who hate Christ (**24:9**). Those who will come to faith in Christ after the rapture of the church—often referred to as “**Tribulation saints**”—will become the targets of persecution and execution. Because those believers will identify themselves with Jesus Christ at a time when the rest of the world worships the Antichrist, the seething hatred of the unsaved will rise up against them. Many will be hunted down, arrested, tried, and killed. Martyrdom will greatly increase, but those believers will be heirs to an eternal reward. The book of Revelation describes a great multitude of believers “*from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues*” who will “*come out of the great tribulation*” (**Rev. 7:9-17**). These are people who will have suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Antichrist and his wicked empire (**Rev. 6:9-11; 13:7-10**).

David Thompson: This coincides with seal judgment number five (**Rev. 6:9-11**). I want you to notice that before Christ comes Israel will be hated by all nations. They will be hated, hounded and killed because of Jesus Christ. During the Tribulation, this will be true for any who believe on Christ, but specifically this will be true for Israel.

2. (:10) Surprising Betrayal
*“And at that time many will fall away
and will deliver up one another
and hate one another.”*

Marvin Rosenthal: During the first three and one-half years, false Christs and false prophets will emerge; they will do false signs and wonders to seemingly authenticate their false message. Believers will be seduced, hated, and betrayed (**Matt. 24:9-10**). The love of many for God will grow cold (**Matt. 24:12**). In that environment, the faith that exhibits **patience** – that endures in the midst of adversity, that does not reject the true Christ for a false Christ – will be rewarded: *“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.” . . .*

The **apostasy**, then, to which Paul referred (**2 Thess. 2:3-4**), will involve Israel, not the church. It will commence when many within the nation sign a covenant with the Antichrist (unknown to them, a covenant with death) -- at the beginning of that seventieth week. The apostasy will encompass a total abandonment or falling away from renewed covenant relationship (the seventieth week) and from the God of their forefathers and the promised Messiah. They will embrace a counterfeit religion (humanism) and a counterfeit Messiah (the Antichrist) who offers a counterfeit peace and solution to the Middle East dilemma.

In the middle of that seventieth week of Jewish apostasy, the Antichrist will break the covenant with Israel. Having entered the Middle East on the pretext of protecting Israel from her enemies, he will defeat Egypt, Syria, and other nations. Then he will “plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas [the Mediterranean and Dead Seas] in the glorious holy mountain [Mount Zion]” (**Dan. 11:42-45**). Only then, in the middle of the seventieth week, with the setting up of his image in the temple, will the Jews realize his true character and real identity and that they have made a covenant with death.

B. (:11) Great Deception

“And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many.”

Stu Weber: Verse 11 sounds similar to verse 5 above, describing false prophets instead of false Christs. A prophet was a spokesman for God; therefore, a false prophet was one who falsely claimed to be God's spokesman. This was a more subtle form of deception, since there was only one Christ. However, there can be many prophets from God, and it was easier to pass oneself off as a prophet. Jesus said there would be many such deceivers and that they would deceive many people. The person who attempts to remain faithful to Christ may find great difficulty in discerning between so many claimants to God's true revelation. The false prophets would be clever in their deception, winning great followings. The true disciple of Christ must always remain alert.

C. (:12-13) Great Apostasy but Deliverance of the Saints at the End

1. (:12) Great Apostasy
“And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.”
2. (:13) Deliverance of the Saints at the End
“But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”

Warren Wiersbe: “*The end*” does not mean the end of this life; it refers to the **end of the age** (**Matt. 24:14**). Those believers on earth during this terrible period, who endure in their faith, will be saved when the Lord comes at the end and delivers them.

Leon Morris: The power of God is such that he can and will sustain his faithful servants through whatever trials they may be called upon to endure.

D. (:14a) Gospel Proclamation Worldwide

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations,”

Charles Swindoll: The sixth sign of the end is a worldwide declaration of the gospel (**24:14**). Despite the global horrors growing toward an unspeakable crescendo—with false Christs, destructive warfare, natural disasters, and persecution—the message of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ will still be proclaimed. All nations will hear the gospel, giving everybody an opportunity to believe unto eternal life. How will such an ambitious worldwide mission occur during the short time of the future seven-year Tribulation period? Perhaps God will use angelic messengers to bring the good news, as He did in the very first proclamation of the Resurrection, at the empty tomb (**28:5-7**). The book of Revelation suggests such a future angelic proclamation:

I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”
(Rev. 14:6-7)

It is also likely that God will work through the 144,000 converts from the twelve tribes of Israel described in **Revelation 7:1-8**. These Hebrews will serve as faithful, courageous, and diligent witnesses for Christ during the darkest period of the earth’s history. God will preserve them from harm during the Tribulation and use them to fulfill the ancient Old Testament calling of Israel to be God’s witnesses among the nations (see **Isa. 43:1-13**). God’s plan for Israel was always that they would serve as the light of truth for the Gentiles. During the Tribulation, they will finally fulfill this global mission.

David Thompson: The main message of the Tribulation will not be the Gospel of grace, but the **Gospel of the kingdom**, which specifically says the King of Kings will come back and establish a kingdom for Israel. It is during this time when God’s Word will reach the whole world. Truth is in seven years something will take place which the Church could not do in 2000 years. It is at this time when the end will come. Now “*the end*” refers to the end of Israel being mistreated and finally being esteemed as the nation of God. This is not the end of the Church Age, this is not the end of the universe—this is the end of the Tribulation and the end of Israel not being in her kingdom with her King.

III. (:14b) FINAL ARRIVAL OF THE END

“and then the end shall come.”

Grant Osborne: This turns around v. 6, “*the end is not yet.*” This does not mean that all the nations will be converted before the end can come but rather that the universal proclamation will

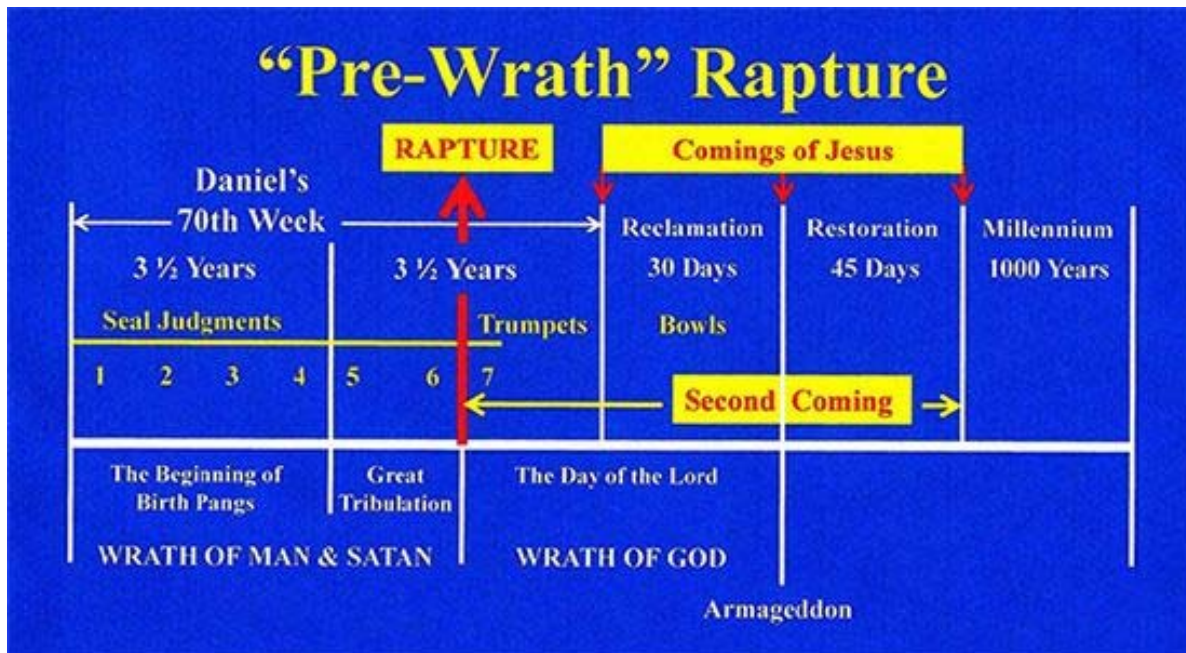
continue until the end. **Romans 11:25–26** says that at the *parousia* of Christ the Gentile mission will be completed and “*all Israel will be saved.*”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Despite the future orientation of the Olivet Discourse, how can we glean applications to our present living in terms of endurance and watchfulness and preparedness?
- 2) Why should we be careful not to point to specific present calamities and wars as definitive indicators of the closeness of the *Parousia*?
- 3) How do events such as the judgment on the Jerusalem temple serve as a type or foreshadowing of end time events?
- 4) How can we warn people not to abuse the Lord’s patience and forbearance with sin during this interim period as an excuse to ignore their accountability before the return of the Judge?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Timeline reflecting the Pre-Wrath Rapture Position



John MacArthur: The Signs of Christ’s Coming

[The disciples] believed that they were on the edge of the Messianic kingdom. In fact, in Luke chapter 19 verse 11, we have a verse that really supports that idea. In **Luke 19:11**, listen to this:

“As they heard things, He added and spoke a parable because He was near to Jerusalem.” This is when they’re just on the way to Jerusalem on – in the beginning of this week. And it says He added this parable *“because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”* The disciples, from the time He approached Jerusalem, thought the kingdom should immediately appear, and so they were living in that anticipation, and when the crowd threw palm branches and clothing in front of Him as He rode *“the colt the foal of an ass”* and they shouted, *“Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna to the Son of David,”* they thought this was all a part of readying the people for the kingdom. And then as He went into the temple and cleansed the temple, they thought that was the purging of the hypocrites. And now as He says He is going to come in judgment, they feel this is going to be the purification of Jerusalem which they believed was going to happen. And then He’s going to come in the name of the Lord as their Messiah. **They see all of this happening immediately.**

In fact, as they leave the temple ground in **chapter 24 verse 2**, Jesus, looking at the temple, says, *“There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.”* And He even tells them that the temple itself will be destroyed, and that fit into their teaching, too, because they remembered that Ezekiel said in the kingdom there would be a new temple. And this temple, after all, was built not even by a Jew but by Herod, the Idumaeen. And it was a temple that was occupied presently by hypocrites and false religionists. And so it all was sort of coming together in their minds. The Messiah had reached the moment when He was going to bring His kingdom. And they disregarded His words about dying, about a seed falling into the ground to die. They ignored what He said about having to be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes and to be crucified and to rise again the third day. And all they could see was the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. And sure enough, He had already begun to cleanse the temple and now He was going to destroy it. He was going to judge the ungodly and purge the nation, and then He was going to come in full glory as King of kings and Lord of lords, and they believed they were imminently at that point. This was how they interpreted the prophets. . .

Now, what makes them feel such anticipation? The fact that He promised the destruction and desolation of Jerusalem, the fact that He promised He would come in the name of the Lord, the fact that He said the temple would be devastated. They think it’s imminent. And so He has to explain to them that it isn’t, that it’s yet in the future, that it’s a great way off. And that is the purpose from verse 4 on. It is a prophetic sermon that sweeps them and us into a time not yet come. Does not describe time between then and 70 A.D., the destruction of Jerusalem. There’s no way that can be possible. The terms won’t allow us to believe that. It does not describe the church age – it can’t. It has to describe the future time, right before the coming of Christ. They want to know the signs of the coming of Christ, the signs of the end of the age, and the signs that say this is it, this is it, it’s coming. And so he sweeps them all the way to the end time.

Now, to let us know this is not the time period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, it’s not just the church age, as many commentators have wanted to lead us to believe, but that it’s the end time, let me give you some key interpretive indicators, all right? So follow along.

- 1) First Indicator Vs. 8 -- When does **birth pain** occur? At conception? That’s ridiculous. During pregnancy? Equally ridiculous. Birth pain occurs when? Just prior to birth, at the very end, that’s the last thing that happens and you know you’re there. In fact, you start monitoring the frequency of birth pains until they come in a rapid succession and then it’s time for the issuing forth of life. Birth pains happen at the end. They’re not strung out all through the pregnancy. And neither are these things strung out

all through the history of the church age. They are things which occur in rapid-fire succession that issue in the birth, as it were, of the Messianic kingdom.

- 2) Now, a second indicator, and one that I think is equally important, is found in **verse 13**. **Verse 13**: “*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*” What is the end? Well, the end is mentioned in **verse 13** and the end is mentioned in **verse 6**. The end is not yet, He says. What end is He talking about? You go back to **verse 3**, “*The end of the age.*” He’s talking about the end of the age. It has to be that that is His subject. And so in **verse 13** when He says, “*He that shall endure to the end,*” what end is He talking about? **The end of the age.**

Now, if this is all about people enduring till the end of the age, it’s got to people who are alive at the end of the age, right? In other words, the people who go through these events, who go through these birth pains and endure until the end of them and the end of the age, will be saved. So He has to be talking about people then.

- 3) Notice **verse 14**, another indicator. It says, “*And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come.*” What end? The end of the age again. And prior to the end of the age, there’s going to be worldwide preaching of the gospel. Now, that couldn’t have been true before 70 A. D. – there’s no way. There was no preaching of the gospel around the world before 70 A.D., and it isn’t even true today. There are many, many places in the world where the gospel is not being preached at all and has never been preached. But before the end, it will be preached in all the world.
- 4) Now, there’s another indicator in verse 15. Notice **verse 15**. “*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place. Whosoever readeth, let him understand, then let them who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*” In other words, it’s all going to break loose when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Now, what is that? Oh, that’s easy. All you need do is look at Daniel chapter 9 and he says in **verse 27** that the antichrist is going to “cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease and for the overspreading of abominations, he will make it desolate.” What he’s going to do is, the antichrist goes into the temple in the future Tribulation time, he desecrates the temple, he commits sacrilege in the temple where the Jews have set up their worship, and it says he does it until the consummation – until the final end – and that determined or that which is determined by God to be done is poured out on the desolate. In other words, final judgment. He does it at the very end, in the final day of man when God is going to pour out judgment. He does it, Daniel says, at a time when the Prince comes to finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

In other words, in **Daniel 9:24-27**, the prophet says the abomination of desolation takes place right before the Prince who sets up everlasting righteousness, right before final judgment and vengeance. So it has to be at the end time. So it says here in **verse 15** of **Matthew 24**, “*When you see the abomination of desolation, then you know you’re seeing the signs of the end.*” And Daniel tells us that that happens just before the Messiah sets up His kingdom and judges the ungodly. So again, another indicator that we must be looking at a **future time**. That’s exactly what Daniel had in mind.

- 5) Now notice **verse 21**. And here is another indicator that we're looking at a future time. It says, "*In this time there will be great trouble, great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time known or ever shall be.*" It will be the worst time in the history of the world – the worst time in the history of the world. And when is the worst time in the history of the world? It's got to be the end time, right? It has to be. It has to be the time when God's vengeance breaks out. . .
- 6) Another indicator is in **verse 29**. It says immediately after the tribulation of those days, immediately after this, the sun is dark and the moon doesn't give its light, the stars fall from heaven, the powers of heaven are shaken, and then appears the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. So Christ comes immediately after the Tribulation. The Tribulation of which He speaks is the Great Tribulation of **verse 21**. It's the time that's not like any other time; it has to be the time in the future. What time is it? According to Daniel in **verse 15**, it's the time of the abomination of desolation, and that is right before the second coming. So all these indicators tell us this must be future. It must be future.
- 7) Finally, look at **verses 32 to 34** as another and last indicator. The Lord says – there's a parable, a branch puts forth its leaves, you know summer is near. You have a fig tree, you see leaves, and you know fruit is to follow. Fruit comes in the summer, you see the leaves, and you know the fruit's coming. In other words, it's just a signal. So likewise, when you see all these things – what things? Everything He's been talking about, a time of Tribulation like no other time in the history of the world, a time of all these other marks and signs that He's been through prior to that in **chapter 24**. "*When you see those, know that it is near.*" What is near? **The end of the age**. The sign of the Son of Man coming. And this generation" – what generation? The generation that is alive when the signs happen, the generation that sees them all coming to pass, "*will not ever pass away till all of this is fulfilled.*" In other words, the fulfillment of all the time of the end is going to be seen by the people who see the signs. So the signs are reserved, then, for the people who are going to be alive at the end time. That takes this whole thing and pushes it into the future. **The generation alive when the signs begin to unfold will be alive when Christ comes to set up His kingdom.**

S. Lewis Johnson: This discourse, incidentally, is a discourse that has been interpreted basically in three different ways. Now I'm going to, for the sake of time, say only a few words about this now, and as we go through in the remaining six messages, a few other things I will say, I hope it will not be too repetitious for you.

There are those who have believed that this discourse is basically fulfilled in the past. They are generally post-millennial interpreters. Now post-millennial interpreters believe – and I'm going to speak about the Christian postmillennialists, not the non-Christian postmillennialists. There are non-Christian postmillennialists who are simply humanists. They believe that basically man is good and that as a result of a kind of evolution in society, man shall become finally so good that there will be something like a kingdom of God upon the earth like a millennial age.

Now we will dismiss them, because obviously they do not have any real claims for correctness in biblical interpretation since their basic view of man and God and the cross of Christ is deficient. But let's think about the Christian postmillennialists, because there are Christians who believe that through the preaching of the gospel in the present age God is going to win a great victory, and we are actually by virtue of God's work in the believers to gain a victory of the world to

such an extent that we will by the grace of God introduce a period of time of like a golden age upon the earth which will fulfill the prophecies concerning the millennial age. It will be done by the grace of God working through believers.

Now these are postmillennialists, because they believe at the conclusion of that period of time, that golden age wrought by God through us, and through the preaching of the word, the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. So it will be after the millennium that he returns.

Now such interpreters, such as **Dr. Keck** who has a book on this particular prophecy, believe that these prophecies of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 have already been fulfilled, and so when we read, beginning at verse 4 and following, on through the remainder of this chapter, we are dealing with things that have come to pass in the past.

Now I know immediately you think, well what about **verse 30**, “*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Then shall the tribes of the earth mourn when they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*” This, for such interpreters, means simply that Jesus Christ is reigning in heaven at the present time, and the other events are simply spiritual or allegorized statements of the providence of God in human history. Now that is one way to interpret these verses. I do not think that it is the correct way, and I believe that the best test of course is for us to read through the prophecy and seek to find its meaning.

There are some who interpret these chapters as having primary reference to the present. They give us general principles by which we should guide our lives. Basically, these interpret this in a nonliteral sense too.

And then there are those who feel that this discourse is fulfilled in the future. I’m telling you ahead of time that I follow this last named principle of interpretation. **I do believe that the Olivet Discourse is a discourse that has to do with the future.** The test of the correctness of this view will be, again, I say the study of the word of God, but I want you to know ahead of time that is my opinion. . .

the destruction of Jerusalem is also a **typical event**, just like the prophecies of the Old Testament in which the local merges into the distant future. . . the local event merges into the future, final destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, just preceding the second advent, the consummation of the age. . .

These verses, **verse 4** through **verse 14**, are a kind of **summary of the future week**, just preceding our Lord’s second advent. The week of years, characterized by a time of affliction, characterized by a time of great tribulation that shall just precede the second advent. Then I think after these verses, **verses 4** through **14**, which are a summary of that period of time, beginning at **verse 15** and following, we look at some details that are singled out for special attention.

TEXT: Matthew 24:15-28

TITLE: GREAT TRIBULATION TRIGGER = THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

BIG IDEA:

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION TRIGGERS THE GREAT TRIBULATION EVENTS LEADING TO THE SPECTACULAR RETURN OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

Remember the timeline of the **Pre-Wrath Rapture position**:

- Daniel's 70th week (a 7 year period) which will conclude this age begins with the signing of a covenant with the nation of Israel.
- The birth pangs of various trials are experienced up until the mid point of the week.
- At the mid point you have the climactic Abomination of Desolation where the AntiChrist defiles the temple and launches the persecution of the Great Tribulation period.
- Those times are cut short before the end of the 70th week and Christ returns to Rapture believers and initiate judgment.
- Immediately after that are the trumpet and bowl judgments of the Day of the Lord.
- Then you have the Battle of Armageddon and the transition to the Millennial Kingdom.

Most of the commentators quoted below do not hold to that timeline ... so you need to take that into consideration in evaluating what they say.

John MacArthur: Warning of Coming Peril

Typically, the prophet of the Word of God assigned by God to give a far-future prophecy gave also a near prophecy to establish his credentials. In other words, if he proves to be accurate in the historically verified prophecy, we can believe him for the one that's so far in the future that we can't see it. And the reason Jesus mentions the destruction of Jerusalem in **verse 2** as prophecy is not to introduce the whole sermon on that same destruction, but to give you a **historical point** in which to verify that He speaks the truth. And so He said there shall not one stone be left upon another that shall not be thrown down. . .

Verse 4 to 14 gives these **general things** that are going to happen and they will be the beginning of the end, just prior to the coming of Christ.

But Jesus goes one step further in **verse 15** and says there's one single event that kicks the whole thing off. "*When you shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place, whoever reads, let him understand.*" Now, when you see the abomination of desolation, you know that's the **trigger** that kicks the whole thing off. **Verse 21** says: "*For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*" . . .

Now, as we come to **verse 16 to 28**, He **warns us**. And He warns all the readers who will read this, who will know this in the time that it happens. And He warns about four things:

1. severe calamity,
2. subtle confusion,

3. spiritual collapse,
4. and a second coming.

And these are really something to see.

Scott Harris: There should be great fear concerning the **wrath of God**. There should be a terror that grips the human heart when it contemplates God's judgment on sin. The apocalyptic revelations are a warning to all mankind about the end result of sin and that we had better be prepared for the Lord's return. It is a warning to the non-Christian to repent, or they will suffer God's judgment, and it is a warning to the Christian to live their lives in a worthy manner. . .

Jesus is speaking prophetically to the disciples. That is, He is talking with them, but His message is really for a generation that is yet to come, the generation that "*would not pass away until all these things take place*" (24:34). This was a common occurrence in Old Testament prophecies and several things in the text point out that this is what Jesus is doing here. As just mentioned the generation that saw these things would not pass away until they were completed, and neither the disciples or anyone else has seen many of the elements here come to pass yet including

- the preaching of the gospel in the whole world for a witness to all the nations (14),
- nor the "*Abomination of Desolation*" (15),
- nor the "*great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall*" (20),
- nor the sun being darkened, the moon failing to give its light and the stars falling from the sky (29).

Last week we looked at what Jesus called the "*beginning of birth pangs,*" and related these to events described in **Revelation 6 & 7**. That there would be wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of the righteous and apostasy. All these things have always been true, but at the beginning of the great tribulation they will **increase dramatically in frequency and seriousness**, just as birth pangs do. And prior to the end, the gospel will be preached to all the world, and we saw last week that during the tribulation period God will have 144,000 Jewish servants as well as the two Witnesses of **Rev. 11** to accomplish this task, and then in **Rev.**

14 there is an angel that has "*an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people... 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgement has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.'*" . . .

The **Abomination of Desolation**, the abomination that causes desolation, is when the Anti-Christ ends the Temple worship and sets himself up to be worshiped instead. Many Bible scholars believe this may even occur in the form of a statute of himself that he will set up in the holy of holies in the same way that Antiochus IV had set up an idol of Zeus.

This will be very obvious to everyone who desires to understand it when it happens. Jesus goes on to express the urgent need to flee when it does happen.

Greg Allen: Now; it seems to me that the thing that makes "*the great tribulation*" stand out isn't so much the uniqueness of the things that happen in it. As I have studied this chapter, it appears to me that much of what will happen in that unprecedented time will be things that also characterize the times we call "*the beginning of birth pains*". What seems to be unique about "*the great tribulation*" will be that those things will become greatly expanded—so that they spread

from Jerusalem to the whole world; and they become greatly intensified—so that, unless those days were mercifully shortened by God, no flesh on earth would survive.

And it's in this that I see a spiritual lesson for our everyday lives as believers. As our Lord gives a description of that future, unprecedented time of trouble on the earth, He also—at the same time—gives us hints of His **sovereign rule** over it. He tells His disciples when it will begin. He tells them what will happen in it. He tells them how long it will last. He tells them what to beware of during those times. And He tells them what the outcome of it all will be.

And if He demonstrates such **sovereign control** over even the most unprecedented outbreak of evil that this world will ever know, then you and I can be sure that He demonstrates sovereign rule over (if I may say it this way) all the far 'lessor' times of trouble that you and I—as His people—face in our daily lives right now.

I. (:15-20) THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION PROMPTS URGENT FLIGHT

A. (:15) Sign of the Abomination of Desolation

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),"

B. (:16-20) Sudden Escape Will Be Difficult

1. (:16) Urgency of Flight

"then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;"

2. (:17-20) Understanding the Urgency of Various Circumstances

a. (:17) No Time to Pack

"let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house;"

b. (:18) No Time to Retrieve Belongings

"and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak."

c. (:19) No Time to Give Special Care to the Pregnant or Nursing

*"But woe to those who are with child
and to those who nurse babes in those days!"*

Scott Harris: In **verse 19** Jesus mentions personal situations that would make this very difficult. Those who are pregnant or have a young child would have a difficult time because it is hard to move quickly if either of those things are true. In **verse 20** He mentions timing circumstances which would make it difficult, winter or a Sabbath. The cold, wet weather of winter makes travel and hiding in the mountains more difficult. Any hindrance could be fatal. And if it occurs on a Sabbath, those holding to the Sabbath travel restrictions would be greatly hindered and the orthodox might try to obstruct other people from breaking their Sabbath restrictions.

d. (:20) No Time to Make Allowance for Winter Weather or Sabbath Travel

"But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath;"

II. (:21-22) THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION TRIGGERS THE GREAT TRIBULATION

A. (:21) Severity Unparalleled

“for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”

Stu Weber: This period of “*tribulation*” is a specific period of time beginning with the abomination and ending with the second coming of Christ (**Rev. 11:2; 13:5**). It is during this time that the terrible judgments of **Revelation 6-19** with its seals and trumpets will destroy great portions of the earth. This time of trouble will be without precedent in world history.

[I would separate the persecution of the **Great Tribulation** from the outpouring of God’s wrath in the subsequent **Day of the Lord** which begins just after the Rapture event and contains the trumpet and bowl judgments.]

24:21-22. So the disciples might not underestimate the horror of this Great Tribulation, Jesus explained that it would be the worst suffering in all of history—unequaled from the beginning of the world until now (**24:21**). He added further emphasis, saying that this Tribulation would have the potential of destroying all life, leading some modern students to think of nuclear war. But whatever the means necessary to bring about such unparalleled destruction, it is evident that such a Great Tribulation is still future to us. So there is much more in mind here than the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As bad as it was, that destruction has been multiplied in intensity on a number of occasions in the twentieth century alone.

The world has yet to see the great distress which will never be observed again (**24:21**). Jesus said as much when he indicated that those days would necessarily be cut short, implying divine intervention (**24:22**). Christ will intervene to prevent complete genocide and the wholesale destruction of the human race.

But even in judgment, the Lord will display mercy, particularly for the sake of the elect (plural of *eklektos*, “*select, chosen ones*”). These are those who have placed faith in him and followed him as his disciples. The use of the term elect also highlights the Lord's sovereign choice as to who these people will be. It is he who draws the faithful to himself; none of us come of our own will. This Tribulation will not reach its full destructive potential because of the Lord's intervention. By his hand, those days will be shortened. Because Jesus shifted into his segment answering the question regarding the timing and signs of his coming, we may infer that the Tribulation will be interrupted by Jesus' return. He will end the destruction on earth.

B. (:22) Salvation of the Elect

“And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.”

III. (:23-28) THE GREAT TRIBULATION ENDS WITH THE COMING OF CHRIST

A. (:23-26) False Christs and False Prophets Will Mislead Many

1. (:23-25) Misleading People about the Identity of Christ

a. (:23) Deception Must Be Rejected

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him”

- b. (:24) Deception Will Be Enticing
“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”

Stu Weber: False Christs would be those claiming to be the Messiah himself, while false prophets would be those claiming to have truth revealed by God—possibly in a hoax supporting one of the false Christs.

- c. (:25) Deception Prophesied in Advance
“Behold, I have told you in advance.”

2. (:26) Misleading People about the Location of Christ

- a. Claiming He is in the Wilderness
“If therefore they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go forth,”

Richard Gardner: It is in crisis times such as these that false messiahs and false prophets will arise (vv. 23ff.; cf. vv. 5, 11), with impressive credentials (cf. 7:22-23; Deut. 13:1-3; Rev. 13:11-18). What makes their appeal all the stronger is that they come in Christ’s name (v. 5), from within the church. Some may set up shop in the wilderness, the traditional site for launching liberation movements (Exod. 3:1-12; Acts 5:36-37; 21:38), while others may fit the model of a hidden Messiah (in the inner rooms; cf. John 7:27).

- b. Claiming He is in the Inner Rooms
“or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.”

B. (:27-28) The Return of Christ Will Be Sudden and Spectacular and Unmistakeable

- 1. (:27) Return Compared to Lightning
“For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”

So there is no secret rapture that occurs before the beginning of the 70th week as taught by the Pre-Tribulation camp. There is only this one Parousia which includes Christ coming in glory and in judgment.

Warren Wiersbe: **Matthew 24:27** indicates that the return of Jesus to the earth will be sudden, like a stroke of lightning. The event that precedes His return is the gathering of the Gentile nations at Armageddon (**Rev. 16:13-16; 19:11ff.**). The eagles flying around the carcass picture the awful carnage that will result from this great battle (**Rev. 19:17-19**).

Charles Swindoll: In other words, the real coming of Christ in glory will be unmistakable. Nobody will confuse it with even the most astonishing “*signs and wonders*” of the false Christs and false prophets populating the end times.

Leon Morris: The coming of the Messiah will not be some secret thing such that only those with special knowledge will be able to say where the Messiah is. Jesus likens his coming to the lightning. Nobody needs to be told where the lightning is. When it flashes, the whole sky is lit up from east to west. The coming of the lightning is a coming that thrusts itself on our notice; we

cannot overlook it. The coming of the Son of man will be like that. It will be open and public; nobody will need to be told about it.

Richard Gardner: According to Jesus' words in **verses 27-28**, there will be no need for **guesswork** when the Son of Man really appears. It will be as obvious as "a horizontal lightning bolt... illuminating the whole earth, east to west, at the same moment" (**Schweizer**: 454). And it will be as certain as the presence of a carcass when one sees vultures circling (v. **28**; cf. **Luke 17:37**).

2. (:28) Return Compared to Vultures Circling a Decaying Carcass
"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

Stanley Saunders: The sight of vultures signals from afar the presence of death. So too the coming of the Son of Humanity will make plain to all that the empire of heaven has defeated the dark forces of this world.

Charles Swindoll: In light of the menacing vision in **Revelation 19:21** of birds gorging on the flesh of those slain at the return of Christ, it seems best to understand Jesus' use of these words as foretelling the **certainty of the future judgment of the wicked**. His cryptic statement points to the earth as the place of judgment, as evidenced by the birds feasting on carrion. Evil and death tend to be found in the same places. Those separated from the righteous will be consigned to judgment because they did not find salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Marvin Rosenthal: Jesus is coming again because justice legally demands it. The Lord Himself said, "*For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together*" (**Matt. 24:28**). This was a familiar Hebraic expression, the meaning of which would be, moral corruption requires divine judgment (cf. **Job 39:27-30**; **Rev. 19:17-18**). "*Wherever the carcass is*" conveys the idea of moral corruption, stench, and decay. "*There will the eagles be gathered together*" implies divine judgment on all corruption (sin and its progeny). If God is holy and just, then He must, of necessity, punish evil. Judgment on unrepentant, wicked men requires His return and will be on the King's agenda at His coming.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) By describing these future end-time events, what type of attitude and conduct is Jesus trying to promote for His disciples?
- 2) Why should we not be deceived by the claims of false Messiahs and false prophets?
- 3) What are the indicators that Jesus is speaking here about events that were not fulfilled in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 and thus refer to end time events?
- 4) How visible and obvious will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to bring judgment upon the world?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: The midpoint of the tribulation period is most important, for at that time an event will take place that was prophesied centuries ago by Daniel (**Dan. 9:24-27**). Please note that this prophecy concerns only the Jews and the city of Jerusalem (“*thy people and . . . thy holy city,*” **Dan. 9:24**). To apply it to the church or to any other people or place is to misinterpret God’s Word.

The prophecy involves seventy weeks, and the Hebrew word week means “a week of years,” or seven years. Seventy sevens would equal 490 years. But this period of 490 years is broken up into three parts:

1. During seven weeks (forty-nine years) the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt and the worship reestablished.
2. After sixty-three weeks (434 years) Messiah would come to Jerusalem and die for the sins of the world.
3. The prince will make an agreement with the Jews for one week (seven years) to protect them from their enemies.

The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given in 445 BC by Cyrus (**2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1**). The city was rebuilt in troubled times. Sir Robert Anderson in his classic book *The Coming Prince* (Kregel, 1975) has proven that there were exactly 482 prophetic years (of 360 days each) between the giving of the decree and the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the King.

But we must account for the remaining “week” of seven years. Where does it fit in? Note that the same city that was rebuilt will also be destroyed by “*the people of the prince that shall come*” (**Dan. 9:26**), that is, the Romans. (“*The prince that shall come*” is a name for the Antichrist.” This event took place in AD 70. But the Jewish nation would be spared and the city restored again. For at some future date, the prince that shall come (Antichrist) will make a covenant with the Jews for *seven years*. This is where the missing “week” fits in. He will agree to protect them from their enemies and permit them to rebuild their temple. (**Dan. 9:27**) talks about a restoration of the sacrifices, and this would demand a temple.) . . .

The readers of this prophecy in the latter days will know what to do: Get out of Judea! These instructions are similar to those given in **Luke 21:20ff.**, but they refer to a different time period. Luke’s instructions apply to the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the “sign” was the gathering of the armies around the city. Matthew’s instructions apply to Jewish believers in the middle of the tribulation, and the “sign” is the desecration of the temple by the image of the Antichrist.

Donald Hagner: Although the A.D. 70 “*abomination*” was almost certainly in Jesus’ mind (cf. **24:2,16-20**), both he and Daniel looked ahead to another such abomination in the temple, which is **yet future to us**. This implied, of course, that the temple will again be rebuilt on the temple mount in Jerusalem, where the Muslim Dome of the Rock has stood for the last thirteen centuries. The warnings of **24:16-20**, which related to Jewish geography and Jewish culture, prophesied most directly of the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, along with the persecution of the Jews by Rome. Jesus warned that when the “*abomination*” occurs (or when it seems

imminent), the inhabitants of Judea (the province of Jerusalem) should flee to the mountains, where they could hide from persecutors (**24:16**).

The destruction would come so quickly that those on their flat housetops (often used for prayer) would need to descend immediately down the external stairway and escape without retrieving any supplies or valuables. Those working out in the fields would need to flee to a hiding place (**24:17-18**). Those who delayed would be caught in the destruction. We do know that in A.D. 70 many Christians did flee all the way to the “hiding place” at Petra.

The **ultimate fulfillment** of these prophetic elements, still future, will take place when the Antichrist occupies the most holy place. **Daniel 9:27** describes these events. This evil prince will “*confirm a covenant with many [Israel] for one ‘seven’*” (or one period of seven years). In the “*middle of the ‘seven’ he will ... set up an abomination that causes desolation.*” **Second Thessalonians 2:4**, referring to this same event, describes this ruler setting himself up as a god in the temple.

Of course, the fact that Israel has reestablished itself as a national political entity and occupied the holy temple site again has many scholars anticipating the end times very soon. No other nation has experienced two thousand years of cultural dispersion and retained their national integrity. **God is not yet finished with the Jewish people.** And the Great Tribulation to come in the seventieth and final of the “seventy weeks” (periods of seven years) predicted for Israel by the prophet Daniel (**Dan. 9:24-27**) will see the nation purged and prepared for the return of its Messiah-King.

This period of “tribulation” is a specific period of time beginning with the abomination and ending with the second coming of Christ (**Rev. 11:2; 13:5**). It is during this time that the terrible judgments of **Revelation 6-19** with its seals and trumpets will destroy great portions of the earth. This time of trouble will be without precedent in world history.

(**24:21-22**) So the disciples might not underestimate the horror of this Great Tribulation, Jesus explained that it would be the worst suffering in all of history—unequaled from the beginning of the world until now (**24:21**). He added further emphasis, saying that this Tribulation would have the potential of destroying all life, leading some modern students to think of nuclear war. But whatever the means necessary to bring about such unparalleled destruction, it is evident that such a Great Tribulation is still future to us. So there is much more in mind here than the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As bad as it was, that destruction has been multiplied in intensity on a number of occasions in the twentieth century alone.

The world has yet to see the great distress which will never be observed again (**24:21**). Jesus said as much when he indicated that those days would necessarily be cut short, implying divine intervention (**24:22**). Christ will intervene to prevent complete genocide and the wholesale destruction of the human race.

But even in judgment, the Lord will display mercy, particularly for the sake of the elect (plural of *eklektos*, “select, chosen ones”). These are those who have placed faith in him and followed him as his disciples. The use of the term elect also highlights the Lord's sovereign choice as to who these people will be. It is he who draws the faithful to himself; none of us come of our own will. This Tribulation will not reach its full destructive potential because of the Lord's intervention. By his hand, those days will be shortened. Because Jesus shifted into his segment answering the

question regarding the timing and signs of his coming, we may infer that the Tribulation will be interrupted by Jesus' return. He will end the destruction on earth.

(24:23-26) So that God's chosen followers (“*the elect*,” **24:24**) might not be fooled by false Christs and false prophets, Jesus forewarned us about them. False Christs would be those claiming to be the Messiah himself, while false prophets would be those claiming to have truth revealed by God—possibly in a hoax supporting one of the false Christs.

At the time of the Great Tribulation, there would be reports that the Christ (the Messiah) had come. And indeed there would be imposters (the false Christs and false prophets) who would provide great signs and miracles that people will take as validation of their authenticity as God's Christ or prophet (cf. the Jewish leaders' demand of a sign from Jesus in **12:38; 16:1**; see also Jesus' description of miracle-working imposters in **7:21-23**). These imposters would be so convincing that they would deceive even the elect. It is important to remember that miracles themselves do not guarantee that something is of God. Jesus had already made that point clear to the disciples (**Matt. 7:21-23**).

The followers of the false Christs would invite people to come see the imposters in the desert, or in the inner rooms. But Jesus commanded his followers not to follow such guidance and not to believe those who invited them. Jesus the Messiah came in this manner the first time, as one group of people could find in the desert or in a house. But his second advent would be quite different.

(24:27-28) The word *For* tells us why we should not believe the Messiah will be seen in a single location on earth. When he comes, the whole world will know! Unlike his first advent—through natural birth into a human body and thirty-four years of life as a man—the coming of the Son of Man (here Jesus used the title with its full messianic impact) will be like lightning, which comes from the east and is visible even in the west.

The picture is that of a bolt of lightning, flashing all the way across the sky, from horizon to horizon, in an instant. Jesus was about to tell us more about his coming (**24:29-31**), but this alone distinguished him from all the imposters at the end of the age. They would be mere men, lingering about in one place or another, while he would come suddenly and visibly, and he would not be limited to a single location.

Coming (parousia) is a word that appears here for the first time. It becomes an important word for the apostle Paul, who used it to describe the second coming (e.g., **1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13**). Other New Testament writers used it as well (e.g., **Jas. 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:4; 1 John 2:28**).

John Walvoord: The Abomination of Desolation and Warnings of Coming Peril

Jesus said there is coming in the future a time unlike any other time, a time of incredible, indescribable horror to the world but particularly focusing on the nation Israel. It is a time of which Isaiah spoke, of which Jeremiah spoke, of which Daniel spoke, and of which Zechariah spoke. So it really isn't anything new that our Lord is saying. He is reiterating what was said of old, a time like no other time. If Israel thinks it has endured unbelievable holocaust in the past, then they need to take stock of what the prophets have said and what the Lord Jesus said, that they have not yet endured what they shall in the future. For there is coming a holocaust unlike any other. And it will not only impact Israel, but it will impact the world. And things are

not going to get better; they're going to get worse. In fact, they're going to get worse than they've ever been the worst of all. . .

So He's given them some **general signs**, the **birth pains** at the very end of man's day that result in the birth of the kingdom. But He gives them here the **trigger** that sets the whole thing off. . . "Now, when you who are alive in that day" [:15] – and He uses the prophetic "you" as we pointed out in our last study. When you who are alive in that day see this, you know you're in the Tribulation. Here is the trigger that sets the birth pains of verses 4 to 14 loose on the earth. This is the key event. . .

So what you have, then, is the coming of Christ and just before that you have a seven-year period. That seven-year period is initiated when Israel makes a covenant with this prince, this king who is the leader of the western confederacy who will be a protector for Israel. Halfway through the week, he turns on Israel, stops their sacrifices, sets up an idol in the midst of the temple, stops all of their worship, makes them worship this false god, this false idol, abominates the place so that it goes into ruination and Jews won't go near it. . .

So from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there'll be a thousand, two hundred and 90 days. You say: "Wait a minute, from the time in the middle, 12 hundred 90 days, that's 30 days more than three and a half years. Where did the extra 30 come from? **Revelation 12:6** says it will be 12 hundred and 60 days, Daniel says 12 hundred and 90 days. Why the disparity?" I think the best explanation of that is that it is in those 30 days after the Tribulation has ended that the Lord, when He comes to the Mount of Olives, as it says in Zechariah, creates a great valley into which all the nations of the world are gathered to be judged. And I believe Daniel has taken us 30 days beyond to give us that timeframe in which there will be the judging of the nations described in **Matthew 25** as the judgment of the sheep and goats, in which all the living people still on the earth at the end of the Tribulation are gathered together to the Lord to be judged as to their suitability for heaven and hell. And it is that **30-day period**, which we see here in Daniel, that is added to the Revelation text.

Further, look at **verse 12**: "*Blessed is the one who waits and comes all the way to the thousand, three-hundred and thirty-five days.*" Now, we got **45 more days**. The blessed people are going to last another 45. I mean, if you're in that – so the implication here is that a judgment occurs at the 12 hundred and 90 period and that's what I think is being described. There's a 30-day period in there in which that judgment of the nations takes place. Blessed are those who go into the next 45-day period. What's that? I believe the next 45-day period that goes to 13 hundred and 35 is a **transition time for the setting up of the kingdom**. The Lord establishes His throne in Jerusalem. The Lord sets us in places of rulership, in places of representation as envoys throughout the world and establishes His kingdom, begins to bring the nations to Him, starts disseminating the rules and the principles for the Messianic millennium and that is that 45-day period.

So Daniel then sees the abomination of desolation. Then Revelation takes us 12 hundred and 60 days, end of Tribulation. Thirty more days for the judgment of the nations. Forty-five more days for the establishing of the millennial kingdom and then on into the kingdom. **Prophecy is so explicit**. But the thing that triggers it all is the abomination of desolation, the desecration of the holy place. . .

Now, as we come to **verse 16 to 28**, He warns us. And He warns all the readers who will read this, who will know this in the time that it happens. And He warns about four things: severe calamity, subtle confusion, spiritual collapse, and a second coming. And these are really something to see.

Greg Allen: But that's when our Lord gives us another very specific sign in our passage this morning. He says, "Therefore when you see the '*abomination of desolation*,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . ."

This is something that is referred to four times in the Old Testament book of Daniel (**Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11**). It describes a **horrible event**—that an ungodly ruler of world influence will make a covenant with the people of Israel, break it, and dare to set up a defiling image in the temple of God. And most Bible scholars recognize three fulfillments of it—the first two being largely symbolic of the third and final fulfillment of it.

The first occurred in 168 B.C.; when the Selucid king Antiochus Epiphanes (who deeply despised and resented the Jewish people) marched an army of Greeks and renegade Jews into Jerusalem and polluted the holy altar in the temple by offering up a sow on it, put an end to the daily sacrifices, ordered the Jews to cease the worship of God, and erected an image of Zeus in the temple. This event was past in the time that the Lord spoke the words of our passage; and so, He clearly intended to apply them to something else.

The second fulfillment of it occurred in 70 A.D.; when the Roman general Titus invaded the city of Jerusalem, and destroyed it and its temple. This was an event that was just a short time in the future when the Lord spoke these words. He clearly intended that they be applied to that future event; because the very stones He said would not be found setting one upon another (**v. 2**) are the stones of the temple that Titus knocked down. The result of it is what Jesus said in **Luke 21:24**; that "*Jerusalem would be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*". But clearly, His words have an application even further beyond 70 A.D.; because they are intended to describe the sign of His coming and the end of the age (**v. 3**), and because, immediately after it, the Lord would return (**vv. 29-31**). I believe that's why He adds "*whoever reads*" (with reference to the book of Daniel), "*let him understand*".

The third and most complete fulfillment of the prophecy about the "*abomination of desolation*"—for which the first two only served as symbolic pictures—will be the coming of the Antichrist—the future, satanically empowered world ruler described in dreadful detail in **Revelation 13** as "*the beast*" who deludes the whole world into worshiping himself—the "*man of sin*" that Paul described in **2 Thessalonians 2:3-12**; whose coming is immediately associated with the Day of the Lord. Paul writes:

. . . that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God . . . And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 8-9).

Now, I'm very tempted to go into further detail; and sadly, we just don't have the time to do so. But the thing that I want you to notice the most in all this is that our Lord declares the sign to us

that marks the beginning of the end of this age. It is under His control. The dreadful "*great tribulation*" will not come until He says it will.

David Thompson: WHEN JEWISH PEOPLE SEE THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, THEY NEED TO QUICKLY GET AWAY FROM JERUSALEM BECAUSE FEROCIOUS ATTACKS WILL COME AGAINST ISRAEL.

TEXT: Matthew 24:29-31

TITLE: THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN

BIG IDEA:
CHRIST RETURNS IN POWER AND GREAT GLORY

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Teaching concerning the return of Christ never fails to create mixed feelings. For those who are ready for it, there's a mixture of comfort, relief, and eager expectation. For those not ready because of unbelief, disobedience, or rebellion, the range of emotions runs from ignorant indifference to contemptuous scorn. Yet just like it's impossible to remain neutral in our response to the gospel of the saving person and work of Jesus Christ, so it is with regard to the Second Coming. Even when we're not thinking about it, God's clock is ticking, moving toward that moment when the true believers will be snatched from this earth and the rest of the world will face the great Day of the Lord—the seven-year Tribulation (**1 Thes. 4:16 – 5:3**).

[That represents the **Pre-Trib position**. But I have switched to the **Pre-Wrath position** where believers enter the 70th week of Daniel but are raptured after the Great Tribulation (which does not begin until the mid point of the week) but just before the judgments of the Day of the Lord in the latter part of the week.]

Richard Gardner: Up to this point, Jesus has been clarifying the shape of things to come before the end. A shift occurs in **verse 29**, where Jesus at last begins talking about the final drama that will bring an end to the time of tribulation. Symbolic of the fact that God is about to refashion all creation, the heavenly bodies cease to radiate or rule life (**v. 29**; cf. **Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:2, 10; 2 Esd. 5:4**). As their glory wanes, the glory and power of the Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven is all the more apparent (**v. 30**; cf. **16:28; 26:64; Dan. 7:13-14**).

David Turner: It is argued here that **24:29–31** describes the climactic signs in heaven that immediately precede Jesus's future coming (**24:29**), that glorious coming itself (**24:30**), and the purpose of his coming: to gather God's elect for their reward (**24:31**). Jesus's appearance effects a reversal of business as usual. Since his death and resurrection, the disciples have mourned over their many persecutions (**5:10–12; 9:15; 10:23**), but when Jesus appears, their persecutors mourn (cf. **13:41–42**), and the disciples with joy begin to experience the ultimate reward of their master (**25:21, 23**).

Grant Osborne: The **cross** is the central event in history, the **parousia** the final event in history. The entire Bible looks to both events as the heir to the exodus, effecting the salvation of God's people. We are looking at the consummation of all of history seen as salvation history. This passage extends the point of **vv. 27–28**: unlike the false teachers and their emphasis on a secret coming, the true Messiah will come with a **public event** that no one will be able to ignore. The conspicuous nature of the return is seen in the **loud trumpet blast** and in the arrival of the **hosts of heaven** to gather God's people to Christ.

The Bible Says: This concludes Jesus's answer to *His* disciples' second question asking Him "what will be the sign of Your coming?" (**Matthew 24:3**). *His* answer was that they would not

need a *sign* because when He returns everyone will know (**Matthew 24:27**). But He gave them three **precursor events** to *His* coming so they would know that *His* return was near.

These events were:

- the Abomination of Desolation (**Matthew 24:15**);
- the Great *Tribulation* (**Matthew 24:21**);
- and the Darkening of *the Sun, Moon, and Stars* (**Matthew 24:29**).

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2429-31/>

[The existence of such prophesied precursor events undermines the key tenet of the pre-trib position which is the doctrine of **imminence** = Christ could come at any moment.]

I. (:29) PRECURSOR TO HIS COMING = CELESTIAL UPHEAVAL

A. Timing Reference

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days”

Grant Osborne: When?

The return of the Lord is *“immediately after”* the tribulation period. One major doctrinal debate that centers on this passage is the so-called “rapture debate” within premillennialism. The issue is whether the Lord will return at the beginning (pretribulation position), in the middle (midtribulation), or at the end (posttribulation) of the “*great tribulation*” period (**24:21; Rev 7:14**). The pretribulation position (mostly dispensational scholars) believes that Jesus is addressing Jewish disciples rather than members of the church, and so Jesus is not addressing the “rapture” at the beginning of the period (which is only for the church) but the “revelation” of Jesus in power and glory at the end of the period.

The midtribulation position argues that this is the same event as **Rev 11:11–12** (the catching up of the two witnesses, who symbolize the church) and so the middle of the period described in **Rev 6–19**.

The posttribulation position asserts that there is **only one return**, not two; and so this must be the same event as **Rev 19:11–21** (cf. **1 Thess 4:13–18; 5:1–12**, which they say is also a single event) and must occur *“immediately after”* this period. Amillennialists would tend to agree with the posttribulation position on **Matt 24:29–31**.

[My position is the **Pre-Wrath Rapture** which differs from all three defined above. The Rapture occurs at some unknown time after the Great Tribulation but before the Day of the Lord.]

B. Disruption of Celestial Powers

*“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will fall from the sky,
and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,”*

Walter Wilson: With the sun and the moon inoperative, time effectively stops, the entire space-time continuum undergoing transformation. Presumably the *powers* (δυνάμεις) mentioned at the end of **24:29** refer to the **celestial entities** mentioned previously in the verse, rather than to spiritual forces located in the heavens (as, for example, in **1 Pet 3:22**). In either case, the only

“power” left in the universe belongs to the Son of Man, the arrival of darkness prefiguring the **eschatological punishment** he will mete out in **25:30**.

Leon Morris: Jesus is saying that, whatever the powers of the heavens may be, they are subject to God, and that at this time, that of the return of the Son of man to this earth, their power will be disturbed. Whatever functions they may be exercising at the time will be affected by the great fact that the Son of man is coming back to this earth to bring an end to the current system and to inaugurate the reign of God over all the earth.

BethanyBible.org: Now; these words are describing something astonishing. And many Bible teachers and scholars have assumed that they must be speaking of something figurative or symbolic. But I believe they are describing something **very literal**.

For one thing, the description our Lord gives is of something that seems to be mentioned in many different places in prophetic Scripture concerning the coming Day of the Lord. I find it hard to believe that something mentioned so often in Scripture—and often in nearly the same terms—is meant to be taken symbolically.

II. (:30) POWER AND GLORY OF HIS COMING

A. Sign of the Son of Man

“and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,”

Richard Gardner: In the midst of this picturesque description, Jesus speaks of the sign about which the disciples inquired, the sign of the Son of Man which will appear in heaven (**v. 30a**). But to what is Jesus referring? One of the earliest (though less likely) interpretations of the allusion is the sign of the cross. More recently, commentators have proposed that the sign consists of a counterpart to the blaring trumpet mentioned in **verse 31**, either a military standard or ensign (cf. **Isa. 18:3; Jer. 4:21; 6:1; 51:27**) or a **great display of light**. [Shekinah Glory indicating the presence of the Lord = the Parousia] Still others argue that the sign is Jesus himself, and that we should translate the words in question: The sign which is the Son of Man. One way or another, Jesus is telling his disciples: **You will know it when you see it!**

David Thompson: There is debate among scholars as to exactly what the sign of the Son of Man actually is. Some have speculated that it is a type of Shekinah glory. **Dr. Gaebel** believes it will be the Shekinah cloud which shrouded Israel in the O.T. times. The same cloud seen when Christ ascended into heaven (**Acts 1:9**). This will be a sign that the glory of God is coming back to Israel. However, if we look at **Revelation 19:11-16**, there is a graphic description of the coming of Christ. This may include all of these signs. In other words, after the world sees these things happening in the sky, they look up and see the Son of Man coming on a white horse with armies following Him. This would be quite an amazing sign.

Ray Stedman: Let us not miss the fact that he links this sign with the statement, *“then all the tribes of the earth will mourn.”* We shall examine that more fully a bit later, but from other Scripture it appears that he means the **tribes of Israel**. Since this sign is thus linked with Israel it strongly suggests that the sign will consist of the reappearance of the cloud of glory which accompanied the nation Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness for forty years. It was called the **Shekinah**, and was the **sign of God's presence with his people**. Much later, when the

Temple was built and Solomon dedicated it to God, the Shekinah glory came down and took rest in the holy of holies upon the Ark of the Covenant as the sign that God was dwelling with His people.

This shining cloud may well be what Jesus himself is referring to when he says, "*They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven.*" There is an obvious reference to this same event in **Revelation 1:7**. There John says: "*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.*" Of course it can simply refer to the atmospheric clouds, but the repeated emphasis seems suggestive of more. When Jesus thus appears it will mark the close of the age, but it will also be the opening event of a new age, and the supreme characteristic of that new age will be that **God dwells with His people**. In **Revelation 21:3**, John describes it, "*Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them.*" Since the Shekinah is the sign of God's presence with man, it is fitting that it should reappear as the sign that explains, clarifies, and reveals the meaning of Christ's coming. He comes that he may be, as the Old Testament prophets whispered, "*Immanuel-God with us.*"

Marvin Rosenthal: The sign of the appearing of the Son of man in heaven will be manifested following the opening of the sixth seal (**Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27**). This occurs after the Great Tribulation but long before the end of the seventieth week. The seven trumpet judgments must be poured out before the seventieth week ends (**Rev. 11:15**). The fifth trumpet judgment alone is said to last five months (**Rev. 9:1, 5**). This appearance of the Son of man in heaven before the opening of the seventh seal is related to the rapturing of the church before the Day of the Lord's wrath begins. God does not exempt his people from man's wrath; He does exempt them from His wrath (Lot was told to flee Sodom and Noah to get into the ark before God's wrath fell.). God's wrath begins with the opening of the seventh seal, for out of the seventh seal the seven trumpet judgments will emerge.

The cosmic disturbance introduced with the opening of the sixth seal is the prelude of the Rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord wrath.

B. Sorrow of the Tribes of Israel

"and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn,"

S. Lewis Johnson: And he adds, "*And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.*" Now that's a very interesting statement. I wish it were possible for me to talk about the Old Testament significance of the term, *earth*, and also the New Testament significance of the term, *earth*. The word *ge* in Greek, which is often rendered "*earth*" is a word that also means "*land*." Now if it means, earth, if it means earth, we normally think about the whole of this globe, but if it should mean, land, then of course, we would think about the land; that is, the **land of Palestine**. And in the light of the fact that he says, *then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn*, lends some credence to the interpretation that what he is saying is that when the Son of man appears in heaven, then the tribes for Israel, and its tribe shall be back in the land, the tribes of the land shall mourn. In other words, Israel shall come to the realization that it is the Messiah that they crucified when the Lord Jesus Christ was hanged upon the cross.

Now that interpretation gains also some support from the passage in the Old Testament in the book of **Zechariah**, which seems to be the passage that our Lord was thinking about. **Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10** in which we read these words, "*And I will pour upon the house of David*

and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.” Isn’t that a striking passage? Here the Lord, here the prophet speaking for the Lord, Yahweh it says, I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications. What is that? Why that’s Old Testament **effectual grace** which shall be poured out in the future. It is exactly what the Bible teaches when it speaks about God opening the hearts of people to believe. He will pour out upon these tribes, specifically here the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, such a ministry of the Holy Spirit that they shall look unto—isn’t it startling that Jehovah should say—*they will look upon me whom they have pierced? . . .*

C. Sight of the Returning Son of Man

“and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”

Ray Stedman: The reference of Jesus to his coming "*with power and great glory*" reminds us immediately of the closing words of the Lord's Prayer. How many times have you prayed, "*For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory?*" That prayer reflects the anticipation of God's people, through all the dark centuries, of the eventual coming of that flaming hope when the power and the glory of the universe will be in the hands of the One to whom it rightfully belongs.

III. (:31) PURPOSE OF HIS COMING = TO GATHER HIS ELECT

A. Galvanizing of the Angels

“And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet”

B. Gathering of the Elect

“and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

D.A. Carson: The “*four winds*” represent the four points of the compass (**Eze 37:9; Da 8:8; 11:4**)—the elect are gathered from all over (cf. **8:11**), “*from one end of the heavens to the other*” (from every place under the sky), since that is how far the gospel of the kingdom will have been preached (**v.14**). Although all nations of the earth will mourn, nevertheless the elect are drawn from them.

Leon Morris: The angels will be sent to gather his elect; the messengers of heaven will gather up the saints of earth. Jesus brings out the truth that not one of them will be overlooked; the angels will gather them from the four winds, which is expressive enough as a reference to the whole earth, but here it is reinforced with from one end of the heavens to the other. Jesus’ followers are encouraged by the certainty that on the last day **not one of God’s people will be missing.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you believe the Second Coming of Christ occurs in two stages (including a Rapture) or is just a single event?
- 2) What type of cosmic chaos will result from the disruption of celestial powers described here?

- 3) What will be the significance of the return of Christ encased in **Shekinah Glory**?
- 4) Who are the “*elect*” that will be gathered at this end time point?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson: The Second Advent, The Hope of the World

It is perhaps, possible, too in the light of the statement, *they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*, that there will be around him some form of glory, like the **shekinah glory** of the Old Testament. Remember, God led Israel through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud in the day and pillar of fire at night. The pillar of fire was the sign of the divine presence and that shekinah glory hovered over the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, and over the temple for a while, until ultimately the glory of God departed from the temple because of their unbelief. So it is possible, perhaps probable, that when our Lord Jesus does come in his Second Advent there will be a blast of glory, that in the skies, that all shall recognize as the glory that comes from the one who is very God of very God. So he then says, immediately after those days, there will be cosmic agitation and then there will be the kingly advent in glory. . .

Now we began by saying our society is suffering from absence of hope and presence of fear. I think the second coming is the ultimate solution, because it illuminates the ultimate triumph of the Lord Jesus over the forces of evil. He will come again as the governor of this creation, and we are not, therefore, without hope. If we look round about us at the problems of life, the problems of population and pollution, and all of the other kinds of disturbances that lie about us, and if our eyes are so earthbound that we look only at them, we do have reason for fear. But if our eyes look off to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, there is tremendous hope. . .

The second coming is also our ultimate hope because it underscores the fact that history is going somewhere. It's moving to a goal. Tennyson was not far wrong, even though he didn't have the true faith: "One God one law one element and one far off divine event to which the whole creation move." Therefore we look into the future in the midst of the absence of hope with the presence of fear with confidence and a surging hope. And we reply and we pray, even so come come quickly Lord Jesus.

David Turner: Biblical Allusions

Biblical imagery permeates **Matt. 24:29–31**. The table presents the most significant citations and allusions. The crucial text is **Dan. 7**, where God is pictured as an awesome judge, "*the Ancient of Days*" (**Dan. 7:9**), who passes sentence in favor of the son of man, giving universal dominion to him and his people (**7:14, 22, 27**). The context is eschatological reversal, in which the "*little horn*" (**7:8, 20, 24–25**), the archenemy of God and Israel, is judged and defeated. In both **Dan. 7** and **Matt. 24**, the coming of the Son of Man ends the persecution of God's saints and begins their glorious rule with Jesus.

Biblical Allusions in Matt. 24:29–31

Matthew	Topic	Hebrew Bible
24:29a	Tribulation	Dan. 12:1
24:29b	Sun and moon darkened	Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15
24:29c	Stars fallen, shaken	Isa. 34:4; Hag. 2:6
24:30a, 30c	Son of Man coming on the clouds in glory and power	Jer. 4:13; Dan. 7:13–14
24:30b	Tribes mourn	Zech. 12:10, 12
24:31a	Trumpet	Isa. 27:13
24:31b	Elect gathered	Deut. 30:4
24:31b	Four winds	Dan. 7:2; Zech. 2:6
24:31b	Ends of the sky	Deut. 4:32

Grant Osborne: The combination of the coming of the Son of Man and the trumpet blast plus angels and the resurrection of the saints links this with **1 Cor 15:52** and **1 Thess 4:15–16**. The trumpet blast announcing the coming of the king (**1 Kgs 1:34**), a sacred event (**Lev 25:9**), a theophany (**Exod 20:18; Heb 12:19**), a call to war (**Judg 6:34, 7:20; Isa 18:3**), or the day of the Lord (**Isa 27:13; Joel 2:1; Zech 9:14**) was a royal call either from the ruler or from God himself. For the place of the angels in the gathering of the saints and final judgment, see also **13:41, 49; 16:27; 25:31–32**.

John MacArthur: The Sign of the Son of Man

1) Sequence – When will the Lord return?

Now, remember that the disciples feel it must be very near because they know the Lord is the Messiah, because He has cleansed the temple, you remember, threw out the moneychangers and the buyers and the sellers. Because He has promised that the whole temple will be torn down

and not one stone will be left upon another. They believe, then, that He is going to come and wipe out hypocritical, false Judaism. He is going to wipe out the false religious leaders. He is going to purge the nation. And because they've already seen Him cleanse the inside by throwing everybody out and He has just predicted that the stones are going to be torn down, they believe His coming is very, very near. And with very anxious hearts, they have sat down with Him on the Mount of Olives and they have said: "Lord, how near is it? And what is the sign we look for that You're going to come into Your full parousia, Your full presence and be King?" And they must believe it's only a matter of days now before this is all going to happen. And the Lord says I'll answer your question, it can't happen until immediately after this time period. And they don't realize that this time period is thousands of years into the future from where they are. But our Lord makes it very clear that it isn't until that time period after which the second coming occurs. . .

2) Setup – How does the Lord set up this event?

The earth is held together by the power of the heavens, and when that power is not there, the chaos is going to be indescribable. And how God can even preserve life for a few moments, or days, a few weeks, so that the kingdom can be established, is only by His supernatural overruling of the chaos of those natural forces disintegrating. It's something we can only imagine. . .

3) Sign of His coming

It is a **subjective genitive**, the sign by which He reveals Himself. Not the sign, objective genitive, to which it points. The sign is the Son of man in heaven, in other words. Then shall appear the sign. What is it? It's the Son of man in heaven. That's the sign. It isn't a cross and it isn't a light detached from the Son of man, it is the Son of man in heaven. In the midst of this blackness will appear in blazing, infinite, unveiled glory, the Son of man. In fact, at the end of verse 30, it says He will come not just with glory but with what? Great glory. Glory like the world has never seen. The unveiled Shekinah. So much so that Revelation 6 says people scream for the rocks and the mountains to cover them up and hide them from the face of the One who sits on the throne, the One who comes in blazing glory. And I believe it's none other than the Lord Himself. . .

4) Strength – He comes with power

I mean can you imagine the power to just set the whole universe reeling, to set the whole earth rocking on its axis. He has power over the whole created universe. He has power over Satan. He has power over demons. He has power to slaughter all the ungodly Christ-rejecting unbelievers worldwide. He has power to establish His kingdom. He has power to redeem His elect. This is power without equal. Great power, great power. No power like it. He comes with the holy angels, comes to sit on the throne of His glory, **chapter 25 verse 31** says. Great power. In fact, Isaiah calls it in **chapter 63** the day of vengeance of our God when He treads out the winepress of His wrath.

5) Sorrow – Unsaved Gentiles will mourn; Jews will mourn -- but with godly sorrow leading to repentance of all Israel

6) Select – Collecting His select elect for His eternal kingdom

TEXT: Matthew 24:32-35

TITLE: LEARN FROM THE FIG TREE – END TIME EVENTS QUICKLY LEAD TO FINAL FULFILMENT

BIG IDEA:

THERE IS A CLOSE TEMPORAL RELATIONSHIP TO END TIME SIGNS AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus has finished responding to the disciples' question of v. 3 and now is giving the implications of the whole chapter. When the signs of vv. 15–28 appear, they will know the end is near (vv. 4–14; note those signs that do not herald the end). This is then followed by a series of parables on **imminence** and **readiness**.

David Turner: This passage parabolically expresses the **nearness of Jesus's coming (24:32–33)** and solemnly affirms its **certainty (24:34–35)**. Jesus's contemporaries are familiar with the fig tree's budding and blossoming in the spring and in the summer bearing fruit (24:32), and so he compares his coming to this process (24:33). In terms of the disciples' question in 24:3, the "sign" is the tree's spring budding and blossoming, and Jesus's "coming" is the summer bearing of fruit. When the disciples see the spring signs, they know that summer's coming is near. The affirmation of 24:34 depends on the eternal trustworthiness of Jesus's words (24:35).

Marvin Rosenthal: The Lord's teaching is unmistakably clear. The fig tree was a **time indicator**. When its branches became soft and it put forth leaves, the Jewish people knew that summer was near (getting close), but they did not know the exact time. The fig tree was a sign of **approximation**. Likewise, when the events described in **Matthew 24:4-28** occur, men will know that Christ's coming (*parousia*) is near. Like the fig tree, those events will be a sign of approximation. Men of faith will know the general period of Christ's coming (*parousia*), but they will not know the hour or the day; therefore, the admonition to watchfulness (**Matt. 24:42**).

The Lord's coming (*parousia*) is a **comprehensive whole**. There is only **one Second Coming**. It includes the Rapture of the church [pre-wrath timeframe], the outpouring of God's wrath during the Day of the lord, and Christ's physical return in glory. The meaning of the word *coming* (*parousia*) demonstrates that fact. It means **a coming and continuing presence**. That would be contradicted by the concept of a coming at the beginning of the seventieth week and another at its end, as pretribulationism has often taught.

[Study the usage of *parousia* in the NT: **Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:1, 19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:8; James 5:7, 8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28]**

In each and every instance, the word *coming* (*parousia*) is either modified by the personal pronoun his or thy or, most frequently, with the definite article the. And in every case, his return is in the singular; not comings but coming. There is not even a hint – anywhere – of two separate comings. That is simple, unadorned, biblical fact. The often-heard suggestion that Christ will come first *for* His church and then return to the earth a second time seven years later *with* His church is an assumption with no biblical evidence to substantiate it. The argument that

verses which speak of the coming sometimes refer to the Rapture and other times to Christ's return in glory, and therefore, that there must be two comings, is without basis. This argument total ignores the fact that Christ's coming (*parousia*) includes both His coming and consequent presence to accomplish His purposes. Some texts which speak of Christ's coming are emphasizing the Rapture and the Day of the Lord; others His return in power and glory. But these events are part of one composite whole – **the Second Coming**.

(:32a) PROLOGUE – GROWTH CYCLE OF THE FIG TREE TEACHES US

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree:”

I. (:32-33) END TIME SIGNS POINT TO SOON ULTIMATE FULFILMENT

A. (:32b) Lesson from Nature – Correlation between Fig Tree Sprouting Leaves and Soon Arrival of Summer

“when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;”

Grant Osborne: The fig tree was the **harbinger of summer**. It was somewhat unusual among trees of Palestine in that it lost its leaves when winter hit. That makes it easier to note the change in spring when the sap begins to flow and the branches become “soft” or “tender” and ready to sprout leaves. Since this is easy to see with the absence of leaves, fig trees were one of the primary signs of the approach of summer. As the leaves began to unfurl, people's hearts surged with joy because the warm days of summer were around the corner.

The Bible Says: The changing of a *tree's leaves* is nature's way to indicate a change in season is approaching. Jesus used *the fig tree* as His example. He possibly used *the fig tree* because He was sitting on the Mount of Olives (**Mark 13:3**) where *fig trees* were present. Jesus cursed a *fig tree* near this very spot a few days earlier on His way into Jerusalem for not having any fruit despite being in leaf (**Matthew 21:19**). And the nearby village of Bethphage means “*house of the unripe fig*” indicating that *fig trees* were abundant in this area. *The fig tree* also undergoes several obvious leaf cycles throughout the year.

Because it was Passover (early/mid spring), a *fig tree's branches* were either *already tender* and putting forth its leaves or about to do so. *Tender branches* mean new growth. This takes place during the increasing warmth of spring. Everyone who saw *tender branches* in *the fig tree* would instantly recognize and *know that summer, though not yet here, is near*.

Using this visible and simple example of approaching change from nature, Jesus told His disciples, *so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near. . .*

Jesus wanted to His disciples to *know* that the Messiah's coming was *near* when they saw these events just as easily as they knew *summer* was *near* when they noticed the *tender branches* and new leaves on a *fig tree*.

For emphasis, Jesus added the expression, *right at the door*. This indicated that *all these things* would practically occur the instant before *He* appeared.

Assuring the disciples with His personal divine authority, Jesus said, *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2432-35/>

Leon Morris: Jesus turns from the signs that will precede his coming to the kind of conduct that is appropriate in his servants as they await him. As he has so often done throughout his ministry, he proceeds to teach by means of a parable, this one not so much a story (as many of them were) as a command to pay attention to the significance of the way the fig tree grows (REB, “*Learn a lesson from the fig tree*”). Most trees in first-century Palestine, we are told, kept their leaves throughout the year, but not the fig tree. This tree sheds its leaves in winter, but year by year the miracle takes place in spring. The branch becomes tender (the reference will be to the change that takes place when the sap rises in the spring) and puts forth leaves. There are other ways of knowing that the winter has come to an end, but anyone who has grown trees knows how satisfying it is to see the new leaves make their appearance. There is then no doubt that the harsh days of winter are gone and that summer is near. The fig tree does not bring the summer, but the appearance of its new leaves is a sure and certain indication that summer is now at hand.

B. (:33) Application to End Time Events – Correlation to End Time Signs and Soon Return of Christ

“even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.”

Leon Morris: The followers of Jesus are to be no less discerning than the orchardist. When the tokens of which he has spoken make their appearance, they are commanded, “*know that it is near*” (it is also possible to take the Greek in the sense “*you know*”); the imminence is underlined with *right at the doors*. It is also possible to understand the meaning as “*he is near*” (so NRSV), but this does not seem nearly as probable as “*it*”; the reference is to the whole series of events, not simply to the central person.

II. (:34) TARGET AUDIENCE = GENERATION VIEWING THE SIGNS

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

Warren Wiersbe: The generation alive on earth at that time will see these events take place.

Opposing View: **Donald Hagner:** The attempt to explain ἡ γενεὰ αὐτή, “*this generation*,” as the generation alive at the time of the *parousia* or more generally as the human race or people of God goes against the natural meaning of the phrase and makes the words irrelevant both to Jesus’ listeners and to Matthew’s readers. The fact that, as **Lövestam** has shown, the expression clearly alludes to a sinful generation, one ripe for judgment, fits the fall of Jerusalem (and not merely the end of the age, which is **Lövestam**’s conclusion).

III. (:35) CERTAINTY OF FULFILMENT GUARANTEED

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”

David Thompson: Jesus makes a promise that **everything He has said will take place**. He will not return until every one of these signs has been fulfilled—the world will experience God’s wrath. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away. What is interesting

about this statement is that heaven and earth will not pass away until after Jesus Christ has come back and reigned for 1000 years (**Rev. 21:1ff**). However, His words will not pass away. The Word of God will be in existence forever. Now the generation that Jesus refers to – “*this generation*” – is a reference to Jewish people, who will be in existence when the signs take place. Keep in mind that one of the signs will be an extermination plot of the antichrist to destroy the Jews (**Rev. 12:13, 17**). If you are a Jewish person and you actually see these signs occurring, you will think the entire nation of Israel will be destroyed. However, Jesus makes it clear that Israel will not pass away. She will survive and He will return.

Donald Hagner: Heaven and earth, seemingly so permanent, are transitory and are destined to pass away in their present form with the dawning of the eschaton (cf. **Isa 51:6; 2 Peter 3:7, 11–12**). By contrast, the words of Jesus (οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου, “*but my words*”) will endure forever. They are thereby made the equivalent of the word of God, which is the usual contrasting element in such statements (e.g., **Isa 40:8**). In the present context, the emphasis falls not on the teaching of Jesus generally (as, e.g., in **7:24, 26**) but on the **authority and reliability of his words concerning the future**. Though all else of the present order will pass away, the words of Jesus will not fail.

Stanley Saunders: In **Isaiah 65:17**, from which Matthew draws this image, and **Revelation 21:1**, the vision of heaven and earth passing away also reveals the glory of the new creation that follows God’s judgment of the world’s empires.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Since these signs have not yet occurred, how can one hold to the doctrine of imminency?
- 2) Why can’t the reference to “*this generation*” be to the disciples listening to the words of Jesus?
- 3) How does Jesus’ promise that “*heaven and earth will pass away*” inform our approach to those whose agenda demands that we preserve the environment at all costs?
- 4) Shouldn’t the reliability of Jesus’ prophecies regarding future events motivate us to study end time prophecies more diligently with the enthusiasm of expectation rather than avoiding the subject because of “controversy”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: As was said at **10:23**, Jesus expected a lengthy period before the end (**13:24–33; 19:28; 21:43; 23:32; 24:14; 28:19**) and so cast his soon return in the light of the interim period between his advents. So “nearness” means it can occur in the near future, but God is the one who decides how near (see v. **36**). The believer is to be ready at all times in light of the near and sudden (v. **27**) return of Christ.

This will be the theme of the parables that will follow this. The signs will herald the end, but we must differentiate those that are not signs (vv. 4–14) from those that are (vv. 25–26). Moreover, we must realize that with our finite perspective we may not be reading the signs correctly. This is the problem with many who label themselves “prophecy preachers.” We dare not apply certitude to our reading of current events; the only certain thing is the appearance of Antichrist (**2 Thess 2:3**), whom the church has often prematurely identified as the popes (Reformation period) or Mussolini or Hitler, etc. Still, Jesus encourages us to note the signs.

John MacArthur: Could Jesus Come Today?

The theme of the second coming fills the New Testament. It is the great anticipatory reality of Christian living. We look back to the cross where our souls were redeemed. We look forward to the second coming where our bodies will be redeemed and we will enter into the fullness of our salvation. And we as Christians long for the day when Jesus comes because it is in that day that Satan will be defeated. It is in that day that the curse will be lifted. It is in that day that saints will be glorified, that Christ will be worshiped, that creation will be liberated, and that sin and death will be eliminated. And so with great anticipation do we look for the second coming of Jesus Christ. And we believe it is a real event that will happen as historically as did His first coming with just as far-reaching and glorious impact. . .

Having given them those things as indicators, He knows in their mind they still have a question. When all those signs begin, how long will it be? How long does it last until the kingdom is established? How long until the Son of God reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords? How long do the birth pains last? How long is it from the sign in heaven to the kingdom on earth? And so to summarize and act as a transition into the “when” question, He gives this parable and its explanation in **verses 32 to 35**. And I want you to look at it – it’s marvelous – and I want you to see four elements as it unfolds.

1) An uncomplicated analogy (:32)

Parables, then, had a twofold purpose: Parables unexplained hid the truth; parables explained made the truth clear. That was the twofold purpose of a parable. When Jesus gave a parable to the multitude or to the religious leaders and never explained it, it was a riddle to them. When He gave it to the disciples and explained it, it was an illustration that made things all that much more clear. So He says the reason I speak in parables is to hide things from the quote/unquote wise and prudent of this world and to reveal them unto babes. Parables explained become illustrations by which things are made clear. Parables unexplained are riddles by which things are made unclear. And so Jesus now speaks to the disciples and explains what He means exactly so that for them the parable becomes a living illustration making the truth very, very clear. It is an uncomplicated analogy.

2) An unmistakable application (:33)

What are all those things? The birth pains of **verses 4 to 14**, the abomination of desolation of **verse 15**, the need to flee because of great tribulation in **verses 16 to 28**. So the birth pains, the signal for the beginning of the birth pains, the calamities that come upon the earth, the subtle confusion of those who cry out, “The Messiah is here,” “The Messiah is there,” the sinful corruption like a dead carcass to be eaten by birds, and then the sign of the Son of Man in heaven as the sky goes black and the Son of Man appears in all His glory. All these things, He says, when you see all these things, it’s like the tree putting forth leaves, and you know that it is near. . .

That is the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the end of man's day, it is the beginning of God's day. "*Know that the kingdom is near,*" the Millennial kingdom of **Revelation chapter 20 verse 4 and 5** is in view here, when Jesus Christ reigns with His redeemed saints for a thousand years upon the earth and Satan is bound. The glorious kingdom promised to Israel when Israel will be back in its land and will be preserved from all its enemies and become the servants of the Most High God, the time when Gentiles ten at a time will grab on to the skirt of a Jew and the Jew will take them to God that they may know the true God. It is the time promised by all the prophets of old, that great kingdom.

3) An unmistakable application (:34)

What generation will not pass away? [various views explained]

You cannot confuse the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. with the second coming of Jesus Christ. And they're not asking Him about the coming of Romans, they're asking about the coming of Christ. When they said in **verse 3**, "*What shall be the sign of Thy coming?*" they didn't ask, "What's the sign of the Romans coming?" and when He answered them, He answered their question. And their question had to do with His coming. Plus, there is no way under the sun that you can fit all of these events into 70 A.D. . .

This [next view] is probably the one you've been exposed to, that is this, **that the fig tree is Israel**. And when – and by the way, that doesn't say that, either, in the Scripture; it just says here's an illustration of a fig tree. Somebody along the line says the fig tree is Israel. Jesus didn't say that. So now you have stopped the analogy and you've got an allegory. And you have to tell us what the elements of the allegory refer to. So we say then that the fig tree is Israel and when it puts forth its leaves, I've heard, that is the statehood of Israel in 1948. Now, have you heard that view? Okay, that's sort of a popular view. That when Israel becomes a state – well, in the first place, Jesus didn't say that, and how in the world the disciples would have ever perceived the statehood of Israel in 1948 is pretty far-fetched.

And you have to remember this: Jesus is illustrating for them the things He's teaching them. He is trying to make clear what He has taught them. He is not trying to say something to them that is so infinitely obscure that it could never be perceived by anybody who lived before 1948. Plus, how can we conclude that the life pulsing through the fig tree and pushing out leaves is the statehood of Israel? Certainly if we're thinking – if we would use it that way, it would have to be if the tree was Israel and it started to put forth leaves, we would assume that it was life coming into Israel, right? And life coming into Israel would be spiritual, not physical, and Israel, though alive today, is one of the most secular nations on the face of the earth. So it doesn't make a good allegory of the spiritual revival of Israel.

And why would the Lord talk about only the statehood of Israel as if it were spiritual life pulsing through the nation and who is to say that the fig tree refers to them anyway when the context has nothing to do with the survival or restoration of the nation Israel but has to do with the second coming of Jesus Christ? So I think that also is an unacceptable, though imaginative, view.

What's left? My view. Now, my view is – you know, and I went into this pretty open-minded because, you know, I've thought about a lot of these things, and I was just reading, and it's so clear to me what He's saying. When the branch is tender and puts forth leaves, you know that judgment is near. So when you see all these things – all what things? The leaves. And what are

the leaves? The birth pains, right? The sign in heaven. The attendant signs. All the things He's been describing through the whole chapter. When you see all those things, you know that judgment is near. And this generation – what generation? The “*this*” has to modify **the people who see all those things**. This generation that sees all those things will not end until the rest is fulfilled. . .

An unprecedented alteration (:35)

And the sum of it is in **verse 35**: “*Heaven and earth shall come to an end.*” As we know it, heaven and earth will end. The earth that we know, the heaven that we know, will cease.

Now, just exactly all that that embodies is very, very difficult for us to perceive. We've read much of Revelation and many things written by Isaiah the prophet and others, so we know that heaven and earth are going to pass away as we know them, and in their place is going to come a new creation – a new creation.

Finally, Jesus said this: “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words*” – what? – “*shall not pass away.*” That is an **unchanging authority**. And He closes the parable with an unchanging authority. “*My Word shall not pass away.*” In **Luke 16:17**, He said heaven and earth will pass away and it's easier for them to do that than for one tittle out of the law to pass away. He said not one jot or one tittle in **Matthew 5:18** will pass away until all is fulfilled. In **John 10:35**, He said Scripture cannot be broken. And so if we believe the Word of God, we believe this is going to happen – **it's going to happen**.

Matthew McCraw: His return gives us hope that all of His promises will be fulfilled. His return causes us to be careful in our conduct. His return reminds us of the necessity to share the Gospel with others. His return encourages us to remember that this world will pass away and everything will be made new. His return confirms that we will be able to see our friends and family who trusted Jesus as Lord. His return guarantees an end to sin and its terrible effects. His return brings answers to so many questions. His return settles the end times debates (which I so look forward to). His return wipes away every tear. His return settles every debt. His return heals every disease. His return starts the perfect rest for all of us. And so much more!

He will soon be at the door! He will return!

TEXT: Matthew 24:36-44

TITLE: *BE DISCERNING . . . BE ALERT . . . BE PREPARED -- FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT*

BIG IDEA:

SPIRITUAL VIGILANCE NEEDED SINCE THE EXACT TIMING OF CHRIST'S RETURN IN JUDGMENT IS UNKNOWN

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: This begins the **next major section** of the Olivet Discourse, the parables on watchfulness (24:36 – 25:30). This passage provides the thesis for the section, **alert vigilance** as we await the end, and leads into the parables that follow.

God has not seen fit to reveal the time of the eschaton; not even Christ knows the date. As a result, people will be living lives unaware and unprepared; many of them will be left for judgment when the Lord comes. There is only one conclusion: be continually vigilant and live lives of readiness for the Master's return.

Donald Hagner: Eschatology is never presented for the sake of mere information but always and consistently as the motivation for ethical living. Again, the fact of the parousia, not the time of the parousia, is what matters. The evangelist stresses the need to be prepared for that coming reality.

Richard Gardner: The sayings that follow in **verses 37-44** all depict situations in which a lack of readiness or vigilance spells disaster for persons when an unexpected trauma befalls them. Such was the case with the carefree contemporaries of Noah, engrossed in the pursuit of everyday life when the flood literally took them by storm! (vv. 37-39; cf. **Gen. 6—8; 2 Pet. 2:5**). Such is the case with a homeowner who is asleep at night, blissfully unaware that a thief has entered unannounced and is burglarizing his belongings (vv. 43-44; cf. **1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15**).

And such will be the case at the end as pairs of men and women labor at their customary tasks of farming and milling, when God's own harvest operation suddenly commences and separates the prepared from the unprepared (vv. 40-42; cf. **13:36-43**).

These assorted pictures and comparisons support the summons to vigilance in **verses 42 and 44**. Only if suitably prepared will Jesus' followers be able to welcome his sudden coming and the judgment it brings.

David Turner: At this point Jesus moves from speaking predictively to speaking paraenetically. From now on, his goal is not to provide additional information to answer the disciples' question (24:3) but to exhort them on the proper response to that information. This may not be what the disciples want to know, but it is what they need to know. This material is mainly parabolic. The first (24:36–42) and last (25:31–46) sections are not parables, but both utilize quasi-parabolic comparisons (24:37–39; 25:32). **W. Davies and Allison** (1997: 374) point out that 24:36 sets the tone for the rest of the discourse: **ignorance of the time of Jesus's coming should result in constant alertness**.

Jesus begins by drawing a lesson on alertness from history (24:36–42). The next three segments underline the lesson on alertness by drawing from scenes from everyday life:

- (1) an owner of a house and a thief (24:43–44),
- (2) a faithful and an evil slave (24:45–51), and
- (3) thoughtful and foolish bridesmaids (25:1–13).

Constant alertness (24:42–44, 46, 50; 25:13) is mandatory, since the time of Jesus’s coming is unknowable. Alertness must be accompanied by dependable stewardship (25:14–30) and compassion toward needy disciples (25:31–46).

William Hendriksen: Spiritual and moral circumspection and forethought are required; preparedness is necessary. The watchful person has his loins girded and his lamps burning (Luke 12:35). It is in that condition that he looks forward to the coming of the Bridegroom.

I. (:36) MYSTERY REGARDING THE EXACT TIMING OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

John MacArthur: In other words, Jesus’ knowledge in His incarnation was qualified by what the Father had revealed to Him. And the Father revealed things to Him through Scripture; that is, the Old Testament, as He studied the Scripture, through experience as He walked in the world and saw the moving of the power of God, and through direct revelation. But **Jesus limited His knowledge to what the Father chose to reveal to Him.** He didn’t have to do that but He chose to do that to play the role of a servant to accomplish the redemption of mankind. It’s a very important concept so that when it says He humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant, was made in fashion as a man, and so forth, it means that He limited the use of those attributes. And if you studied, for example, in the passages that deal with His early life, you will remember that it says Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, you remember, and favor with God and man. He grew in wisdom. . .

Now, it is my own personal feeling that **after the resurrection**, this was revealed to Him. That when He came out of the grave in the glory of His resurrection life, it says in **Matthew 28:18**, He said to His disciples, “*All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth.*” And I think what that’s saying is nothing is missing; I have authority over all things. And then in **Acts 1:7**, He said this: “*But unto you it is not given to know the times and the seasons which My Father has put in His own power;*” and He doesn’t include Himself anymore. He says “*unto you it isn’t given.*” So it may well be that after the resurrection, His knowledge was complete. It’s as if the Father only revealed to Him the next great event, and He never revealed to Him the full moment of His second coming until He had already come out of the grave and accomplished the resurrection, and then the Father opened to Him the next event in His marvelous, marvelous work. . .

And so we don’t know. That moment, we don’t know. And that’s – there’s a reason for that. Because the Lord wants every generation to live in **expectancy**, every generation to live – are you ready for this word? – in **preparedness**. We don’t know what generation it’s going to come upon. But when it comes, it’s going to come in a holocaust and it’s going to come rapid-fire. And we don’t know what generation that will be, and even the generation that comes on

isn't going to know the **exact moment**. So Christians ever since the New Testament have always lived in the eagerness of the coming of Christ.

Stu Weber: This teaching is also a warning to those who claim to know the time of Christ's return. Such claims have been made for centuries, and, as each one passes, the Messiah has still not come. One would think that people would learn from experience, if not from Jesus' own teaching. These speculations are foolish and disobedient. They ignore Jesus' teaching to believers to be obedient and ready at all times.

Craig Blomberg: **Verse 36** proves equally significant for **Christology**. Christ's words disclose his voluntary limitation of the independent exercise of his divine attributes (cf. **Phil 2:6-8**). Jesus was obviously not bodily omnipresent while he walked on earth. **Mark 6:5** describes some restrictions on his omnipotence. Here we have a **limitation on his omniscience**. Christians who balk at the implications of this verse reflect their own docetism (the early Christian heresy of not accepting the full humanity of Jesus) and lack a full appreciation for the extent of God's condescension in the incarnation and in the various human limitations he took upon himself.

D. A. Carson: The gist of **v.36** is clear enough. Jesus' disciples are morally bound to repress all desires to know what no one knows but the Father—not even angels (cf. **18:10; Ezra 4:52**) or the Son. If the Son himself does not know the time of the Parousia, “how cheerfully should we his followers rest in ignorance that cannot be removed, trusting in all things to our heavenly Father’s wisdom and goodness, striving to obey his clearly revealed will, and leaning on his goodness for support” (**Broadus**).

II. (:37-39) BE DISCERNING REGARDING THE RETURN OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT

A. (:37) Analogy to the Days of Noah

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.”

Leon Morris: There is a resemblance of the coming of the Son of man to the coming of the Flood. The time until then is likened to the days of Noah. . . when Noah and his family and the animals entered the ark, the Flood came very swiftly. The emphasis is on the **suddenness of the deluge**. “So,” Jesus says, “*will be the coming of the Son of man.*” We get the picture of a long time of waiting and of a sudden act at the conclusion.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus now illustrates the unexpectedness and unpredictability of his return by comparing it with the arrival of the flood in Noah's day (**vv. 37-39**). At that time the world's wicked were caught totally by surprise as they went about the ordinary activities of daily life, including festive events, oblivious to their impending destruction. Noah and his seven faithful family members were prepared but still did not know the specific timing of the cataclysm until the last moment (**Gen 6-7**). Compare the repetition of these two points in **1 Thess 5:1-3** and **4-6**, respectively. So also Christ's return will interrupt people in the ordinary activities of life.

R. T. France: If the time of the parousia is unknown, it follows that people will be caught unawares. The previous mention of the parousia in **v. 27** has used the image of lightning to portray both its unmistakable nature and also its suddenness. It is a universal event, not a hole-and-corner occurrence (in the wilderness or the store-rooms, **v. 26**) which most of the world would be able to ignore. Everyone will be affected by it. In all these ways the sudden and

universal onset of the flood as described in **Gen 7:6–24** provides a powerful analogy; people were caught unawares, no one could evade it, and only those who had made advance preparation escaped—a point which will be picked up especially in the parables of **25:1–30**. The description of normal life in v. **38** underlines the lack of any prior warning: things were carrying on just as they had always done (as the “*scoffers*” observe in **2 Peter 3:4**). But the time of normal banality is potentially also the time of danger.

Homer Kent: In an age of great wickedness (**Gen 6**), men went about their daily living undisturbed by impending doom. . . . But the flood took away all the wicked, so that only the righteous were left to inherit the earth. Likewise the coming of the Son of man, following the Great Tribulation (vv. **29-31**) will remove the wicked, in order that the faithful remnant who have come out of the Tribulation may participate in the Millennial blessings (cf. **25:31-46; 13:30, 41-43, 49, 50**).

B. (:38-39) Ignore God’s Warnings of Sudden Judgment at Your Own Peril

1. (:38-39a) Worldly Self Indulgent Lifestyle Lacks Spiritual Discernment

“For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away;”

John MacArthur: It’s almost unbelievable that they knew not, that the people in the time of Noah didn’t know it was going to rain because they had had somebody telling them that for 120 years. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. And he preached righteousness and judgment. And he gave them a very large sign of coming judgment by building a massive boat, an ark. Literally the word means “wooden chest.” This was the symbol and the sign, 120 years in building, that God was going to bring a devastation to drown the world. And it says until the Flood came and engulfed them, they didn’t realize it. They just went on eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. In other words, they went on with the routines of life, literally ignoring the preaching of judgment, literally ignoring the sign and the symbol of the coming Flood. And so it will be in the day of the second coming of Christ.

Grant Osborne: The picture here is of **normal life**, eating and drinking at meals and parties, getting married and giving their children in marriage (with present participles stressing the continuous nature of the activity). In itself it is not a negative picture, but these were a people obsessed with their daily lives, **giving no thought whatsoever to their obligations to God**. All this was to change when “*Noah entered the ark*,” but then it would be too late.

Donald Hagner: The people of Noah’s day were oblivious to all else than their own pleasurable living. And they had no inkling of the judgment that was to come upon them until it was too late: “*they did not know* [οὐκ ἔγνωσαν (i.e., the imminent danger)] *until the flood* [κατακλυσμός] *came and swept them away.*” The reference to Noah entering the ark in v. **38** is very close to the language of the LXX of **Gen 7:7**. The parousia of the Son of Man will in a similar way come suddenly upon an **unsuspecting generation** that is carrying on its ordinary activities. This fact leads to the main exhortation of the passage in v. **42**.

2. (:39b) Judgment Will Be Sudden and Unpredictable

“so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Grant Osborne: The danger of becoming **lackadaisical** is simply too great, for judgment will be swift, sudden, and irrevocable.

III. (:40-42) BE ALERT FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT

A. (:40-41) Two Examples of Sudden and Surprising Return of Christ in Judgment

1. (:40) Men Working in the Field

“Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left.”

Your view of the timing of the Rapture tends to dictate which category you place these two groups of people into. Since I hold to the pre-wrath Rapture position, I would interpret the ones “taken” as raptured and the ones “left” – then left for judgment. Those who hold to the pre-trib position would take the opposite view – cf. **Robert Gundry:**

Robert Gundry: The **taking away** of people by the flood favors that being taken along has to do with judgment at the Son of Man’s coming (compare the separation of the wicked out from among the righteous in the parables of the tares and foul fish [13:30, 40–42, 49–50]). Then being left means being spared from judgment. The accent doesn’t rest on the separation of people in proximity so much as on the occurrence of this separation during the round of daily activities and therefore unexpectedly—unless you’re watching.

2. (:41) Women Grinding at the Mill

“Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.”

John MacArthur: And then He gets very specific in **verse 40** and **41**. *“Then shall two be in the field, one shall be taken, the other left. Two grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left.”* The word “one” in **verse 40** is masculine in gender. The “one” in **verse 41** is feminine in gender. That means **verse 40** speaks of a man in the field, two men in the field, one taken, one left. **Verse 41** of women, two women grinding at the mill, one taken and the other left. The man’s task in that particular agricultural part of the world in that time was to be in the field and the women were there with the stone, the mill, grinding that which was harvested by the men. And so it’s just life as usual, and in the midst of the routine of life, one shall be taken.

What do we mean, “taken”? I’ve heard people say this means the Rapture. You can’t bring the Rapture in here. This is long after that. [Unless you hold to the pre-wrath view.] This is talking about **taken in judgment**. Go back to **verse 39**. *“Till the cataclysm came and took them away.”* It’s based on that imagery. It’s based on that picture of the flood sweeping men away into death. Two are going to be in the field when that final devastating flood of fire comes. And one is taken in judgment. Two at the mill and one is taken in judgment. And the other left – the other left – what are they left for? They’re left to go into what? Into the kingdom. And they become those who populate the Millennial kingdom. They are the redeemed. So you’ll have people on the job. Some will be believers and some will be unbelievers. The unbelievers will be swept away and the believers will be preserved.

By the way, that separation process is described in detail in the judgment of the sheep and goats in **Matthew 25:31** to **46**, where He takes the goats on the one hand and sends them into everlasting punishment, His sheep on the other hand and gives them the kingdom. So they are left. Very important. They are left for the kingdom. So it is this that we have to keep in

mind. When the Millennial kingdom comes and begins, the people who will be left to go into it will be believers who were not swept away in the judgment of all the ungodly. So the kingdom on earth, the Millennial kingdom, will be populated by those believers who have lived through the reign of terror of the antichrist and he has not destroyed them. They're still alive when Christ comes. Christ sweeps away in a holocaust of judgment all the ungodly, but the godly that still remain and are alive will go into His eternal – rather, into His Millennial kingdom to populate that kingdom. So that kingdom is populated, then, by physical beings, real people like we are, who've lived through antichrist's reign of terror, who believed in the truth of the gospel and were not destroyed. Maybe some of them even believed at the last moment.

Stu Weber: By way of specific illustration and application, Jesus gave two examples from the contemporary lifestyle of his day. The two men working in the field and the two women grinding grain at the mill represented the **average citizen**. The message of this was, "Everyone needs to heed these warnings." One of each pair was prepared because he or she knew Jesus' teachings, had watched for the signs, and had remained obedient.

The other in each pair was unprepared, because he or she had either been ignorant of Jesus' teaching or else simply ignored them and not lived according to the righteous standards of the king and his kingdom. Such people were taken from the scene when the king returned to rule. Jesus' point was: **be prepared**. His arrival will be sudden and unpredictable.

Leon Morris: Here, too, there is **separation**: one is taken and one is left. In both the field and the mill the emphasis is on **division**. The coming of Jesus marks a complete and permanent division. Jesus makes clear that the coming of the Son of man does not mean that all indiscriminately will enter into the joys of that day. Those who have chosen to live without God will find their choice respected when the great day comes. It will be the portion of the godless to be without God.

B. (:42) Exhortation: Be Alert for the Lord's Coming in Judgment

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."

John MacArthur: But the word here is – **verse 42** – *be alert*. It's a present imperative, be continually alert. Every generation, every person, be alert, "*For you know not what hour your Lord does come.*" It's a cry for constant vigilance, constant alertness. He will come and men who recognize that He is coming will be alert to that coming, spiritually aware.

Robert Gundry: *To stay awake* means to keep watching for the events that will signal the nearness of the Son of Man's coming. "*Therefore*" bases the command to stay awake on the already stated impossibility of knowing the day and hour of the Son of Man's coming. The consequent redundancy of "*because you don't know at what particular day your Lord is coming*" adds further emphasis on that impossibility.

IV. (:43-44) BE PREPARED FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT

A. (:43) Parable of the Householder and Thief

"But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into."

Michael Wilkins: The responsibility for the safety of each home lay on the master of the house, since modern conceptions of police force were nonexistent. Some protection was provided by military forces for rulers and for the upper classes, but not for individual homes. If a homeowner knew that a thief was coming, he would do whatever was necessary to be prepared, whether that meant staying up all night, or patrolling each opening, or even enlisting the help of neighbors.

Homer Kent: If the household master had been watchful, he could have prevented damage and loss.

“*Broken up*” – Literally, *dug through*, a reference to houses of sun-dried brick in Palestine, comparatively easy to enter. Believers have less excuse for carelessness than this master, who had not been forewarned that a thief was coming.

B. (:44) Exhortation: Be Prepared

*“For this reason you be ready too;
for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you stay alert and prepared for the Lord’s return?
- 2) How can normal, everyday living contribute to the neglect of greater spiritual and eternal realities?
- 3) In light of Christ’s admission that not even He knows the date and time of His return, how can any credence be given to those who speculate and try to guess the date or timeframe?
- 4) How can people be so unprepared for an event which is preceded by such dramatic signs as those detailed in the preceding paragraphs?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: Ready or Not – Here I Come!

It is a text that deals with the **suddenness** and the **unexpectedness** of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. . .

Look at **verse 36**. Here’s the key to the rest of that section. “*But of that day and hour knoweth no one. No, not the angels of heaven nor the Son but My Father only.*” And with that statement, He directs their thinking to the issue of when and tells them the when is an unknown. The signs that precede the second coming have been clearly given. They are unmistakably detailed here in **Matthew 24** and also in **Revelation chapters 6 through 18**. You can’t miss those. And the generation that is alive during that period will see those signs. They will be observable signs. They will be worldwide signs. They will be unmistakable indications of the collapse of the world and its systems as well as the universe. But the specific

moment, that is – notice it in **verse 36** – the day and hour are not known. They’re not known. And we must remind ourselves that He is speaking of a day and an hour. . .

Now, listen. The time period of the second coming will be known, it has to be known. It has to be known because of all the sequence of events. The abomination of desolation will be an historical event. The tremendous worldwide conflicts, the wars, the rumors of wars, the nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, the famines, the pestilences, the descriptions of **Revelation 6 to 18** where the fresh water is devastated and the salt water is devastated and the sea is turned to blood and where the day is set off its normal cycle and daylight is shortened and there’s a greater amount of darkness, and all of those events that are very observable will indicate that it is the general period and the general time of the second coming. **But the day and the hour will not be known.** That will come with suddenness in an unexpected way. The period of the Tribulation, very clearly indicated, and we know the coming of the Son of Man, **verse 29** says, is immediately after the Tribulation. But how immediately, we don’t know.

Grant Osborne: All three images used here center on the unexpected nature of Jesus’ soon return and the necessity of being ready at all times for his parousia. The implication is that the consequences of being unprepared are far too serious to ignore. The only possible response is to maintain constant vigilance, to make certain that we are always “ready.” **Bruner** says it well: “Our not knowing is necessary (v. 36) but dangerous (vv. 37ff.) because we might use not knowing as an excuse for not acting.... But disciples’ not knowing when should make them alert lest they be unprepared for the knowable that of his coming.”

This theme of ethical responsibility stemming from the imminent return of Christ governs the ensuing parables and becomes a major theme in the rest of the NT. Every major passage on the Lord’s return emphasizes right conduct on our part (cf. **1 Cor 15:58; 2 Cor 5:9–10; 1 Thess 5:8–11; 2 Thess 2:13–15**; the perseverance theme in **Revelation**). In addition, in several places a statement that “*the end is near*” or some such saying is used to anchor ongoing ethical responsibility (cf. **Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 7:29–31, 10:11–13; Jas 5:7–9; 1 Pet 4:7–11**).

William Barclay: Here is the **practical outcome** of all that has gone before. If the day and the hour of the coming of Christ are known to none save God, then all life must be a constant preparation for that coming. And, if that is so, there are certain basic sins.

(1) To live without watchfulness invites disaster. Thieves do not send a letter saying when they are going to burgle a house; the principal weapon in their wicked undertakings is surprise; therefore a householder who has valuables in the house must maintain a constant guard. But to get this picture right, we must remember that the watching of the Christian for the coming of Christ is not that of terror-stricken fear and shivering apprehension; it is the watching of eager expectation for the coming of glory and joy.

(2) The spirit which leads to disaster is the spirit which says there is plenty of time. It is the comfortable delusion of the servant that he will have plenty of time to put things to rights before his master returns.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus’ Prophecy of Consummation of the Kingdom: Just Like the Days of Noah

There are two or three mistakes that we could make approaching the issue of the end time. One mistake is to think that all such discussion of the end times is speculative and impractical. I think

it has already become apparent to us as we have looked through Jesus' instructions that they are anything but impractical. Every one of Jesus' instructions in **Matthew 24** as we have studied so far, is something that we can put into practice today. Yes, it is true that we can say with one of the great divines, that it is possible to think more about the events surrounding His coming, than to think about the one who is coming. Yes, that can happen. That would be improper for us, would it not, to care more about the time table, and the accompaniment than it would be to think about the one who we long to come. That would be inappropriate. But the teaching of the New Testament on the end times, the teachings on Eschatology is eminently practical. And we have seen example after example of that so far.

Another mistake that we could make, and there are many who make it, is simply do not believe that Jesus is coming at all. Perhaps you have had friends who have made jokes about the delay of the coming of our Lord Jesus. They say, it has been two thousand years, are you seriously still waiting for this occur. And they mock. And they make fun. And Jesus in this very passage today, makes it clear that on that day, unless their hearts are changed, they will be just like those who lived in the days of Noah. Mocking and laughing and going on with life and surprised with His coming.

There is a last mistake that we could make however, and that is to be unprepared for His coming. Note, Jesus' coming is something that often times terrifies sincere believers. They have grown up on the horror tales of the end times and they are actually frightened of the thought of the Lord Jesus coming. And though it is appropriate that we would have a godly fear at the thought of the great judgment of the Lord. Ultimately the New Testament wants Christians to be excited about the second coming of the Lord. And so the issue of how to be prepared is a very practical issue. And it is in fact something that Jesus is going to spend much time on through **chapter 25**. But I would like to look with you today and see some of the answers to these very kinds of concerns that we find in the passage that we are going to study.

I. The uncertainty of the exact time of the return of Christ – Christians must be watchful.

Jesus first of all, tells us that His coming, the time of His coming is unknown. Because He wants to exhort us against the tendency of our nature to be sleepy. To be idle, to be lazy in preparation for His coming, so He tells us this in order to exhort us, to encourage us to be faithful in watching. But He also tells us this in order to encourage us in light of the very sober note that He is going to strike in **verses 37-41** which we are going to look at in just a minute. Jesus makes it very clear that the second coming is not going to a happy day for those who are unprepared. But precisely because He wants it to be a glorious day for us. He tells us that He wants us to be prepared. And as we are prepared, it will be a glorious day of triumph for us. Not something that we look forward to with dread, but something with which we join our prayers in with the saints of all ages, come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen, becomes our prayer.

II. Unbelievers will not look for the second coming of Christ.

Unbelievers aren't going to be expecting this. They are not going to be looking out for this. Christ's coming is going to be surprising to those who are unprepared by faith. And again, we learn another lesson by this. If it is going to be surprising for those who are unprepared by faith, then we must be prepared for that coming by faith. That is how you prepare for the coming of the Lord, in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. That is how you prepare. In this passage, Jesus explains Himself further by a comparison. He compares the days of His coming, to the days of

Noah. And this is to highlight the sudden and unexpected nature of His second coming. People, He says are going to be wrapped up in their own affairs. They are going to be eating and drinking. Business as usual. Marrying and giving in marriage, business as usual. They are going to be wrapped up in their own affairs, to the extent that they are blind to the greater realities all around them.

III. The second coming will bring about a final and eternal distinction between believers and unbelievers.

It is clear that the distinction is in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, there is going to be this separation between those who have embraced Christ and those who reject Him. Christ's coming is going to bring about a final division, just like He promised. **J. C. Ryle** catches the meaning of this passage perfectly. He says there shall be no time for parting words or a change of mind, when the Lord appears. No second chance. No time for parting words. It will be like one person working in the field, and judgment has come. It will be like two women working together and judgment has come. Blessing on one and judgment on the other. Blessing on one, and judgment on the other. Have you taken account of your own soul today?

TEXT: Matthew 24:45-51

TITLE: CONTRAST BETWEEN FAITHFUL AND WICKED SLAVES

BIG IDEA:

THE FAITHFUL SLAVE FEEDS THE HOUSEHOLD WHILE AWAITING THE RETURN OF THE MASTER

INTRODUCTION:

These exhortations to spiritual vigilance and alertness and faithful stewardship in anticipation of the return of Christ have application not only to the time of the Tribulation but also to those of us ministering now in the church age in anticipation of the imminent Rapture at an unknown point in time. The importance of taking seriously the responsibility of feeding the flock of God with the nourishment of the Word of God is clearly in view and the promised reward should be an encouragement to all engaged in such activity.

Ray Stedman: This parable is clearly for the instruction of those who are awaiting the Lord's return. The master of the household is gone but he has entrusted certain work to his steward until he returns. That work is primarily a ministry to the rest of the household, and notably, "*to give them their food at the proper time.*" It is clearly addressed to the disciples and to those who will follow in their steps in the ministry of feeding and shepherding the church of Jesus Christ. Doubtless it includes any who have a ministry of teaching: pastors, evangelists, prophets, elders, Sunday School teachers, children's workers and Bible class leaders. It takes in any who have gifts of teaching, whether exercised in a church building or in homes. It includes theological professors, editors of magazines, radio teachers, missionaries, youth workers, and many others.

Give Them Food!

Since this is the first parable in the series it probably points up the most essential element in the matter of watching. The wise servant is given one major and primary responsibility: to feed the household at the proper time. If this is rightly done, the household will keep watching; if it is neglected, the household will languish and starve, and will not be ready when the Lord returns.

The task, therefore, of any leader within the church is to unfold the message of the Bible. Every pastor should set a loaded table before his congregation, not only that they might eat and grow, but also that they might learn from him how to draw from the Scriptures for themselves the spiritual nourishment they need. The Bible is wonderfully adapted to this purpose: there is milk for the beginner, bread for the more advanced, and strong meat to challenge and feed the mature. It is so designed that when books of the Bible are taught through consecutively they will cover a wide variety of subjects and yet keep truth marvelously in balance.

<https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/matthew/in-the-mean-time>

Grant Osborne: The primary theme is the necessity of proper conduct insofar as no one knows when Christ will return. A secondary theme is the certainty of judgment for those who are not ready. When Christ appears, everyone will be accountable for how they are living at that time.

R. T. France: The readiness of the good slave consists not in sitting by the window watching for his master, but in getting on with the job he has been given, while the fault of the bad slave is in

his assumption that the master will not be back soon and that therefore he will not be held to account. The eschatological themes of **delay** and imminence are thus interwoven, and applied to the question of the disciple's responsibility during the time of waiting.

David Turner: The vivid imagery in **24:36–51** warns against such a preoccupation with the tasks and pleasures of daily life that it does not take into account the possibility of imminent divine judgment. Jesus's disciples must be constantly aware that life as they know it could suddenly be terminated by Jesus's coming. They must be like the dependable slave, not like Noah's oblivious generation, the homeowner who does not expect a burglar, or the wicked slave. Disciples must not take up a nonchalant lifestyle that is inconsistent with Jesus's unexpected coming.

Robert Gundry: In charge of the household, this slave could abuse his authority by beating his fellow slaves, who make up the rest of his master's domestic help, and also by carousing with drunkards, who represent other false disciples. Together, they waste their resources on partying instead of sharing them with fellow slaves, who represent true disciples proclaiming the gospel, living openly according to Jesus' teachings, and fleeing resultant persecution. The abuse and the carousing breed **carelessness**, so that the master's coming—though delayed, and precisely because delayed—takes the slave in charge by surprise. “*On a day*” and “*at an hour*” denote the next shortest and very shortest units of time used by people then and therefore stress again the impossibility of knowing beforehand the exact time of the Son of Man's coming. “*Slice him in two*” warns of horrible judgment for unbrotherly behavior, and “*put his portion with the hypocrites*” means that Jesus will judge as false those professing disciples who engage in such behavior. As false, their portion—that is, their inheritance—will be to spend eternity with the hypocrites, namely, the scholars and Pharisees of **chapter 23**, who are destined for “*the judgment [consisting] of gehenna*” (**23:33**). “*Weeping*” arises out of sorrow over this fate, and “*gritting of teeth*” arises out of the pain associated with it (compare the figures of being sliced in two and elsewhere of hellfire). “*There*” refers to gehenna, hell, as the place of punishment..

William Barclay: Rejection is based on failure in duty, and reward is based on fidelity. The servant who fulfilled his duty faithfully was given a still greater place; and the servant who failed was severely dealt with. The inevitable conclusion is that, when he comes, Jesus Christ can find us employed in no better and greater task than in doing our duty.

Stu Weber: In light of the future reality of hardship and ultimate salvation, we must stay ready for Christ's return (and his rewards) at all times by loving obedience.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The household, then, belongs to the Lord. Jesus is the master. He assigns ministry responsibilities to His servants. He expects effective time management. He rewards long-term faithfulness and He punishes hypocrisy and laziness. Each of His servants must keep serving Him the whole time He is away and be serving Him when He returns (**Tit. 2:11-14; Lk. 21:34-36**). Jesus spoke this parable not to the ungodly but to His disciples about their responsibility to faithful service. He expected them to stay busy doing the task He assigned them until He comes for them (**Lk. 12:47-48; Nolland 1000**). He also expected them to teach this obligation to all disciples (**28:20**).

William Hendriksen: The lesson of the parable, therefore, is this “Be and remain actively loyal to the Master, sensibly and joyfully carrying out the task assigned by him, in the interest of those who are precious to him.”

I. (:45) CHARACTERIZATION OF A MODEL SLAVE

A. Two Primary Attributes

1. Faithfulness

“Who then is the faithful”

2. Wisdom

“and sensible slave”

R C Sproul: We are either **slaves** of God or slaves of sin. Nobody is autonomous. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Jesus raises the question of **fidelity** – one who can be trusted; one who is consistent in allegiance to his owner. The wise slave works with insight. Responsible to provide the food and provide it on time.

Bibleone.net: The word translated *faithful* is the Greek word *pistos* and comes from the root Greek word *peitho*, which means “worthy of belief, trust, or confidence.” It speaks of a person who is trustworthy and consistent in the performance of his duty to God and to others. . .

The word “wise” here is the Greek word *phronimos*, which comes from the Greek root word *phroneo* meaning “to think or have a mindset.” The activity represented by this word involves the “soul” (a person’s will, affections, and conscience); a word that always refers to a person’s “life.”

Wisdom from God is to be prized above all earthly gain (**Proverbs 3:13, 14; 8:11**) and can only be appropriated by the study and comprehension of **God’s Word**.

http://bibleone.net/print_tbs100.html

Grant Osborne: The number of slaves a person owned was a sign of status in the ancient world. Slaves were often highly educated and were doctors, teachers, accountants, and workers for every function in a home. Wealthy homes would have dozens of slaves, some whose job was little more than doing the mistress’s hair or folding napkins for dinner parties. Slaves were allowed to own property, earn wages, and even purchase their freedom.

The theme of this parable is the search for a “*faithful and wise*” leader who can be trusted as a head slave. Both are discipleship terms, with “*faithful*” (πιστός) found again in **25:21, 23** of the “*good and faithful slaves*” who used their “*talents*” for the benefit of their master, and “*wise*” (φρόνιμος, meaning “prudent, discerning”) used in **7:24; 10:16** as a wisdom term for understanding the situation and doing what the master commands (cf. **25:2, 4, 8, 9**).

B. Primary Responsibility of Stewardship and Governance

“whom his master put in charge of his household”

Leon Morris: He does not owe his position to his own deliberate choice: his master has appointed him over his household. But being there, he is responsible. It is his task to be sure that the members get their food, and get it at the proper time.

C. Primary Function of Providing Proper and Timely Nourishment

“to give them their food at the proper time?”

II. (:46-47) CASE OF THE FAITHFUL SLAVE

A. (:46) His Actions

“Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.”

B. (:47) His Reward

“Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.”

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus did not amplify the truth here, but from other Scriptures we learn that one reward for obedient service will be ministry in the kingdom that He will establish on earth (**Luke 19:11ff.**). The reward for obedient service is the capacity for greater service. Not to have a place of ministry in His kingdom would, to me, be a tremendous loss.

The Bible Says: One of the primary rewards Jesus seeks to give those who are faithful in this life and with this creation is to reign with Him over the earth in the next life and in the new creation, in love, service, and harmony (**Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:11**). The servant kings of the new creation will bring their glory into the New Jerusalem (**Revelation 21:24**).

Jesus promised, *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne”* (**Revelation 3:21**). The word for “overcome” in that verse is the Greek word, “*nikao*.” It means “to conquer” or “to win the victory.”

Jesus won victory over temptation and death through learning obedience, even to death on a cross (**Philippians 2:8-9; Hebrews 5:8**). As *the master of the house asks, who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household*, so too does Jesus ask Himself who should share His throne, and rule over His kingdom. Answer: The one who is serving Jesus faithfully when He returns.

What is it that those who rule over His household will be doing in His kingdom? To give them their food at the proper time. And what is Jesus looking for to judge whether a servant is faithful and sensible? It is a slave or servant who is already feeding His people. One who is investing in His flock. Those whom *the master finds so doing when he comes* will be the one who is *blessed by the master*. It is likely here that Jesus’s reference to feeding His people is a corollary to His instruction in the Great Commission, *“teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”* (**Matthew 28:20a**). As Jesus made clear, **spiritual food is of greater value than physical food** (**John 4:32-34, 6:27, 6:55**).

The servants who are faithfully feeding the flock on the earth will be blessed with an incredible reward. Jesus will put him in charge of all his possessions, to reign with Him in His kingdom. This metaphor is parallel with **Revelation 3:21**, where Jesus promised He would share His throne with those who overcome. It makes sense. Jesus wants rulers of the New Earth who have proven they are willing to serve. There will be no tyrants in the Kingdom that is to come. Only kings who, like Jesus, learned to serve (**Matthew 20:28**).

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-24/matthew-2445-51/>

III. (:48-51) CASE OF THE WICKED SLAVE

A. (:48-49) His Actions

1. (:48) Wicked Mindset (Carelessness)

“But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’”

How do you work when no supervisor is watching you?

Grant Osborne: The key to the use of the parable here is *χρονίζεις*, which means to “delay, stay away a long time,” or even “fail to come” (BAGD, 887; EDNT, 3:487). This is why Jesus tells this parable, for it speaks to the issue of the “delay of the parousia” (1 Thess 4:15–16; 2 Pet 3:4), vastly overstated by many critical scholars but still a problem for the early church.

All the apostles (Paul included) expected Jesus to return soon, and when he did not, it certainly caused consternation. If anyone had told Matthew or Paul that Jesus would not return for at least two thousand years, they might well have called that person a false prophet! Knowing this, Jesus is warning the church about false reactions to that delay.

R. T. France: The point within the story is that the period of absence provides the second slave with an opportunity to indulge his selfish irresponsibility at the expense of his fellow-slaves.³⁹ He can think only of the present, not of the inevitable end of that opportunity when his master returns.

Homer Kent: His defection is both doctrinal (*my lord delayeth his coming*) and ethical (*smite his fellowservants, eat and drink with the drunken*). He mistakes the uncertainty of the time of coming for a certainty that it will not be soon.

2. (:49a) Wicked Mistreatment of Others (Cruelty)

“and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves”

Donald Hagner: Since the master is delayed, the wicked servant takes advantage of his absence, violates the commands of his master, and acts irresponsibly. . . That the time remains unknown should have motivational power for ethical living in the present.

3. (:49b) Wicked Indulgent Lifestyle (Carousing)

“and eat and drink with drunkards;”

B. (:50-51) His Retribution

1. (:50) Unexpected Accountability

“the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,”

Leon Morris: Jesus is underlining the truth that delay does not mean cancellation. The master may have been away for longer than this particular servant expected, but that did not mean that he would never come back. The application to the coming of the Son of man is obvious.

2. (:51) Unrelenting Punishment

a. Physical Dismemberment

“and shall cut him in pieces”

b. Placement with Hypocritical Jewish Religious Leaders

“and assign him a place with the hypocrites;”

R. T. France: “*Hypocrites*” is surprising in this context, since the slave’s action was blatant rather than hypocritical, but after the repeated use of the word in **ch. 23** we may perhaps understand it here as a general term for those who place themselves outside the will of God (the Lucan parallel is “*the unbelievers*”). If the same term can be used for the unfaithful disciple as for the failed Jewish leadership, the Christian reader is warned that merely belonging to the disciple community is not in itself a guarantee of ultimate salvation.

Leon Morris: This man who pretended to be a capable overseer of a whole household and who proved to be inefficient and interested only in his own self-indulgence belongs with them.

c. Painful Suffering in Hell

“*weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.*”

John MacArthur: weeping and gnashing of teeth is mentioned five times at least in the book of Matthew, and each time is a way to describe the terrible, unrelieved, unconsolable pain of eternal hell.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Slaves can be tasked with a great variety of functions. Why is the emphasis here put on providing proper food?
- 2) Do you view your spiritual giftedness as a stewardship from God for which you will one day give an account?
- 3) Does your reliability as a worker vary depending on the amount of supervision and who is watching you work?
- 4) Why are the wicked slaves treated the same as the hypocritical Jewish religious leaders?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: William Barclay records the interesting story of three apprentice demons who came before Satan. And he sent them to the earth to do their apprenticeship. And the first apprentice demon said, “I will tell people there is no God.” And Satan said, “It won’t work; they know better.” And the second apprentice demon said, “I will tell people there is no hell.” And Satan said, “It won’t work; they know better.” And the third demon said, “I will tell people there is no hurry – there is no hurry.” And Satan said, “You will gain many souls.”

Grant Osborne: There are three messages here.

- (1) Jesus is going to return, and that return will be unexpected.
- (2) Every believer is responsible to be ready at all times, for we will all be held accountable for the way we live.

(3) There will be severe judgment for those who live for themselves and refuse to serve others.

The abuse of others and hedonism are more a part of the parable than intended to be singled out, but both are viable illustrations of the **self-centered living that is condemned here**.

Craig Blomberg: The three main points of the parable thus follow:

- (1) God rewards and punishes people at the final judgment on the basis of their stewardship of the tasks assigned to them.
- (2) Faithful stewardship requires perseverance and consistency, for the end could come at any time.
- (3) Those who postpone their responsibilities and do evil in the meantime may sadly discover that it is too late for them to make amends for their errors.

Michael Wilkins: Actions reveal our nature. In the parable of the two servants, Jesus indicates that a person's faithfulness is the external evidence of whether or not he or she is truly one of Jesus' own. We should therefore examine ourselves to determine whether we are true believers, which will be evidenced by the way we think, the way we treat others, and our righteousness or unrighteousness. We must be careful not to imply that one can earn one's salvation by watchfulness or preparedness, but rather that a person who truly is a disciple of Jesus will watch and be prepared, because it is their good new nature to do so. The point for non-disciples is that they should not delay repenting too long, thinking they will have time. Rather, their own death or Jesus' return may find them to be unrepentant sinners.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Faithful Slave

Notice their **function** at the end of **verse 45**. What are they to do? What is the service that they are to render to the household? They are to feed the household, to give them their food at the proper time. The main point there is their job is to serve not their own interests, but the interests of the master's household. They are to look after, yes they are to be responsible for good order, but primarily they are to provide for the needs of the household while the master is away. We are already seeing that Jesus is describing a good master here. He is someone who, when he goes away, really cares about his household and he leaves people behind to take care of them.

And then if you will look at **verse 46**, you will see a fourth thing. The actions of this blessed slave are described. The slave who Jesus says is blessed, is the one who the master finds doing what he told him to do when he went away. The slave who is blessed is actively obedient. He is marching to the beat of his master's drum. The master told him to do something. This slave who is blessed, is doing what his master told him to do. . .

Now Jesus tells the flip side of the story in **verses 48-51**. Here He gives us the characteristics of the rewards of the evil servant. And the evil servant here is a **nominal Christian**. This is somebody who claims to be a Christian, with their lips, but they are not there in their heart. They are not there in their lives. They give lip service. Matthew is responding to the issue of **hypocrisy** in this passage. Like he so often does in his Gospel. And he shows us through Jesus' words, what a person looks like who is not ready for Jesus' coming. In fact, we learn that the nominal Christian is threatened with judgment not only here, but here after, because of his evil thoughts and ways. Jesus tells this story of an evil servant and He describes him and he tells us his characteristics in this passage. Look at **verses 48-51**. The description of this evil servant. Well, that is exactly what he is. He is an evil slave. Notice the bluntness of this assessment. You know normally we don't talk about our friends as evil people. I mean if you are non-Christian

here today, you will be happy to know that we Christians normally don't sit around describing you as evil people. In fact, we kind of like some of you. But here is an ultimate assessment about a person. Here is a person who doesn't trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and is not faithful in his way. And you know what they are called at the end? Evil. That is blunt, but it is reality.

And Jesus goes on in **verse 48** to explore the **thoughts** that are going on in that person's heart. My master is not coming for a long time. You see carelessness and spiritual laziness, and spiritual presumption. This person doesn't care about ultimate spiritual realities, like the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a man says to himself is often more important than what he says openly. Because it is within the secret precincts of his own being that a particular man converses wickedly and irresponsibly. Nobody else sees it, but it is true.

Then again in **verse 49**, he tells us the **actions** of this slave. He beats his fellow slaves, he eats and drinks with drunkards. Two parts to that. He abuses his position. Instead of being a help to the household, he is a hurt to the household. He doesn't help the household of faith, he hurts them. Furthermore, he associates himself with those who indulge in fleshly desires. He clearly doesn't have spiritual desires, he would rather indulge in the desires of the flesh.

Verse 50. What is going to happen on the coming of his master? He is going to be taken by surprise. Why? Because the natural will always be taken by surprise by the second coming. He will be taken by surprise because he doesn't really believe. It will be unexpected to him, because he is not prepared. He is not expectant. And so, the Christian must live expectantly. In contrast with the natural man who will be unprepared and unexpecting of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice in **verse 51**, the brutality of the judgment. The slave's judgment. He will be cut to pieces. That is an immediate judgment. He will be assigned the place with the hypocrites. Notice in contrast, if you will look at **Luke 12:46**, when Jesus preached this sermon the first time, he said that the wicked slave would be assigned in the place of unbelievers or in the place of the unfaithful people. But here, Jesus says, he will be assigned to the place with the hypocrites. Why? Because He is speaking especially about professing believers who aren't ready for His coming. They are hypocritical. And then we are told in **verse 51**, that in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Even when the judgment comes, as horrific it will be, there will be no repentance. They will gnash their teeth at Christ. They will grind their teeth in defiance against Him. They will hate Him, more than they have ever hated Him before. Jesus is especially warning us here against the parallels against religious hypocrisy and nominalism.

Albert Mohler: Jesus stresses the deep division between those who are ready and those who are not; they will receive blessing or judgment, respectively, when the Son of Man comes. In this parable, the true nature of the servants is revealed by their actions – their faithfulness or unfaithfulness during their master's absence. The parable serves to contrast true and false believers and addresses the consequences of those who show by their lives that they are deserving of hell. The way one thinks about the Lord's return will eventually influence what one says and how one acts. The period of time before Jesus' return serves as a test to the heart of each person who professes to believe.

Keith Throop: Parable of the Two Servants

In contemplation of this parable, **Klyne Snodgrass** rightly speaks of both the patience and the impatience a believer must possess:

How can the church acknowledge both its own long history and its lively hope without looking silly? Both patience and impatience are legitimate and necessary responses. Given the NT emphasis that no one knows the time and the length of time that has passed, patience is required, for God's timing and purposes never fit our agenda. Patience undergirds the faithful living which is the primary concern of this parable. The wise and faithful Christian is the one who understands the significance of the end and actively serves, whether the time is long or short. Impatience is called for as well. We should be impatient with those who assert they do know the time and draw eschatological charts. We should be as impatient with those who deny the importance of Jesus' future vindication. Further, we should be impatient for the End to come, weary of evil and longing for the time when evil will be set aside and righteousness is established. Christian faith is always faith on tiptoe, looking to that day, and because of that day, living in accord with such anticipation. (*Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, p. 504)
<https://reformedbaptistblog.com/2014/03/20/parable-of-the-two-servants-matthew-2445-51-teaching-outline/>

TEXT: Matthew 25:1-13

TITLE: PARABLE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS

BIG IDEA:

ONLY GENUINE TRIBULATION SAINTS IN POSSESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL BE PREPARED FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS (DESPITE UNKNOWN DELAY)

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: This is the next in the set of parables that center on **readiness** for the Lord's return. All have the same basic themes—ignorance of the time of the coming, importance of vigilance, being prepared for the sudden return, and accountability.

Donald Hagner: In this second consecutive parable of the apocalyptic discourse (cf. τότε, “then”) Matthew continues to address the importance of **readiness for the coming of the bridegroom**. The coming of the bridegroom and the wedding banquet have **messianic associations** (cf. **22:1–14**), which make the parable particularly effective. This is the final pericope that stresses the **need for constant preparedness**, particularly because the time of the return of the remains unknown and may involve a longer-than-expected delay. . .

This parable makes yet once again, and in a most sobering way, the point that **preparedness** for the unexpected time of the coming of the Messiah is of the utmost importance. That is, how one lives in the lengthening interim period between the first and second appearances of the Messiah must be consistent with one's claim to be a disciple. What matters is that one not be embarrassed by an “inopportune” coming of the Messiah. The difference between the foolish and the wise is that the latter do all within their power to be ready for the parousia. They will join in the eschatological reward of the messianic banquet while the foolish will find themselves excluded and without recourse. The bottom line of the eschatological discourse is the importance of preparedness, which looms larger and larger toward the end of the discourse.

David Turner: This parable stresses, for the last time in the discourse, that the time of Jesus's coming (**24:3**) is **unknowable**. This point has been stated (**24:36**) and then illustrated both historically from Noah's time (**24:37–42**) and parabolically from a burglary (**24:43**) and from good and wicked slaves (**24:45–51**). The present parable illustrates the point from another familiar scene, **a wedding**. Five foolish virgins do not prepare for nightfall by bringing extra oil for their lamps, because they expect the bridegroom to arrive immediately. But five others wisely prepare for a delay. The foolish virgins miss the bridegroom and are banned from the wedding feast, but the wise virgins share in the joy of the wedding (cf. **9:15**). . .

Comparing **25:5** to **24:48** links the lesson of this parable to that of the evil slave. In both cases there is **delay** in the return of Jesus. But the two reactions to this delay are opposites, and these opposite reactions teach a crucial lesson. The evil slave is irresponsible because he overestimates the delay of the master's return. He is unpleasantly surprised by the master's seemingly early arrival. On the other hand, the foolish virgins are careless and underestimate the delay in the groom's arrival. The evil slave's lackadaisical approach to the master's return is similar to the generation of Noah and the homeowner, neither of whom expected an imminent event (**24:36–44**). But the foolish virgins took readiness to the extreme and did not plan for any delay. From

these opposite errors, the church learns that it cannot know the time of Jesus's coming. **It can assume neither an immediate nor an eventual return.** Christians must constantly expect Jesus while they persevere in obedience and mission (cf. **10:22; 13:20–21; 24:13**). The duties of constant readiness and future preparedness must be held in dynamic tension if the church is to be faithful to the teaching of its master (cf. **Luke 12:35–40; Meier** 1980b: 294–95). Those who do not exhibit constant alertness jeopardize not only their present opportunities for effective service to Jesus but also their eternal destiny.

D. A. Carson: In a real sense, it is the **bridegroom's delay** that distinguishes the wise from the foolish virgins. Any interpretation that ignores this central element in the story is bound to go astray (cf. G. **Bornkamm, Geschichte**, 49–50). The context similarly shows that the overriding theme is **preparedness for the coming of the Son of Man**. Even when this involves certain forms of behavior (**24:45–51; 25:14–30**), that behavior is called forth by the **unexpectedness** of the master's return.

From this perspective, **vv.1–13** fit well into this sequence of parables and agree with what we know Jesus taught. There is no good reason for doubting their authenticity or retreating to one of several reconstructed cores.

- The first parable (**24:42–44**) warns of the unexpectedness of Messiah's coming.
- The second (**24:45–51**) shows that more than passive watchfulness is required: there must be behavior acceptable to the master, the discharge of allotted responsibilities.
- This third parable (**25:1–13**) stresses the need for preparedness in the face of an unexpectedly long delay.

William Hendriksen: Preparedness is essential, for the time is coming when getting ready will no longer be possible; the door will be shut.

(:1) PROLOGUE – INTRODUCING THE PARABLE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.”

R.V. Tasker: Although the first word in **verse 1** *Then (tote)* is often in this Gospel merely a transitional particle with no chronological significance, it would seem that it should here be construed in a temporal sense, the reference being to the *day* that has played such a large part in the previous section. So **Knox** rightly renders, “*When that day comes, the kingdom of heaven will be like . . .*”

Finally, after the lapse of about a year [after the engagement and betrothal] there was the marriage, when the bridegroom accompanied by his friends went to fetch the bride from her father's house and brought her back in procession to his own home where the marriage feast was held. It is most probably that it is this procession that the ten girls in the story are pictured as going to meet.

Stu Weber: This parable, like most of Jesus' other parables, taught another aspect of reality in the kingdom of heaven. The virgins were the bridesmaids invited to be a part of the wedding ceremony. This was a great honor. They represent all who have been invited to be citizens of God's kingdom—some of whom, as we shall see, will indeed enter the kingdom and some of

whom will not. The bridegroom is the Messiah, and the wedding celebration pictures the eschatological wedding feast of Christ.

Jeffrey Crabtree: The **future tense** refers to that time when the kingdom will be consummated, when it will enter its final stage, whereas the present tense in **Matthew 13:24, 44-45, 47** speaks of the early days of the kingdom during Jesus' ministry.

Grant Osborne: The emphasis in “*young women*” (παρθενοί) is not on the fact of their virginity (that is assumed) but on the fact that they were **unmarried young women**, probably between twelve and eighteen years old (by then most young women were married). Here they are obviously friends of the bride (like modern bridesmaids) sent out to meet her groom.

D. A. Carson: Normally the bridegroom with some close friends left his home to go to the bride's home, where there were various ceremonies, followed by a **procession** through the streets—after nightfall—to his home. The ten virgins may be **bridesmaids** who have been assisting the bride; they expect to meet the groom as he comes from the bride's house (cf. **Kistemaker**, *Parables of Jesus*, 130), though this is uncertain. Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch would be assumed to be party crashers or even brigands. The festivities, which might last several days, would formally get under way at the groom's house. . .

The “*lamps*” (not the same word as in **5:15**) are here either small oil-fed lamps or, more plausibly, **torches** whose rags would need periodic dowsing with oil to keep them burning. In either case, the prudent would bring along a flask with an additional oil supply.

Michael Wilkins: It was a larger dome-shaped container with rags soaked in the oil to light the way while a person was walking outside.³⁸⁴ These outdoor torches could last for several hours when extra containers of oil were brought for replenishing the lamp (**25:2**), as the wise virgins had done.

I. (:2-4) POSSESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (OIL) DISTINGUISHES GENUINE PREPARED DISCIPLES (PRUDENT VIRGINS) FROM FOOLISH FALSE PROFESSORS

A. (:2) Two Contrasting Groups of Professing Tribulation Believers

“And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus described two opposite groups of these women. Five He called wise because they took extra oil for their lamps in case there was a long waiting period. Their wisdom showed in their preparation for a possible lengthy delay of the bridegroom. The other five He called foolish because they took lamps with oil in them but no extra oil. **They did not prepare for a delay.** They expected the groom to come soon.

B. (:3-4) Distinguishing Feature = Possession of Oil (Symbol of the Holy Spirit)

1. (:3) Foolish Possess No Oil so They Are Unprepared

“For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,”

Stu Weber: The five *foolish* (the Gr. word *moros* from which we derive our word “moron” for dull, inattentive, unthinking) bridesmaids were introduced first. They took insufficient oil with

them to keep their lamps burning for the wedding procession.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus apparently wants to teach that spiritual preparedness may not be transferred from one individual to another. All people are responsible for themselves. But the oil should probably not be allegorized despite frequent and conflicting suggestions that take it to refer to such things as good works, faith, grace, or the Holy Spirit, because **none of these can be bought.**

Van Parunak: Outwardly, **all the virgins look the same.** They all have torches; they all come to the bridal house; they all claim to look forward to the coming of the bridegroom. But in fact, five of them have only the form of godliness, and not the true power (**2 Tim 3:5**). They are like the religious leaders whom the Lord has so vigorously condemned (**ch. 15; ch. 23**), appearing to be the Lord's people, but actually **defective.** They think that the preparation of others in the company will suffice for them. And in the end they are cast out.

Homer Kent: To insist that they had some oil but not enough contradicts **25:3**. The failure to provide any oil at all displays their stupidity.

2. (:4) Prudent Took Sufficient Oil so They Are Prepared

“but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.”

II. (:5) PREPAREDNESS WILL BE KEY DUE TO THE UNEXPECTED DELAY

“Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.”

Stu Weber: The bridegroom's delay represents the stretch of history between the Messiah's first coming and his return. Jesus acknowledged that the length of time before his return would be difficult to endure. All ten of the bridesmaids—both the wise and the foolish—fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom. This is understandable for anyone under those circumstances.

Walter Wilson: Sleep in this content (**25:5**) is not a metaphor for death (cf. **9:24**) or for negligence (cf. **26:40, 43, 45**)—after all, even the prudent girls doze—but a narrative device for indicating how eschatological events will catch people unawares (cf. **13:25**), a theme augmented by the depiction of the parousia occurring in the middle of the night (**25:6**; cf. **24:43**).

III. (:6-9) PAROUSIA (BRIDEGROOM) ARRIVES SUDDENLY WITH URGENT DIFFERENTIATION

A. (:6-7) Sudden Arrival

1. (:6) Announcement with a Call to Action

*“But at midnight there was a shout,
'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'”*

2. (:7) Attempt by All to Walk in the Light

“Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps.”

Grant Osborne: Excitement reigns as the bridesmaids awake, jump off the ground, grab their torches, and start to get them ready for going out in the dark to meet the procession. This makes the rest of the story all the more poignant, for we know that half of them will not make it. *“Began*

to trim” (ἐκόσμησαν) is another ingressive aorist and means to “adorn, decorate”—in this case, to get the torches ready by either putting on extra oil or replacing the burnt-out rags with new oil-soaked rags, then lighting them.

B. (:8-9) Urgent Differentiation

1. (:8) Foolish Lack Oil and Plead for Assistance

*“And the foolish said to the prudent,
'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’”*

2. (:9) Prudent Have Sufficient Oil But Cannot Supply for Those Who Lack

*“But the prudent answered, saying,
'No, there will not be enough for us and you too;
go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’”*

IV. (:10-12) PARTICIPATION IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM (WEDDING FEAST) WILL BE LIMITED TO THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED

A. (:10) Opportunity to Participate is Only on God’s Terms

“And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.”

B. (:11-12) No Second Chances for the Unprepared

1. (:11) Request

“And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.’”

2. (:12) Rejection

“But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’”

Grant Osborne: People do not enter the kingdom on their own terms but on God’s terms, and it is clear from the whole of **24:36 – 25:30** that one of those terms is readiness for the parousia, i.e., a life of obedience to God.

Stu Weber: The bridegroom's delay represents the stretch of history between the Messiah's first coming and his return. Jesus acknowledged that the length of time before his return would be difficult to endure. All ten of the bridesmaids—both the wise and the foolish—fell asleep while waiting for the bridegroom. This is understandable for anyone under those circumstances.

(:13) EPILOGUE – MORAL OF THE PARABLE = BE PREPARED

“Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are the millennial implications of this motif of bridegroom and wedding feast?

- 2) Why will there be need for preparedness if the Great Tribulation contains so many cosmic signs?
- 3) What other OT passages support the symbolic connection between oil and the Holy Spirit?
- 4) Why is it so dangerous to put off making a commitment to follow Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus told the parable in the context of **His return**. He directed it to His followers but it applies to everyone. The main lesson is to **be ready when He comes**. Jesus made this point with these supporting truths:

- (1) Individual, advanced preparation is essential to readiness.
- (2) Readiness includes preparing for a lengthy delay and staying prepared until He comes. Those who do not prepare for the long delay will be caught unprepared as in a trap (**Lk. 21:34**) when Jesus finally arrives.
- (3) It will be too late to prepare once He arrives.
- (4) No one joins the wedding party unless he or she is ready at the time the groom arrives.
- (5) One can be “too late”: either be ready when Jesus comes or be forever outside.
- (6) “Check your ‘equipment’ now because [no one] knows how much longer it will be before [he has] to be sure that [he is] ready” (**Nolland** 1010).

Both this parable and the previous one teach long-term faithfulness. The wicked servant stopped serving his master and so was unprepared when the master returned (24:50-51). The foolish virgins failed to make adequate preparations for a long-term delay and consequently were not prepared to join the wedding procession and celebration when the groom came. People who are not following the Lord faithfully when He comes will find themselves unprepared for His arrival and denied entrance into the kingdom celebrations.

Charette: (*Theme of Recompense*) Presumption in the face of God’s goodness, indifference to his call and unfaithfulness in his service place one in a position of danger. A terrible judgment had come upon Israel because of its failure to conform to the will of God ... the covenant relationship had been revoked and they had been cut off from the blessing of God. The church is warned that it too is not exempt from judgment, but must face a day of reckoning when it will be called upon to present fruit befitting the call and advantage it has received.

William Barclay: In its immediate significance, it was **directed against the Jews**. They were the chosen people; their whole history should have been a preparation for the coming of the Son of God; they ought to have been prepared for him when he came. Instead, they were quite unprepared and therefore were shut out. Here in dramatic form is the tragedy of the unpreparedness of the Jews.

But the parable has at least two universal warnings.

- (1) It warns us that **there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute**. It is far too late for a student to be preparing when the day of the examination has come. It is too late

to acquire a skill, or a character, if we do not already possess it, when some task offers itself to us. Similarly, it is easy to leave things so late that we can no longer prepare ourselves to meet with God. When the Queen of England, Mary of Orange, was dying, her chaplain sought to tell her of the way of salvation. Her answer was: 'I have not left this matter to this hour.' To be too late is always tragedy.

(2) It warns us that **there are certain things which cannot be borrowed**. The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil when they discovered they needed it. We cannot borrow a relationship with God; we must possess it for ourselves. We cannot borrow a character; we must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have amassed. There are certain things we must win or acquire for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others.

Craig Blomberg: The distinctive warning of this parable cautions would-be disciples against refusing to count the cost of persevering in discipleship. The foolish young women resemble the seeds that fell in the shallow soil of **13:5-6,20-21**. The language of **v. 12**, though not as emphatic as that of **7:23**, again suggests that this is not a case of true Christians losing their salvation (Jesus does not say "I no longer know you") but of people whom he simply does not recognize because they have never been his. But they may well have professed intimacy with him, just as members of the bridal party usually appear to be close friends of the couple who are marrying. God is frequently pictured as a bridegroom in the Old Testament (e.g., **Isa 54:4-6; Ezek 16:7-34; Hos 2:19**); Jesus is in some way equating himself with God. On the messianic banquet imagery, cf. under **22:11-14**. The three points of the passage may now be summarized:

- (1) Like the bridegroom, God may delay his coming longer than people expect.
- (2) Like the wise bridesmaids, his followers must be prepared for such a delay—discipleship may be more arduous than the novice suspects.
- (3) Like the foolish bridesmaids, those who do not prepare adequately may discover a point beyond which there is no return—when the end comes it will be too late to undo the damage of neglect.

Walter Wilson: The continuity of **25:1-13** with **24:45-51** (as well as the allegorical features of the parable itself) encourages the reader to see the two groups as representing faithful and unfaithful ways in which disciples prepare for the arrival of their "lord" (**24:45, 46, 48, 50; 25:11**). Besides the element of contrast and the use of the keyword φρόνιμος (**24:45; 25:2, 4, 8, 9**), this passage is connected to the one that precedes it by the **theme of delay** (**24:48; 25:5**) and by the **motif of not knowing** (**24:50; 25:13**; cf. **24:42**), though the manner in which the motif is used to conclude the parable itself (**25:12**) introduces a surprising twist (cf. **7:23**). The use of φρόνιμος, particularly in contrast to μωρός ("foolish"), also recalls the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (**7:24-27**). As comparison with both that passage and **24:45-51** suggests, prudence for our author refers in the first instance not to intellectual aptitude but to **decision-making that results in proper action**, which in this context can be understood as a kind of **eschatological wisdom**. Such an interpretation accords with the central position occupied in the parable by the **symbol of the torch**, which is appropriately interpreted in conjunction with **light imagery** found elsewhere in the gospel, especially **5:14-16**. The symbolic potential of the torch or lamp is exploited by various Old Testament authors as well, for example, **Isa 62:1**, which **likens righteousness to a light**, and **salvation to a torch** (λαμπάς). For a contrastive formulation, we can turn to **Prov 13:9**, which uses the same verb found in **Matt 25:8**: "The light of the righteous is forever, but the light of the ungodly goes out [σβέννυται]."

Daniel Doriani: [Argues against the pre-trib view of the Rapture – raises some relevant issues] Certain forms of Christian eschatology seem to place their hope in escape from this world. Some specifically anticipate a rapture from it. The New Testament, by contrast, teaches us to hope in the day of the Lord, when he restores creation, when heaven and earth are one. At that time, there will be no sin and no rebels on earth because Jesus will have sent them away from him into darkness outside this world (**Matt. 7:23; 8:12; 22:13; 25:30**). If they are sent away, who is “left behind”? We are left on earth, with the Lord.

As for the rapture, we can only say that the Bible teaches **no secret return of Christ**. Christians will not be “raptured” or snatched from this world before a period of great tribulation. The return of Jesus, we have seen, is **loud, public, and visible**. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the angel promised Jesus would come again, a second time, not a second and a third time. (The term “rapture” does not appear in any major Bible translation nor is there a comparable term in the original Hebrew or Greek. “Rapture” is from Medieval Latin terms. Raptura means “seizure” and raptus means “seized” or “kidnapped.”)

The theory of the “rapture” first appeared in **1827**. Following a serious accident, **John Darby**, a British preacher, meditated on the need to be prepared daily for the Lord’s return. Although evangelical, Darby had novel ideas. Above all, he promoted a secret return of Christ, a rapture of Jesus’ disciples, prior to his return to judge the world and prior to a period of wickedness known as “the great tribulation.”

Paul does say we will meet the Lord in the air, but that is not the same concept as the rapture. The New Testament teaches that (1) Jesus returns one more time; (2) his return is public and visible to all, and (3) the dead rise at that time. Rapture theory asserts the opposite at each point. What then shall we make of Paul’s statement that we meet the Lord in the air? Many have been taught to take it as a prediction of a secret rapture. But **1 Thessalonians 4:16** can speak for itself: *“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* These loud sounds hardly indicate a secret return. Paul continues, *“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”* (**4:17**).

This midair meeting sounds baffling. As so often, the answer to a riddle lies in the language and **customs of the times**. It was customary for the residents of a city to go out to meet a king, emperor, or victorious general and escort him into the city. In the New Testament, the verb “meet” and the noun “meeting” both have that usage. People go out to meet Jesus when seeking his aid (**Matt. 8:34; Luke 17:12**). The Christians in Rome go out to meet Paul before he enters the city (**Acts 28:15**). In Jesus’ parable, the virgins go out to meet (same word) the bridegroom and escort him to the wedding feast (**Matt. 25:6**). Since Jesus comes to earth from heaven, if we are to escort him, we must meet him in the air. Therefore, our meeting in the air is brief, some moments before “the great day” of judgment and restoration begins.

John MacArthur: The Fate of the Unprepared

This parable is a parable with the intent of teaching us the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the coming of the Lord which, therefore, should call us to preparedness so that we are not caught in that unexpected moment unprepared for His coming. . .

Goes without saying, I guess, that we're aware of the fact that **the first time Jesus came, the world was not ready**. They should have been. The prophets had marked out very clearly the signs to look for. They said there would be a forerunner. There was. They identified him as a voice crying in the wilderness. That's exactly what John did. They said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, He was; born of a virgin, He was; of the line of David, He was. They said He would come to Galilee, He did. They said He would have great power, He had it. But the world still was not prepared and not ready.

*And so He came unto His own, says John, and His own received Him not. He was in the world and the world was made by Him, but the world knew Him not. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He said, "how oft I would have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her brood but you would not." And in **Luke chapter 19** and **verses 41** and following, we read, "And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, saying, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hidden from thine eyes.'" If you had only known what time it was, if you had only known that I was here, and now it's too late. And this parable warns the world not to let that happen again. For there will be no recourse in the future. . .*

Now the parable is **very simple**. It's rich. It's exciting. And I think its marvel is in its - it's in its simplicity. As you read the many, many writings that have been written around this parable, it can get very confusing. There are the allegorists who want to turn it into an allegory and give every single thing in it a mystical meaning so that you get lost in a mass of verbiage of hidden secret spiritual ideas. That is not the intent of a parable. And then there are the devotionalists who want to see in every single thing something applicable to the Christian life. And that's wrong as well. . .

There was a long wooden pole. On the top of the wooden pole would be some kind of a wire mesh apparatus attached, filled with cloth. That cloth would be soaked in oil and then lit to give a flaming torch. They would carry on their person somewhere a little flask of oil so that they could keep that lit for as long as was necessary. . .

Their presence symbolizes their interest, and their torch symbolizes their profession of faith in Christ. They show outward marks of watching for the coming of the bridegroom. They show outward marks of readiness. They show outward marks of commitment to Jesus Christ. They're part of the believing community. They're gathered as bridesmaids, as it were, ready to be received into this glorious marriage celebration. They profess to love Christ's appearing. They profess to hear the gospel and believe. They profess to be disciples to wait for the Son, to desire the Kingdom. . .

I get the feeling in the context of Matthew 24 and 25 that the Lord is saying even when you've seen the signs given in 24:4 to 31, even when you've seen all those signs that'll happen in the time of the Tribulation, even when you've seen the sign of the Son of man in heaven, it's still going to be a time before He finally comes. There's a gap of time in there, and people are seen waiting and waiting and waiting and then sort of just going back to the normal things of life, they doze off and go to sleep. . .

People, I tell you, this is the most fearful teaching the Bible gives. And Jesus gave it over and over and over again, that there are in the church myriads of people who are unprepared to face

God. And they are deceived about that. And in the moment when they face the reality of their unpreparedness, it will be in that moment that it's too late.

S. Lewis Johnson: The Ten Virgins, or the Qualifications for the Kingdom

What is preparedness? What does it mean, objectively, to be prepared. What does it mean, subjectively, to be prepared? Why should we be prepared? Well perhaps we can answer that very easily. What lies before those who are prepared? If we were to try to sum up what is said in this parable using something of the terms of the parable, it would be something like this. We would say objectively, preparedness is **having one's lamp burning**. That seems to be the point **to have the oil** – to have the lamp burning. And further, that qualifies us for an entrance into the Messianic blessing. That seems to be that which lies back of the marriage feast.

Subjectively, looking particularly at the foolish virgins, subjectively, **readiness is having one's vessel full of oil**. And since oil is a standard symbol in Scripture for the **Holy Spirit**, then the point would be that subjectively, readiness consists in a **vital relation to the life-giver**. That is the having of reality in one's life not simply the form of godliness but having the power of it. . .

You'll notice he talks about wise virgins and foolish virgins and just above he has said in **verse 45**, who then is a faithful and wise servant? So now he illustrates what it is to be a wise servant, and in the parable of the talents that follows, he will illustrate what it is to be a faithful servant. So these two parables illustrate the two sides of that statement, who then is a faithful and wise servant. A servant is to be both faithful, and he is to be wise. So we are going to talk about **wisdom**. . .

There were three stages in an ancient marriage. There was the stage of engagement. Now the engagement was made by the parents of the young man and the young lady. They concluded the arrangements, and certain promises were made, and the engagement took place arranged totally by the parents. . .

The second stage was the stage of betrothal. This was a ceremony a brief ceremony that was held at the bride's house and there mutual promises were exchanged by the contracting parties before witnesses. This was regarded as very significant. It was very binding. In fact it was so binding that if the bridegroom died before the marriage feast, held later, the bride was regarded as a widow even though the marriage had not been consummated.

Then finally about a year after the betrothal, the bridegroom would go to the bride's house, and he would take the bride, and they would have a marriage procession back to his own house which was to be their house. I think it is then that the virgins would come out to meet the procession. They would enter into the bridegroom's home, the doors would be shut, and the marriage feast would be celebrated. And this marriage feast frequently lasted for about a week and everybody rejoiced over the wedding. . .

With reference to **the virgins** the context suggests it seems to me very strongly the future generation of Israel that shall be upon the earth at the time of our Lord's Advent. One thing that makes me think that is because **verse 51 of chapter 24** ends with, *there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

Now we don't have time to look at the passages that we have had this expression previously in the Gospel of Matthew, but there are a number of them. **Chapter 8 verse 12** for example, and

chapter 13 and verse 42, and then **verses 49 and 50 of chapter 13**, and **verse 13 of chapter 22**. In each one of these occurrences of the expression, *there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*, the reference is to the sons of the kingdom or **the generation of Israelites that shall be upon the earth at the time of the Second Advent**. And since **chapter 25** begins with, then at that time, I think that's the preferable rendering here. Then we are to look forward to that generation that shall be on the earth when our Lord returns to the earth. . .

The significance of **the lamps** is rather obvious. This has to do with testimony. You see, a true believer does give a definite testimony that persists, and I guess if a man wanted to impinge a doctrine of the Bible on one of the figures found in a parable, he might talk on the perseverance of the saints, here, but it would be much better to settle that doctrine on Scripture texts that teach it plainly than upon this.

What is the oil? Well oil in the Bible is clearly a figure of the Holy Spirit. I don't think that there should be much objection to that. Even liberal and conservative scholars can agree that that is the biblical sense of the figure of oil. One thing that I think probably should be commented upon is that the Lord says that five were wise and five were foolish, and the foolish took no oil in their lamps. . .

Let me conclude by making just these comments. This parable teaches, then, that qualification for entrance into the kingdom is the possession of the oil of the Holy Spirit. He that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his, the apostle says later in **Romans chapter 8**. It is the possession of the Holy Spirit that marks out the true believer from the world. He has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we testify, Abba Father. If we do not have the spirit of Christ dwelling within us, we do not belong to him. The test of Christianity is the possession of the personal third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. We may have a great regard for religion, we may have a great regard for objective truth, but if we do not have the person of the Holy Spirit we do not belong to him.

Religion is not enough. One must have reality. And there are some things we cannot obtain at the last minute. There are some things that cannot be borrowed. Eternal life cannot be borrowed from our friends. It cannot be borrowed from our father. It cannot be borrowed from our children. It is something we must have for ourselves, and the shutting of the door, while it means acceptance and while it means blessedness and bliss for five of the virgins who are wise, it means exclusion from the other, so that the wedding bells become the funeral knell for the five lost virgins, reminding us of a stanza that we sometimes sing,

*“Almost persuaded harvest is past, almost persuaded doom comes at last /
almost cannot avail, almost is but to fail /
sad, sad that bitter wail, almost but lost.”*

Alternative View:

Dr. Jerry Harmon: (Grace Bible Baptist Church – 6/2/24) **Are You Ready for His Coming?**

Introduction:

I have officiated at many weddings. Nothing ever goes off completely as planned. Almost always the wedding starts later than the scheduled time. At this wedding in the parable, a lot of things go wrong. The point is to wake the disciples up = **BE READY!**

Context: “*Then*” – refers back to **Chap. 24** = the **Olivet Discourse** where Jesus is speaking about the prophetic events associated with His Second Coming.

I. THE PARABLE

A. The Distinction of the Ten Virgins

What a privilege to be invited to participate as bridesmaids.

The bridegroom (representing Jesus) is coming to receive his bride.

Cf. the other references to salvation in Scripture in the context of marriage – e.g. the Marriage Supper of the Lamb – **Rev. 19:7**

Need to understand the 3 different stages of a Jewish wedding in that culture:

- Covenant Stage – the espousal; picture of salvation
- Claiming Stage – Bridegroom coming back to receive the bride and then the procession to his father's house
- Celebration Stage – 7 day banquet

This parable deals with the lengthy Procession back to the father's house; usually they would take the longest possible route; you needed lamps to be out on the street and to light the way for the bridal party.

B. The Description of the Ten Virgins

5 wise and 5 foolish who didn't take enough oil for their lamps;

Once the door to the marriage banquet is shut and locked, it would be impossible to get in.

These ten virgins were **alike in almost every way** – all were invited to participate; all took lamps with at least some oil; all fell asleep; etc.

One major difference = 5 forgot to bring enough oil with them; describing professing believers in the church.

Lamps without oil are useless.

Long unexpected delay before the bridegroom returned

C. The Discussion of the Ten Virgins – “*Give us your oil*”

Responsibility to light the way for the bridal procession.

How could they have been instructed to go into the marketplace at midnight to buy more oil?

Merchants kept their stalls open during the wedding time since there were many guests around.

Does the oil represent the Holy Spirit as many commentators claim? NO – because:

- All 10 have oil in the beginning; you can't run out of having the Holy Spirit; He never departs from believers
- You can't try to buy the Holy Spirit

D. The Division of the Ten Virgins –

The 5 foolish virgins were shut out and could not enter in.

Significance of repeating a name twice in Scripture – “*Lord, Lord*” – [other examples cited –

“*Samuel, Samuel*”, etc.] – **expresses personal intimacy**; but here Jesus testifies that He does not have a saving personal relationship with these 5 foolish virgins

Matt. 7:21 – **many** false professors of faith

What was missing? The oil represents **persevering saving faith**.

E. The Declaration about the Ten Virgins – **Be Ready** = the main point of the parable

II. THE PRINCIPLES WE CAN LEARN

A. (v. 5) The Coming of the Lord May be Delayed

We know for certain He is coming back; but we don't know when;

Cf. what happened in days of Noah; Name *Methuselah* means "*when he dies it will come*" – lived for 969 years; speaks to the longsuffering of God; He is delaying because he wants sinners to come to repentance; cf. **2 Peter** passage;

B. Being Prepared Is Not Transferable

It was not selfish for the wise virgins to refuse to share their oil; they would not have had enough for themselves; impossible to share genuine faith; you can't get into heaven on the coattails of someone else; you can't transfer your oil

C. True Saving Faith Is Demonstrated in Continual Obedience and Good Works for Your Entire Life = the Oil

Not the root of your salvation, but the fruit of it;

True faith will not fizzle out. Cf. **Matt. 5:15**

D. The Lord's Coming Will Bring a Separation Forever

E. Many Will Find the Value of Salvation too Late

Once the door has been shut, there is no more opportunity.

Cf. Noah's Ark

TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30

TITLE: THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (OR BAGS OF MONEY) –
THE TRAGEDY OF WASTED OPPORTUNITY

BIG IDEA:

**STEWARDSHIP OF GOD’S GIFTS DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY --
MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE CHRIST**

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The connection of this parable to the others is the **delay** of the master’s return, but the emphasis here is on the responsibility to serve the master with all one’s worldly resources and abilities (here in terms of money but symbolizing every aspect of life). The theme of judgment continues. Each one is accountable, and those who serve the Master well will have an abundant reward, while those who do not will be condemned.

Craig Blomberg: In **24:45** the slave was faithful and prudent (“*wise*”). The ten bridesmaids (**25:1-13**) illustrated prudence in more detail; the parable of the talents will illustrate faithfulness in more detail. In the parable of the ten bridesmaids, the foolish young women thought the task was easier than it turned out to be; in the parable of the talents, the wicked servant thinks it is harder than it turns out to be. In addition, this passage expands on the nature of the preparedness to which the previous parables were pointing, defining the task with which believers are to be occupied until Christ returns, namely, **good stewardship** for his benefit of all that he has loaned us.

Ray Stedman: Living Dangerously

There is a common, but quite shallow, understanding of this parable that it teaches the need for us to put our natural gifts to work for God. . .

Another easy pitfall we must avoid is to interpret this parable as though it dealt only with the matter of ultimate rewards for service. . .

Now, having gotten our perspective straight, we turn to the inevitable question, "**What are the talents**, in our experience?" There are several clues given to us in the account which will guide us in this search. We shall discover and assess them one by one.

The first clue is found in the opening verse, "*For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property.*" The last two words are the key: "*his property.*" That is another term for the talents which are distributed. They are **the Lord's property**, God's property. They are then, not something which man can give, but something which God alone controls. The talents are not distributed, like natural gifts, to all men freely, but are given only to those who in some fashion have the relationship of a servant to the Lord. To them he is willing to distribute his property.

The second clue is found in the next verse, "*to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.*" Again, the last phrase is extremely helpful. Here we learn that the talents are clearly not natural abilities but are actually **distributed on the basis of**

natural ability. To one man the Lord gave five talents because he was a man of great natural ability, he had many gifts. To another he gave two talents because he was not as gifted as the first, and to the third man he only gave one talent because he had few natural abilities. Whatever the talents may be, one thing is certainly clear: **they are not natural abilities.** Rather, the number of talents given is determined by the number of natural gifts possessed.

The third clue is not stated in the text but is clearly implied. It is the unspoken implication that the Lord **expected these servants to invest the talents** he distributed in such a way as to produce gain. The talent, then, is something that can be invested, be risked, with the possibility of producing gain or loss. The decision to risk is wholly the servant's. He can choose to take this risk, as the first two servants did, or he can utterly refuse to do so, as the third one did.

The fourth clue is likewise implied. It is that the investment must be made wholly for the benefit of the absent Lord. The talent is not given to the servant for his own use. It remains the property of his absent Lord and if it is risked it must be on the Lord's behalf. There is no promise made to the servants that they will share in any way in whatever profits may be made. They have no right to deduct a broker's percentage. As far as the servant could see, all the loss would be his, all the profit would be the Lord's. **The Lord alone would benefit by this transaction, if any would.**

The Riddle Solved

Let us now sum up these four clues and ask ourselves a question. What do we professed Christians have which is God's peculiar property, which comes to us on the basis of natural ability, which requires a risk on our part, and that risk appears to benefit only the Lord and not ourselves? Can you answer that?

Well, look at it this way. Having certain natural abilities, what do you then look for? Recognizing that you have a particular gift, what do you then seek? Is it not **an opportunity to use that gift**? Do we not all look for such opportunities, young and old alike? As we grow up and feel our powers developing, do we not then look for some opportunities to use them? And the more talents we feel we have the more we look for occasions for expression.

So the talents of the parables are to us **golden moments of opportunity**. . .

What is the final message of Jesus in telling this story? It is: Step out! Risk! Live dangerously! Take constant chances with your life and goods for his name's sake. Don't try to bottle up your life so as to hang on to it at all costs. If you do that you will surely lose it. But surrender yourself to his cause, again and again. That is the way to find life. That is the way to watch for his coming. Having risked yourself to become a Christian, now risk yourself again and again as opportunities arise. Live dangerously! Or that also could be written, love dangerously! To live for Christ is to love men with his love. And that is always a risk.

Walter Wilson: Structurally, the parable falls into three sections, corresponding to three successive time frames: the time before the master's departure (**25:14–15a**), the time of his absence (**25:15b–18**), and the time of reckoning (**25:19–30**), the greatest attention being paid to the concluding scene and, within that scene, to the exchange between the master and the third slave (**25:24–30**).

Stu Weber: SUPPORTING IDEA: Believers must live continually on the edge of faith-filled obedience, investing everything they have and are for the kingdom.

The preceding parable emphasized that we must always be ready, but it did not reveal anything about the specific ways to live. In this parable, and in the final account of the judgment (25:31-46), Jesus gave his disciples some practical direction about how to live in readiness for his return.

This parable demonstrates how saving faith in the Messiah will manifest itself in practical terms. This parable seems to go beyond the first three in that it takes the watchfulness to new levels of practical obedience and, therefore, to reward. The true disciples' readiness will involve careful stewardship of assets during the king's absence in anticipation of reward. . .

Every Christian is entrusted with some responsibility for the kingdom. Some will take this seriously and invest their lives wisely, and others will squander this responsibility. The part of the kingdom entrusted to each of us is precious to the Lord. He is hurt by the mishandling of a lifetime of opportunity; but he rejoices over a lifetime well spent. He has placed in our hands what is his own. This is a sobering thought—to be stewards of kingdom resources.

David Turner: To be alert is to actively exercise one's gifts and opportunities for service to Jesus and his kingdom. A familiar saying is appropriate here: "**Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God.**" Disciples must not make shaky investments with their Lord's resources, but they cannot excuse their laziness by claiming that they have incurred no losses. "When Christ returns, he will not ask if one had the date right but 'What have you been doing?'" (Garland 1993: 241).

I. (:14-18) STEWARDSHIP DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY

A. (:14-15) Stewardship Assigned According to Ability

1. (:14) Privilege of Stewardship

"For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them."

D. A. Carson: The introduction to this parable in the Greek is somewhat abrupt.

Robert Gundry: "*For*" makes the following parable a further basis for the exhortation to stay awake in 25:13.

Daniel Doriani: The scope of his resources shows that he was wealthy. He had servants and funds and he "*entrusted his property to them*" (25:14). He commissioned his servants to put his money to good use while he was away. While the servants wait for the master, they must work to improve his kingdom. The master knows his three servants are not identical triplets: "*To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability*" (25:15). Then he departed.

Today a "*talent*" means a skill or ability, but in New Testament times a talent was a unit of money, or to be precise, a weight of a precious metal, typically silver, but sometimes gold or copper. A talent was, therefore, most often an **amount of money**. The weight of a talent varied over the years, but it was typically **seventy-five pounds of silver**. The basic unit of money at that time was a denarius, which was a good day's wage for a laborer. One silver talent equaled six thousand denarii. A talent equaled six thousand days' wages, that is, twenty years' wages.

Thus the master entrusted great resources to his servants—funds worth one hundred, forty, and twenty years’ wages respectively.

2. (:15) Proportional Responsibility Delegated in Stewardship

“And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.”

Homer Kent: A talent was a unit of coinage of comparatively high value. Here the talents were silver (v. 18, *argurion*, “silver money”). Depending upon who issued them, talents ranged in value from \$1,625 (Aegina) to \$1,080 (Attic). A talent was worth much more than a pound (*mina*).

William Barclay: It is always known as the parable of the talents. The talent was not a coin, it was a **weight**; and therefore its value obviously depended on whether the coinage involved was copper, gold or silver. The most common metal involved was **silver**; and the value of a talent of silver was considerable. It was worth about fifteen years’ wages for a working man.

B. (:16-18) Stewardship Executed with Varying Degrees of Faithfulness and Wisdom

1. (:16) Enthusiastic and Aggressive Investment

“Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.”

R. T. France: The first slave’s **eagerness**—he “*went straight off and ...*”—is a model for **enthusiastic discipleship**.

2. (:17) Example Repeated But with Fewer Resources

“In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more.”

3. (:18) Evil Avoidance of Obeying the Stewardship Mandate

“But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money.”

Grant Osborne: The lazy servant decides to hide his money in the ground. This was considered a valid practice for safeguarding valuables (cf. 13:44; in Luke 19:20, where the servant hid the money “*in a piece of cloth*,” the action was more disgraceful), but it was deliberate disobedience and an insult to the master, since he was supposed to use it to make a profit. He played it safe to avoid taking a loss, but that was distinctly against the master’s wishes.

II. (:19) LONG DELAY DOES NOT ELIMINATE OR MINIMIZE ACCOUNTABILITY

“Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.”

Grant Osborne: The emphasis here is not on the unexpected nature of the return but on both the length of the time away (further evidence Jesus was preparing them for the church age) and the accountability it entails.

III. (:20-30) FAITHFULNESS WILL BE REWARDED AND WICKEDNESS CONDEMNED

A. (:20-28) Assignment of Appropriate Rewards

1. (:20-23) Commendation of Faithful Stewards

a. (:20-21) Wise Investment of Five Talents

1) (:20) Report

“And the one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.’”

2) (:21) Reward

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.’”

Walter Wilson: Faithfulness, then, results not only in rewards but also in opportunities for demonstrating greater faithfulness.

Grant Osborne: It is possible that “*of your master*” (τοῦ κυρίου σου) is a subjective genitive and means “the joy your master will give you,” or it could be a simple possessive, meaning, “share in your master’s joy” (in a job well done). Either way the concept is that of **eschatological reward**. Many see a link with the parable of the bridesmaids, and this is God’s invitation for his faithful people into the **messianic banquet**, with eternal reward the prospect.

D. A. Carson: The eschatological setting, coupled with the promise of joy that bursts the natural limits of the story, guarantees that the consummated kingdom provides glorious new responsibilities and holy delight (cf. **Ro 8:17**).

b. (:22-23) Wise Investment of Two Talents

1) (:22) Report

“The one also who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.’”

2) (:23) Reward

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’”

Warren Wiersbe: The two men who put their money to work each received the same commendation (**Matt. 25:21, 23**). It was not the **portion** but the **proportion** that made the difference. They started as servants, but their Lord promoted them to rulers. They were faithful with a few things, so the Lord trusted them with many things. They had worked and toiled, and now they entered into joy. Their faithfulness gave each of them a capacity for greater service and responsibility.

2. (:24-28) Condemnation of Wicked Steward

a. (:24-25) Excuses and Blame Shifting by the Wicked Steward

“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said,

'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.'"

Daniel Doriani: As the servant saw it, he stood in a no-win situation. If he toiled and gained, the master would seize the proceeds. That, the servant thought, was his custom. But if he toiled and lost, he would be punished. Either way, he saw nothing positive. The root of his sin was his bitter judgment that his master was harsh and grasping. We see how mistrust paralyzes people.

Brian Evans: This wicked and lazy servant is so utterly evil that he is trying to blame his laziness on his Master. *Master, I knew you to be a hard man.* This is not at all true. The Master is not hard but very caring and compassionate.

b. (:26-27) Exposure of Wicked Character and Irresponsible Conduct

"But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.'"

Michael Wilkins: The servant's misperception of the master produces alienation, mistrust, fear, and then personal sloth. Had he truly loved his master, he would not have attempted to place the blame on the master, but would have operated out of love.

D. A. Carson: Grace never condones irresponsibility; even those given less are obligated to use and develop what they have.

Craig Blomberg: "*Lazy*" (*okn ros*) more literally means *shrinking* or *hesitating*. The master does not dispute the servant's characterization of him, but neither need v. 26 be read as agreeing with it. The master's words sound like biting sarcasm. He points out that, even if the servant were right, he should have realized that his inaction proved all the more inconsistent with his premise. Disobedience would surely elicit a severe master's wrath. He should have invested the money as his fellow servants did. His tragic error lay in allowing himself to be paralyzed by his fear.

Stu Weber: *You wicked, lazy servant* stands in dramatic contrast to "*good and faithful servant*" (25:21,23), implying that the servant's **laziness** was not because of a lack of ability or opportunity. The servant's "safe" behavior and apparent desire not to displease the master were smokescreens for his self-serving and disobedient heart. In reality, he refused to take any risks or do any work. He did not spend himself in the kingdom's interest. He was selfish, lazy, and arrogant.

The master used this servant's own words against him. He explained that his demanding character should have challenged the servant all the more to invest the talent. This was obviously the master's will—to gain some return. Even a small return from interest would show some degree of loyal obedience.

c. (:28) Executing an Exchange of Future Opportunity

"Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents."

B. (:29-30) Accountability Principles Explained

1. (:29) Faithfulness Rewarded with More Opportunity

“For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.”

2. (:30) Disobedience Judged with Eternal Damnation

“And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is our view of the **goodness of God** reflected in what type of service we render?
- 2) Why do the Scriptures consistently connect the concepts of **laziness** and **wickedness**? What are some other cross references?
- 3) How can a preoccupation with the details of end time prophecy distract us from proactively taking advantage of our present ministry opportunities?
- 4) What type of differentiation in roles and service opportunities can we expect to see in the Millennial Kingdom (and possibly even in eternity)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: The difference between the parable of the talents and the parable of the virgins is the emphasis. The emphasis of the parable of the virgins is that of watching for the King to return. The emphasis of the parable of the talents is that of serving until the King does return. **W. H. Griffith Thomas** said the first parable is about **watching**, the second is about **working**.

THOSE WHO MAKE USE OF GOD’S ENTRUSTMENTS, TO THEM WILL BE HIGHLY REWARDED WHEN THEY FACE JESUS CHRIST; BUT THOSE WHO DO NOT WILL LOSE WHEN THEY FACE HIM.

God entrusts different things to different people. One may use those entrustments for God’s glory or one may waste those entrustments on self and do nothing for God. There will come a day in which full, accurate compensation will be given.

Daniel Doriani: Factors in Service

To serve well, we should know ourselves well. Many factors affect our ability to serve: our schedule and energy level, our age and health, our education and experience, our self-discipline and motivation, our marital and family status. But three factors have a pivotal role.

Capabilities and Limitations

God gives everyone abilities; the Bible calls them “*gifts*” (**Eph. 4:7–8**) and “*graces*” (e.g. **Rom. 12:6**). These terms remind us that the Lord bestows abilities so we may extend his grace to his people (**1 Cor. 12:7–11; 14:12**).

We might call a gift a **raw ability**. At the physical level, some people can run faster, jump higher, or lift more weight than their peers. Yet the capacity must be honed and developed to be truly useful. . .

Desire

Desire is passion for our work and pleasure in it. Desire is the thrill an engineer feels as he solves a problem, the satisfaction a diagnostician knows as she labels a disease and prescribes the remedy, the rush an actor feels when he delivers lines perfectly for an enthralled audience.

Paul says those who show mercy must “*do it cheerfully*” and that givers should “*give generously*” (**Rom. 12:8**). The phrase “*let him give generously*” literally reads “*let him give with simplicity*.” That is, if someone has the gift of giving, he needs no return, but simply gives. Giving itself is the reward. Givers say, “Please borrow our car. We will be pleased if you do.” Mature disciples take pleasure in using their gifts to help others. **We feel alive when we exercise our talents**, even if it brings certain hardships. Prophets may need to deliver bitter words of woe, but they still want to speak God’s truth.

I once had a professor who said, “I teach for free; they pay me to grade papers.” Although he was certainly glad to earn a living, he found joy in teaching, not in money. When God moves someone to “*be happy in his work—this is a gift of God*” (**Ecccl. 5:19**).

Fruit

Where there are capacity and desire, there should be fruit or results. “Fruit” means the engineer’s solution works and the doctor’s patient improves. Gifted people actually advance God’s kingdom, strengthen the church (**1 Cor. 14:3**), and lead God’s people to maturity (**Eph. 4:12–13**). Gifted leaders mobilize God’s people for worthy causes. Encouragers listen and then speak or act to lift spirits (**1 Cor. 14:3–5; Rom. 12:8**).

The Bible encourages us to seek fruit. God’s work as Creator and Redeemer is fruitful (**Pss. 102:25; 104:13**); therefore men and women, created in his image, should try to be fruitful. Moses prayed, “*May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands*” (**Ps. 90:17**).

Ordinarily, when there is fruit, someone asks the worker to perform his service again, either as a volunteer or in a paying job. Proverbs says, “*Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men*” (**Prov. 22:29**).

Let me offer a test if you are unsure of your gifts. If you do something once and if wise people observe and invite you to do it again, you may have a gift. If wise heads insist that you do it again, you probably have a gift. If they never invite you to do it again, you probably do not. Of course, anyone can make a mistake in judging talent, but the unanimous judgment of a group of seasoned observers is almost always close to the mark. . .

Your experience can corroborate the judgment of others. If you do something once and want to do it again soon, you may have a gift. If you never want to do it again, you probably do not. These are not absolutes and there are gray areas. Some people appear to have more ability than they actually do. Further many men and women have abilities that leave them cold. For example, pastors who excel at preaching and teaching commonly possess more ability as a counselor than they might wish. They can help people, but find it draining. Conversely, some counselors are capable teachers, but find that daunting and draining. Many people have skill in administration but yearn for more ability to lead. If some people have a capacity they neither enjoy nor wish for, we may call it an ability but probably not a gift, since gifts (so we ordinarily think) **bring delight** to those who receive them.

R. T. France: It is then more about **responsibility** than about natural endowment, though the degree of responsibility given to each depends on their individual ability (v. 15). The “*talents*,” however, do not represent that individual ability but are allocated on the basis of it. They represent not the natural gifts and aptitudes which everyone has, but the specific privileges and opportunities of the kingdom of heaven and the responsibilities they entail. The parable thus teaches that each disciple has God-given gifts and opportunities to be of service to their Lord, and that these are not the same for everyone, but it is left to the reader to discern just what those gifts and opportunities are. This is appropriate to the open-ended nature of parables, and different readers may rightly place the emphasis on different aspects of their discipleship. What matters is that, however precisely the “*talents*” are interpreted, each disciple should live and work in such a boldly enterprising way that the returning master will say “*Well done, you good, trustworthy slave.*” That is what it means to “*be ready*” for the parousia, just as in the earlier parable it was the slave who was found hard at work who was rewarded (24:46–47). . .

It will be the slaves’ responsibility not to look with envy at the different hand which has been dealt to their colleagues, but to make the most of what they have, and it will be important to note that the first two slaves will receive identical commendations in vv. 21 and 23 even though the sums they have gained differ, since each has succeeded in proportion to his initial endowment.

Craig Blomberg: The three points of the passage thus approximate to the following:

- (1) Like the master, God entrusts all people with a portion of his resources, expecting them to act as good stewards of it.
- (2) Like the two good servants, God's people will be commended and rewarded when they have faithfully discharged that commission.
- (3) Like the wicked servant, those who fail to use the gifts God has given them for His service will be punished by separation from God and all things good.

This final point seems appropriate both for those who are overtly hostile to God and his revelation and for those who profess commitment to him but show no evidence in their lives of the reality of their profession.

John MacArthur: The Tragedy of Wasted Opportunity

Now the parable of the virgins and the parable of the talents differ in a sense. They are both parables about **readiness**. You remember the last one, there were ten virgins; five were ready when the Bridegroom came because they had oil in their lamps. Five were not because they didn't. everyone was waiting but only five of the ten were ready to go into the wedding feast. The whole point of that parable was to talk about readiness, preparedness. And it emphasized waiting, waiting for the coming king, looking for the coming of the Lord, anticipating his return.

The emphasis was on waiting. It was on that internal heart attitude that longs for the coming of the Lord. The parable of the talents is not an emphasis on waiting; it's an emphasis on working, on working. While we are waiting and while we are looking and while we are watching, we are to be serving, and that's what the parable of the talents emphasizes. And together they provide for us a masterful balance of living in anticipation of the Second Coming. . .

It's a picture of spiritual capacity and spiritual privilege and spiritual responsibility and spiritual opportunity. And in the story, you know the servant who really loves his master is going to say, "Boy, here's my opinion to show him how much I love him. Here's my opportunity to really invest my time and my energy and my thought and my work to bring him back a return on what he's given me. Here's my opportunity to show him that he was right in trusting me to sort of return his confidence in me. I want to live up to what he thinks. This would appeal to the noblest motive in the heart of a loving servant. This would really be something he would want to fulfill for the sake of the master to whom he owed so very, very much. And that's the whole point, the Lord gives people within the framework of his kingdom, in the framework of his church all different levels of capacities and opportunities. And the issue is what they do with those opportunities. Talents in our bag, the talent that we carry, the bag of coins that we carry would include teaching, how much teaching have we received, how much opportunity to hear, mixed with our God-given and God-created intellectual capacities, emotional capacities and gifts and skills. And how much opportunity for fellowship and how much opportunity for spiritual advantage and insight, and how much opportunity for blessing and how much have we received of all that the kingdom offers, that's our bag, mixed with our God-given capabilities. . .

The responsibility and the reaction then leads to the reckoning, and I just want to introduce this to you and we'll take it up next time. But notice the reckoning in **verse 19**. After a long time, the Lord of those servants comes and reckons with them. The word reckon is a commercial term meaning to compare accounts; he comes back to look at his books. He comes back to see how they've done in terms of stewardship in regard to their opportunity, and that's the way it's going to be when the Lord returns. He's going to come back and look at the books and see what men have done with their opportunity, with their opportunity to serve the King, with their opportunity to serve the Lord, with their opportunity to serve the Master. What have they done with their spiritual privileges? And I say it is a strong message to a congregation like this where spiritual privilege is so high, where spiritual graces have been so super-abounding. **What do you do with the privilege you have?** Have you really given the Lord a whole life of service in return for that? . . .

So we want to keep in mind that as God has designed things sovereignly, even though eternity and the kingdom provide a certain amount of equality, there will also be a certain amount of absolute inequality in the sense that we will all be distinct serving and ruling and honoring the Lord in ways unique to us as to our privilege, capability, and service rendered to the Lord. Okay? And we must keep all those things in mind. And God has sovereignly designed it so that ultimately when he's redeemed all of us, we'll all fit perfectly into the plan of giving him glory forever and ever and ever, and ruling and leading at whatever level he has designed and we have proven faithful to that design. . .

And so from the responsibility to the reaction to the reckoning. And then finally to the reward. . .

So, people, let me just sum it up very simply. In the kingdom, in the church, in the assembly of the redeemed, there are going to be those who are prepared and serving the Lord. There are

going to be those who are unprepared and who outwardly may be active but are not ready for his coming. And when the Lord comes, there will be a separation and a delineation based upon their service rendered to him. All excuses set aside. False service will be ended and that which they appear to be doing will be given to some others to do for throughout the kingdom and throughout eternity.

Matthew McCraw: Examples of Profitable Investments

- John Gray invested \$10,500 in the stock of Ford Motor Company in 1903. When Ford bought the stock back in 1919, the stock was worth a whopping \$26.25 million.
- Asa Candler bought the recipe for Coca-Cola from John Pemberton for \$2,300 in 1891. Candler then sold the same recipe in 1923 for \$25 million!
- Peter Thiel, one of the original investors for Facebook, invested \$500,000 in the company in 2005. His return was 800 times the initial investment, as he sold all 25 million shares of Facebook for \$400 million in 2012.

You see, history is full of people who made both profitable and devastating investments. The truth is, money can be managed well and it can be managed poorly. A faithful Christian will be a good steward of the money that God has given him or her. However, there are things in life that are much more important than money, and we are to be good stewards of those things as well. . .

Bottom Line: The Lord *blesses us with all that we need to faithfully follow Him until He returns.*

The time and resources God has given us are grace-filled gifts. Let us be faithful.

We have no excuses to not be fully living the life that God has called us to live in Jesus, equipped by His Holy Spirit: a life of faithfulness, a life of generosity, a life of love, and a life of holiness.

Jeremy Myers: It is very difficult to know who is a five talent servant, and who is a one talent servant. We can probably all agree that someone like Billy Graham is a five talent servant. But there was once a Christian man by the name of Edward Kimball. He was a lowly shoe salesman. He didn't have any education to speak of. He wasn't famous or rich. But he did have a friendship with a young man, and Kimball eventually led that young man to Christ. The young man was D.L. Moody, who became a great evangelist and whose work is still having effects today through Moody Bible Institute, Moody Broadcasting, Moody Publishing, Moody Memorial Church, Moody Missionary Aviation and so on.

But the story doesn't stop there. During Moody's life, his preaching ministry took him to England. At first, he was not warmly received by all the pastors. One of the pastors, the Reverend F. B. Meyer, resisted the unschooled and blunt American evangelist. However, Moody's influence on Meyer's parishioners inspired a change of heart in Meyer. Thus, Meyer joined Moody's evangelistic meetings with wholehearted enthusiasm.

Kimball's influence continued through Meyer when Meyer received an invitation from Moody to come to the United States. While in the states, Meyer's Bible teaching ministry reached a struggling young preacher named J. Wilber Chapman, whose approach was so transformed that he, too, went into evangelistic ministry.

It was Chapman's own crusade advance man, a former clerk in the YMCA, who was to carry on Kimball's chain of multiplication. His name was Billy Sunday.

Sunday preached across North America with spectacular results. His crusades in Charlotte, North Carolina, produced some converts who organized a prayer group that met for years, praying that God would continue the ministry of evangelism through the people of Charlotte.

This group of praying men was led by the Holy Spirit to plan a city-wide crusade. They invited Mordecai Ham, the cowboy evangelist, to speak. During one meeting, some teenagers were among those reached for Christ. They included a young man named Billy Graham.

It all began with one lowly shoe salesman. Maybe we would consider him a one talent servant. But in reality, he had the five talent responsibility of teaching Sunday school to some unruly boys, one of whom was D.L. Moody. D.L. Moody's conversion eventually led to the conversion of Billy Graham, whom all of us consider to be a five talent servant.

So nobody can really know how many talents they have been given. And of course, the one who had two multiplied his to four, and maybe if given a little more time, could have multiplied it to eight.

I don't know what talents God has given to you. I don't know what responsibilities He has assigned to you. But I do know this – they are not insignificant. Even if it is only one talent, that is still \$750,000 which can be turned into \$1.5 million.

When it comes to investing your time and money in the Kingdom of God, there is no limit to what you can do. But we must be about our Master's business, because the day is coming when He will return. In our parable, that day comes in **Matthew 25:19**.

https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/matthew/matt_25_14-30/

TEXT: Matthew 25:31-46

TITLE: JUDGMENT OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS AT THE RETURN OF CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

SON OF MAN WILL RETURN IN GLORY TO SIT IN JUDGMENT ON THE GENTILES TO DETERMINE ENTRANCE INTO THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Here it is **the nations** who are to be judged, and the basis of that judgment is how they treat God's people. There is no atmosphere of delay or the unexpected timing of the parousia. Yet, similar to the parables of the wheat and the weeds or the good and bad fish of **13:24–30, 47–52**, this final part of the discourse centers on the glorious appearing of the Son of Man and the judgment of the nations that will ensue.

The righteous will be rewarded because in showing mercy and taking care of Jesus' messengers they have cared for him. The wicked will be punished because they did not show mercy to Jesus' messengers (note the **contrasts**—come/depart, blessed/cursed, inherit the kingdom/eternal punishment/eternal life). The theme is first the unity of Jesus with his people and then the responsibility of the world to accept and minister to his followers in mission.

Homer Kent: This judgment scene must be distinguished from that of **Revelation 20** (Great White Throne), for that follows the resurrection of the wicked at the close of the Millennium. Here the nations must mean **the persons living on earth when Christ returns**. They will be judged as **individuals**, not as groups (*them*, v. 32, is masculine gender, whereas *nations* is neuter). Such a judgment of living men at the time of Christ's glorious coming is foretold in **Joel 3:1, 2** . . .

It seems clear that the *sheep* and the *goats* are distinct from *my brethren*. Hence the interpretation of the nations as Gentiles and my brethren as the faithful Jewish remnant who will proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom in all the world (**24:14; Rev 7:1-8**) meets the exigencies of the passage. . . These Jewish believers will bring about the conversion of an unnumbered multitude of Gentiles (**Rev 7:9-14**), who will evidence their faith by their deeds.

David Thompson: WHEN JESUS CHRIST COMES IN ALL OF HIS GLORY, HE WILL JUDGE EVERY INDIVIDUAL FROM THE GENTILE NATIONS WHO SURVIVED THE TRIBULATION TO DETERMINE WHO GETS TO GO INTO HIS KINGDOM AND THIS DETERMINATION WILL BE MADE ON THE BASIS OF HOW THE GENTILE TREATED THE JEW DURING THE TRIBULATION.

The kingdom will feature O.T. resurrected saints, the Church, faithful Jews and faithful Gentiles who survived the Tribulation. All ungodly Jews will be judged and removed from the earth at the end of the Tribulation (**Zech. 13:8-9**). This will amount to about 2/3rds of all Jews. Then Gentiles will be judged. In order for the Gentiles to be deemed faithful, they must face judgment. The prophet Joel clearly predicted this judgment (**Joel 3:2, 12**).

Ray Stedman: The Unconscious Test

[Look at how] how Jesus ends this tremendous talk with his disciples on the Mount of Olives. He suddenly drops the use of parables and returns to a **simple narrative**. Unlike the household, the ten maidens, and the talents, the judgment of the sheep and goats with which he ends is not parable but **fact**.

It is hard for us to remember that these words were uttered by a Man standing in the gathering dusk on the Mount of Olives, in the midst of a tiny band of forsaken men, and looking out over a city where even at that moment his enemies were completing the plans for his arrest and execution. When Jesus uttered these words, by every human appearance he was defeated. The powers of darkness were triumphant, the shadow of the cross was falling across his path way, the crowds that once had followed him had long since gone, his friends were fearful and powerless, and one of them was even then set to betray him. Yet as he surveyed the centuries he saw the light that was yet to come, and without uncertainty in his words, in that hour of triumphant evil and seeming human defeat, he declared, "*When the Son of man comes in his glory...he will sit on his glorious throne. [And] before him will be gathered the nations.*" . . .

The purpose of the judgment is obviously to determine who shall enter the kingdom of God which the Son has come to establish. Through all the great discourses of Jesus in the gospels the evident passion of his heart is to see the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. He will manifest himself in power for the very purpose of fulfilling those ancient dreams of the prophets—an earth that will be filled with the righteousness of God as the waters cover the sea. But only the righteous will be allowed to enter. . .

Some commentators have felt there are three groups in this judgment scene: the sheep, the goats, and another group whom Jesus terms "*my brethren*" who are the point of testing at the judgment. These "*brethren*" would likely be the **144,000 Jewish believers** who are closely identified with the Lord during the whole period of his presence behind the scenes. The Lord Jesus says to both the sheep and the goats, "*...as you did it [or did it not] to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it [or did it not] to me.*" It seems highly likely that there is this third group involved. Certainly, during the Tribulation each of these 144,000 will be, as Jesus himself was in the days of his flesh, "*despised and rejected of men.*" It will be a severe test of true love to show kindness toward them for they will be an object of furious hatred by the Lawless One and the authorities of earth in that day. . .

The arresting thing about this is that Jesus is clearly saying that the ultimate mark of an authentic Christian is not his creed, or his faith, or his Bible knowledge, but the concern which he shows to those who are in need. The **practical demonstration of love** is the final proof.

I. (:31-33) PREPARATION FOR JUDGMENT

A. (:31) Seating of the Son of Man on His Throne of Judgment at His Coming in Glory

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne."

Van Parunak: This verse forms an **external inclusio** with **24:30-31**. At that point the Lord suspended the chronological presentation for the six parables about readiness for his return. Now he picks up the narrative once more.

Grant Osborne: The glorious appearing of the Son of Man is also found in **13:41, 49; 16:27; 24:30**, building on **Dan 7:14** (“*given authority, glory and sovereign power*”) and **Zech 14:5** (“*Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him*”). What is spoken of Yahweh in the OT belongs to Christ; his “*glory*” (δόξα) is clearly emphasized in this verse. In the other Matthean passages, the term connotes both God’s (and thus Christ’s) Shekinah “*glory*” (the divine glory “*dwelling*” among his people) and the ineffable glory, majesty, and splendor of the enthroned God of **Isa 6** and **Ezek 1**.

Jesus’ coming “*with the angels*” refers to the hosts of heaven who at the eschaton will be the eschatological agents of resurrection and judgment (cf. **Zech 14:5; Matt 13:41, 49; 16:27; 24:31; 1 Thess 4:15; 2 Thess 1:7; Jude 14**).

R. T. France: The sovereign authority displayed in the judgment on the temple (**24:30**) now finds its eschatological counterpart in the judgment of all nations (v. **32**).

B. (32-33) Separation of the People into Sheep and Goats

*“And all the nations will be gathered before Him;
and He will separate them from one another,
as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;
and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.”*

Grant Osborne: Sheep had a relative worth much higher than goats, because of their wool (goat hair made a coarse cloth) and the fact that they were easier to care for.

II. (:34-40) PROCLAMATION OF BLESSING AND REWARD ON THE SHEEP

A. (:34-36) Judgment of the Sheep

1. (:34) Blessed People Rewarded

*“Then the King will say to those on His right,
'Come, you who are blessed of My Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”*

John MacArthur: Are people going to go into the kingdom because of their **social orientation**? There’s far more to it than that, beloved, far more to it. And that’s all bound up in **verse 34**. People who get confused here somehow miss **verse 34**, because **verse 34** makes it very clear **the basis of their entrance into the kingdom**. It’s extremely clear.

First of all, “*Come*” – here comes number one point – “*ye blessed of My Father*.” That emphasizes the source of their salvation. You are blessed of My Father. You are entering into the kingdom because My Father has determined to bless you. Here you have **sovereign grace** beautifully expressed. By the way, the phrase in the Authorized, “*You blessed of My Father*,” in the Greek literally says, “*My Father’s blessed ones*.” You are coming into My kingdom because God predetermined sovereignly to bless you. He redeemed you out of His sovereign love. So **verse 34** expresses the innate reality of redemption and salvation and justification.

And then it says, “*Come you who are the blessed who belong to My Father, inherit*” – **inherit**, which implies something very important. You inherit something because you are born into a family. Right? It implies again that they **belong to the family of God**, to which you belong by faith. You inherit what is yours because by faith you have become a *joint heir with Christ*, if we

can sort of borrow Paul's thought in **Romans 8**. So you are the elect by sovereign grace, the chosen to be blessed by the Father. And you are those who inherit because you belong to the family by faith, you are **sons of God**. And so you see the source of salvation and you see the gift of salvation given to those who are the children of God.

Further it says, "*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you.*" And that again emphasizes the **selectivity of salvation**. When God prepared the kingdom it was for you that He prepared it. You were chosen; you were ordained to this; you are those whom the Father designed to love. So you have the source of salvation in the Father's blessing, desire to bless, you have the reception of salvation in the faith that brings you into the inheritance, you have the selectivity of salvation in the fact that the kingdom was prepared for those people. Let me tell you something, whoever it was prepared for are going into it. God isn't going to lose any and He knows who He prepared it for.

And then a further thought. It was **prepared from the foundation of the world**. Now that emphasizes the **eternal covenant** that God made with Himself to redeem a people selected before the foundation of the world. Who are these people going in? They're not just people who got involved in social action. They're not just people who did good deeds on the earth. These are those chosen from the foundation of the world by sovereign God to receive His grace and be blessed and who responded by faith and became His heirs in the family. And all of that soteriological richness is compacted in **verse 34**. And that can't be missed, that can't be missed. The good deeds mentioned in **35** and **36** are not the primary emphasis. The primary emphasis in identifying these people is in **verse 34**. **The good deeds are the fruit of the redemption** defined for us in such simple yet profound terms in **verse 34**. And the people who get confused by this passage get confused because they perhaps haven't looked as closely as they ought to look at **verse 34**. And looking at **verses 35** and **36** alone might provide some difficulty. . .

These people who are standing there at that moment when Jesus comes will have survived the tribulation and the tribulation will have generated some dire need – some dire need. There will be hungry, thirsty people. There will be homeless people. There will be shattered and devastated families and lives. There will be desperate people. There will be imprisoned people. There will be deathly sick people. All of those things will come out of the tribulation in very clear and bold relief. And when that happens to the family of God, it will be the believers that come to their rescue and they don't care whether they're identified with the family of God, they don't fear the consequence of that. They'll pay the price.

2. (:35-36) Basis for the Reward = Practical Love Giving Evidence of Regeneration

*"For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat;
I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink;
I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;
36 naked, and you clothed Me;
I was sick, and you visited Me;
I was in prison, and you came to Me."*

John Walvoord: Those described here are people who have lived through the great tribulation, a time of unparalleled anti-Semitism, when the majority of Jews in the land will be killed. Under these circumstances, if a Gentile befriends a Jew to the extent of feeding and clothing and visiting him, it could only mean that he is a believer in Jesus Christ and recognizes the Jews as

the chosen people. Accordingly, in this context, such works become a distinctive evidence that the Gentiles described as the sheep are those who are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

David Thompson: The basis for determining whether or not an individual Gentile gets into the kingdom will be the treatment of the Jews during the Tribulation.

B. (:37-40) Justification for the Judgment

1. (:37-39) Question of Clarification

*“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,
‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You,
or thirsty, and give You drink?
38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in,
or naked, and clothe You?
39 And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’”*

Warren Wiersbe: The interesting thing about this judgment is that the sheep individuals are surprised at what they hear. They will not remember having seen the Lord Jesus Christ and ministering to His needs. But just as they lovingly ministered to the believing Jews [in the tribulation period], they did it to Christ. Their motive was not reward, but sacrificial love.

2. (:40) Answer of Clarity Based on Solidarity of God and His People

*“And the King will answer and say to them,
‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine,
even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”*

Grant Osborne: This is the heart of this section, the “moral of the story.” The king on his glorious throne responds to their incredulous query with another “*amen*” (ἀμήν) saying that highlights the importance of it. Jesus and his followers are one (**John 6:56; 15:4–7; 1 John 2:24, 3:24, 4:15**), so what people do to one of his disciples they do to him (**Matt 10:40–42**). Some see this as an extension of **10:40–42**. This union between Jesus and his kingdom community is a family union; they are “*brothers and sisters*.” In **12:48–50** (another important parallel) Jesus’ true family is identified as “*whoever does the will of my Father in heaven*.” That is also the definition of “*the righteous*” in **25:37**, so this is a further extension of the true ethical conduct required of kingdom people.

R. T. France: Whether they knew it or not, the people they helped were associated with Jesus, to such an extent that they could be said to be Jesus. The more general principle of **Prov 19:17** that “*the person who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord*” is thus here more specifically applied to Jesus and his people. As we have noted in the introductory comments above the terms used in this verse strongly reflect language used earlier in this gospel to describe Jesus’ disciples as “*these little ones*” (**10:42; 18:6, 10, 14**) and as Jesus’ “*brothers and sisters*” (**12:50**; cf. also **28:10**). Jesus has spoken in **18:20** of being present where his people have come together in his name. Here his identification with his people goes further: their experiences are his experiences, and what is done to them is done to him. Cf. **10:40**, “*Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me*,” and **18:5**, “*Anyone who welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me*.” This passage thus expands on the message of **10:40–42**: how people respond to Jesus’ representatives is both a sign of their attitude to him and the basis for their reward. This **sense of solidarity** between Jesus and his people will be creatively developed by the author of Hebrews when he explains how it was

necessary for the Savior to share the experiences of those he saves, so that he rightly calls them his brothers and sisters (**Heb 2:10–18**).

III. (:41-45) PROCLAMATION OF CURSING AND PUNISHMENT ON THE GOATS

A. (:41-43) Judgment of the Goats

1. (:41) Cursed People Punished

*“Then He will also say to those on His left,
'Depart from Me, accursed ones,
into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;”*

2. (:42-43) Basis for the Punishment = Lack of Love = No Evidence of Regeneration

*“for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat;
I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;
43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in;
naked, and you did not clothe Me;
sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”*

Grant Osborne: detailing what the nations refused to do for Jesus’ followers. One could break these into two categories:

1. acts of mercy for **physical needs** (hungry, thirsty, ill), and
2. acts of charity toward **social deprivation** (stranger, naked, in prison).

The unrighteous are unwilling to help in any way and so are condemned for this.

B. (:44-45) Justification for the Judgment

1. (:44) Question of Clarification

*“Then they themselves also will answer, saying,
'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or
in prison, and did not take care of You?”*

2. (:45) Answer of Clarity Based on Solidarity of God and His People

*“Then He will answer them, saying,
'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these,
you did not do it to Me.”*

David Turner: Chiastic structure:

Judgment of the sheep (**25:34–40**)

Judgment of the goats (**25:41–45**)

Destiny of goats: Eternal punishment (**25:46a**)

Destiny of sheep: Eternal life (**25:46b**)

(:46) CONCLUSION – SUMMARY JUDGMENT

A. Eternal Punishment

“And these will go away into eternal punishment,”

B. Eternal Life

“but the righteous into eternal life.”

Grant Osborne: The emphasis is on the eternal nature of the two opposite destinies. “*Eternal life*” (19:16, 29) throughout the NT is the motivation for a life of sacrificial service to God, the church, and the very world that rejects and persecutes God’s people. It is clear here that there are no second chances after death. The decisions made by “*the sheep and the goats*” have eternal ramifications. . .

There is no middle ground. Every person on earth is going either to heaven or to hell. Moreover, the decision will be made in this life, so it is essential that every person be confronted by the gospel and challenged to make a decision. There is no neutrality, and nothing in life is as important as this question, because it determines every person’s eternal destiny!

Stu Weber: Jesus completed the judgment scene and the discourse by summarizing the eternal destinies of the two categories of people. The unrighteous would go away (a permanent departure) into eternal punishment, but the righteous would enter eternal life. The use of “eternal” to modify both “punishment” and “life” contrasts the two destinies and emphasizes their permanence. By the time each person stands before the king, his or her eternity is established and cannot be changed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do the Scriptures teach only one final eschatological judgment event that happens at a point in time or a variety of different judgments happening at different points in time?
- 2) How do you defend Pauline soteriology of justification by faith alone in the light of the emphasis in this passage of practical love being the basis for judgment?
- 3) Why do both groups (the sheep and the goats) have questions for the Judge regarding His explanation of their conduct as directly impacting the person of Christ?
- 4) Do the Scriptures teach **annihilation** of the wicked at the final judgment (“*eternal*” punishment in the sense that it relates to eternity) or the **unending punishment** of the wicked in hell?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: The Judgment of the Living Gentiles

Now it is my opinion that in this passage we have **the judgment of the living Gentiles**. But before we look at it let me remind you of the different judgments that are set forth in the word of God. There is first of all, **our Lord’s suffering on Calvary’s cross**. That is called a judgment. On the cross, Jesus Christ was judged for sin, and therefore those who have come to believe our Lord Jesus Christ do not have any judgment, because we have borne our judgment in our substitute. We do not bear the penalty of sin because we have already borne it in our substitute the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have to bear the condemnation for sin, because we have already borne it in our substitute the Lord Jesus, and we shall not be asked to bear again the penalty

which has already been borne by us in our substitute. It would be unjust of God to have two payments for the judgment of our sin.

There is also the **believer's self-judgment** according to the Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians chapter 11**. That has to do with our daily sins, and it is our responsibility to examine ourselves, to judge ourselves as we live our Christian lives, confessing the sin that the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance in order that we may have restoration with the Father. The believer's self-judgment.

We read in the Scriptures, too, that we shall all – that is, **all believers**, the context makes plain – **appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ**, and there we are to receive rewards, so there is a judgment that believers look forward to, which is called the **judgment of believers for rewards**.

The Bible also speaks of the **judgment of living Israelites** with a reference to the Messianic kingdom. It speaks of the **judgment of living Gentiles** here in **Matthew chapter 25**. It also speaks of the **judgment of the fallen angels**; their judgment is still future. And finally, it speaks of the **judgment of the unbelieving dead in Revelation chapter 20 verse 11 through verse 15**, that very familiar passage in which we have the **Great White Throne Judgment**. So it is my belief that we have, in **Matthew chapter 25**, the judgment of living Gentiles, and **the goal of this judgment is entrance into the Messianic kingdom. . .**

The implication of this, it seems to me, is that this is a judgment that takes place on the earth immediately after his Second Advent. The most startling thing about this to me, however, is not that the subjects of this judgment are the living Gentiles or that it is the time of the Second Advent and that the place is the earth. The most remarkable thing about it is what might seem to be a very obvious thing; is that our Lord Jesus is the judge, **the Son of man is the judge. . .**

When we get to heaven, we shall not find people up there who will be saying, I do praise the Lord that I have been the recipient salvation since I have believed of my own free will. It is remarkable when you read the Book of Revelation through you do not read any such sentiment. You do not read anything other than that they who are in heaven are praising the Lord and the Lamb. They attribute all of their salvation to the things that the Lamb has done as a result of the Father's purpose and will. It is the biblical teaching that we are blessed of our Father who has brought it to pass, that there is a redemptive work by the Son and who, through the Holy Spirit, works on the hearts of men whose wills are in bondage to sin, to bring them to a decision that is favorable for themselves and towards God.

We do not deny volition; we deny free volition. There is a world of difference between denial of volition and denial of free volition. We do say, men must make a decision, but we say that men cannot make a decision acceptable to God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes the unwilling willing. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings us from darkness and bondage to sin to light and to freedom of the salvation of Jesus Christ. This is what we say. This is what we affirm. This is what we say, the Bible affirms, and incidentally, it affirms it of us after we have become Christians, too, for we read, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”*

John Walvoord: A strict exegesis of this passage, however, does not support the conclusion that this is a general judgment. There is no mention of resurrection of either the righteous or the wicked, and “all nations” seems to exclude Israel. The conclusion that this is a final judgment is necessary to the amillenarians’ point of view, but it is not taught in this passage. Accordingly, if the view that there is a kingdom of Christ on earth for a thousand years after His second advent is supported by other Scriptures, this passage fits naturally in such a prophetic framework, and, as such, constitutes the judgment of the living who are on earth at the time of the second coming of Christ in respect to their entrance into the millennial kingdom. This judgment therefore should be contrasted to the judgment of Israel (**Eze 20:34-38**) and the judgment of the wicked (**Rev 20:11-15**) which comes after the millennium has concluded. This passage, more precisely than any other, describes the judgment of the world at the beginning of Christ’s millennial kingdom. . .

This passage, while not dealing specifically with amillennialism or postmillennialism, clearly gives these views no support whatever. The postmillennial dream of a gradually improving world is not revealed here. Instead, Christ comes to a world that is basically anti-Christ and worshipping a man satanically empowered. A judgment like this does not fit into the amillennial interpretation either, because there is no basis here for concluding this to be a judgment of all men living and dead. It is quite different than the judgment of the great white throne (**Rev 20:11-15**), which takes place in space, whereas this judgment takes place on earth. . .

Furthermore, when these saints are judged, they are not given new bodies, but enter the millennium in their natural bodies, in keeping with the millennial predictions of Scripture which describe the saints as bearing children, building houses, and otherwise having a natural life (**Is 65:18-25**).

John MacArthur: The Judgment of the Nations

In Revelation it tells us that the Lord Jesus will come to establish an earthly kingdom of a thousand years’ duration. In **chapter 20**, it says Satan will be bound for a thousand years, verse 3. And verse 4, the saints will reign with Christ a thousand years. The Lord Jesus is going to come back. He came the first time in humiliation. He comes the second time in glory. Many of you are familiar with that. The second time He comes, He comes to set up His kingdom. But before the kingdom can begin, it must be determined who can go into the kingdom and who must be kept out. So all the people are then gathered together and the Lord puts those in the kingdom who belong and out of the kingdom who do not belong. That is the judgment we see here. So we’re looking to the second coming of Jesus Christ and a time of judgment – commonly known, because of the analogy that’s used, as the judgment of the sheep and the goats. . .

Matthew presents Him not only as the revealed King and the rejected King but as the returning King. And in chapter 24 and 25, there is this great sweeping sermon of our Lord about His second coming. And it is not the first time it is mentioned in the gospel of Matthew. It is mentioned previous to this on several occasions in our Lord’s conversations with His disciples. It was of major importance to the Lord and of major importance to Matthew as well. In **Matthew 16:28**, “*Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*” **Verse 27**, “*The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels and reward every man according to His works.*” **Matthew 19:28** similarly says that He will come in the regeneration and the Son of Man will sit on the throne of His glory and that the disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and so forth. So He has spoken about it before to the disciples, but now in a great sermon

embracing two chapters, the Lord speaks of His second coming and Matthew records it as the completion of His presentation of the royal character of Jesus Christ. **He is coming as regal reigning sovereign King** – that’s the message. . .

Now the Son of Man, we said, is the judge. He comes as King but not only as King. He comes also as judge. Because He comes as King to establish His kingdom, He must make a decision and a determination as to who goes into His kingdom. It’s His kingdom; He is sovereign; He is King, but He also has to make judgments about who enters in. And as **John 5:22** says, “*All judgment is committed to the Son.*” **So as well as being King, He is judge**, and He will come to determine who goes into the kingdom and who does not. He is the judge. . .

We don’t know the exact moment. We know the period of time just following the tribulation. The great tribulation will be triggered by the abomination of desolations. And then will break loose all the events described in **Matthew 24** and in **Revelation 6 to 18**. As all of those things break loose in that period of time, you get closer and closer to the coming of Christ. Then the sky goes black and the sign appears. And some day and some hour around that time, the Son of Man will come. The exact day, the exact hour we don’t know. But it’ll be at the second coming that the judgment takes place. . .

The place of judgment, notice it in **verse 31**, “*When He comes in His glory with His angels, He will sit upon His glory throne.*” Where, by the promise of the prophets, is the throne of the Messiah’s glory to be? In Jerusalem on Mount Zion in the holy city, for it is the throne of David. And the prophets said He will sit on the throne of His father David. And so He will come to Jerusalem. . .

Now who are the subjects of judgment? . . .

So the kingdom then will be populated by the glorified redeemed of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the tribulation period. They’re already there.

Now that leaves us with those people who are alive on the earth. Anybody who’s already died as a believer, they’re going to receive a glorified form to go in. But those that are still alive and are to be brought in, those who are true believers, have survived the Tribulation, they will be brought in in their physical form only. In other words, they’ll just go right into the kingdom living in their physical form. There’s no reason to believe anything else other than that. It is an earthly kingdom. And one of the proofs of that is that the prophets tell us there will be reproduction in the kingdom. We know that. The Bible says that at the end of the thousand-year kingdom, there will be a rebellion take place and multitudes all over the earth will come to fight against Christ. Well this couldn’t be the glorified redeemed and it couldn’t be the unglorified redeemed, it’s got to be the children of the unglorified redeemed who didn’t believe. . .

You say, well, how could people be born in that kingdom with Christ ruling in that perfect time of the world with all the glory that’s there, how could they be born and reject Jesus Christ when He’s right there and they can see Him and they can touch Him and they can watch His power? How could they reject? Well ask yourself the question: How did they do it the first time? Then you’ll have your own answer. It’s the sinfulness of sin. And if you don’t think men are depraved, then you haven’t looked at the fact that they will reject even when Jesus Christ rules the whole world with perfect wisdom, perfect love, perfect power. . .

Listen to **Jeremiah 31:35** and **36**, “*Thus says Jehovah, who gives the sun for a light by day and*

the ordinance of the moon and the stars for a light by night. 'If these ordinances depart from before Me,' says Jehovah, 'then the seed of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.'” Listen to what it says in **Isaiah 66:22**, “*For as the new heaven and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me,' says Jehovah, 'so shall your seed and your name remain.'*” In other words, God says **I will not change My promise to Israel**. And spiritualizing these things, wishing them away, it can only be done if you make the church Israel, if you make the future the present, and if you spiritualize the prophecies. And then you have disallowed God’s single greatest way to prove His faithfulness and His promises. . .

Now who has the right to come back to all the prophecies regarding Christ’s second coming and **spiritualize** them all? And when it says He’s going to come down and touch the Mount of Olives? No, no, no, not the real Mount of Olives. And He’s going to make a valley there and He’s going to reign a thousand years on the earth. No, no, no, not a real valley. No, no, no, not the earth, not a real kingdom, not a thousand years. You see what we’ve just done, we’ve created a monster. Because who’s going to tell us, if these don’t mean what they say, what in the world they do mean? And why is it that all the prophecies we’ve learned to bank on as being literal are no use to us in understanding how we’re supposed to bank on future prophecies?

The whole idea is ludicrous. Who gave us the right to turn Christians into Jews? To turn Jerusalem into the church? And to make Canaan in heaven? Who gave us the right to spiritualize all of this? Who gave us the right to put the throne of David in heaven? It’s always been on earth – always. Who told us that the land which Israel will inherit is up there not down here? The only land they ever knew about was down here. And when it says He’ll reestablish and replant His people, who told us that the land in which He’s going to replant His people is a heavenly land when it tells us it’s here? **It’s literal**. We are literally at sea if we spiritualize Scripture. There’s just no way to know what we’re talking about except in vagueries.

Another thought. This is so important. I think you’ll understand this one if you’ve missed any of the others. The earthly visible kingdom of Christ is the best possible way for Jesus Christ to demonstrate that He is the supreme ruler over His creation. Did you get that? It’s the best possible way for Him to demonstrate that He’s a supreme ruler over His creation. Now how can Jesus prove that He can supremely rule this world? How can He prove that He can supremely rule man? How can He prove that He can control the earth if He’s not given the opportunity to do that? If history just ends, He comes, wipes out the earth, and everything is a glorious eternity from then but there’s no restored earth, there’s no kingdom of Christ on the earth, when does He prove that He truly was the ruler of this world? When does He show what could have been done with creation? When does He demonstrate how happy men could have been under His rule? When does He demonstrate that the world could have been a place of peace and a place of joy and a place where righteousness reigned – reigned and ruled, a place where evil was instantly punished? When is that going to be proven? When does Christ get His moment in the sun? Does the whole thing end with the devil having run the whole thing right out of gas and it stops and we go into eternity, and we never have a display in the universe of what it would have been if Jesus Christ had been in control of it? I think not. I think not. . .

Now we’ve looked at the judge in this judgment, the Son of Man, **verse 31**. We’ve looked at the time of the judgment, after the close of the tribulation when He comes in glory to set up His kingdom. We’ve looked at the place of judgment where His glory throne is, that’s in Jerusalem.

We’ve looked at the subjects of judgment, **verse 32**, all the peoples, all the ethnē, all the ethnic

groups, everybody all around the world that's still alive.

And now we want to look this morning at the process of judgment, how does this judgment occur? . . .

Van Parunak: Judgment is a major theme at the Lord's return. With some caution, we can distinguish three phases:

	Anti-christ	Second Coming			Judgment of Nations	Millennium	Satan's Rebellion	Judgment of Wicked Dead
		Rapture	Judgment of Saints	Descent to Earth				
Rev 13-20	13-18			19:6-21	20:4-5	20:6	20:7-10	20:11-15
Matthew	24:15-28	24:29-31	7:21-23 24:45-25:30		19:28; 25:31-46			
Other		1 Thes 4:13-17	Psa 50:1-6 Rom 14:10 2 Cor 5:10		Joel 3:1; Zeph 3:8; Dan 7:22; 1 Cor 6:2; Ezek 20:33	Isaiah 60		

Table 19: End-Time Judgments

So the overall picture is that the kingdom will begin with a judgment on those who live on the earth, to determine who shall be allowed to enter it. The church is not part of that judgment. She has already been received to the Lord, to be part of his triumphal entourage described in **Revelation 19**, and in fact other scriptures make clear that the saints will be helping to execute this judgment.

It is sometimes claimed that the objects of judgments are nations as units, not individual people, but it is important to note that the pronoun “them” is masculine, while “nation” is neuter. The word “nation” is **used as a collective to refer to the people that make it up.**

Ray Stedman: Now the discourse is ended. We have heard the greatest prophet who ever lived outline for us the history of the future. It has been a fascinating experience, containing many surprising and unexpected revelations. If we had never read this discourse before we could not possibly have guessed what the outcome of history will be. But now that we know, what shall we do about it?

There can be only one answer to that. We must do what our Lord says. We must obey the command he repeats again and again. Watch! Keep alert! Watch! We have learned now what that means. It means three specific and definite things: It means we are to help one another feed upon the living Lord Jesus, as revealed in the written Word of God. We must study the Book. It means we must walk in the Spirit, depending not upon our human resources and weapons, but upon the power of an indwelling Spirit who is God himself, at work in us. It means we must live dangerously, venturing ourselves for Christ's sake. We must keep thrusting out in his name, buying up every opportunity to meet those around us at the point of their need.

This, and this alone, is watching. Nothing can take its place.

TEXT: Matthew 26:1-5

TITLE: THE PREDICTION OF JESUS AND THE PLOT TO KILL HIM

BIG IDEA:

THE PASSOVER LAMB PREPARES HIS DISCIPLES FOR HIS CRUCIFIXION AS THE WICKED DESIGNS OF THE JEWISH CONSPIRATORS MESH WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL AND REDEMPTIVE PLAN

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: The beginning of the passion narrative in Matthew, as in Mark, consists of a “concentric” drawing out of three aspects of the setting. The outer layer, in vv. 1–2 and 17–19, is the approach of the Passover festival, which provides both the historical and the theological context for what is to follow. Within that broader context we hear of the plotting of the priestly authorities against Jesus, and their recruiting of Judas, vv. 3–5 and 14–16. And set within that framework is the symbolic incident of the anointing of Jesus by a woman at Bethany (vv. 6–13). The devotion of this unnamed woman contrasts with the hostility of the priests and the treachery of Judas, while Jesus’ interpretation of her act (v. 12) prepares the reader for the success of their plot. But all this is to be understood in the **context of the Passover**, the festival of God’s redemption of his people and the occasion of the covenant which constituted Israel as the people of God.

Donald Hagner: In the story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus we come to the climax of the Gospel and by far the longest consecutive narrative in Matthew. Here the goal of Jesus’ mission is realized. The death of Jesus on the cross is no surprise, nor does it indicate the failure of Jesus’ mission. From the evangelist’s point of view, it is the fulfillment of scripture (26:54, 56), the fixed will of God, and the deliberate choice of the obedient Son of God. This, indeed, is the unique time (*kairos*) of Jesus (26:18). Therefore, the tone of the narrative is not one of tragedy or defeat but one of accomplishment and victory even before we reach the triumph of the resurrection in **chap. 28**. There remains, to be sure, the deep mystery of the abandonment experienced by Jesus on the cross. Although we cannot penetrate that mystery, its meaning is surely to be related to the procuring of the forgiveness of sins through the redemptive death of the Son spoken of earlier in the narrative (1:21; 20:28; cf. 26:28). Jesus in this narrative accomplishes the purpose for which he came into this world. . .

In this brief **transition passage** we are at a turning point, being set in motion toward the goal of the cross. The teaching and healing ministry of Jesus is essentially at an end, and we proceed now into the final and climactic stage of the Gospel narrative. Jesus calmly and confidently predicts what is to happen to him. This is indeed why he has come, and it is his primary work. There is a touch of irony in that directly after this prediction the Jewish authorities are recorded as busy in their deliberations concerning the need to be rid of this troublemaker. Thus unknowingly they industriously set about to accomplish the very purpose of God in Jesus. They cannot thwart God’s plan; in their evil opposition to Jesus they become the very instruments of the fulfillment of that plan.

Grant Osborne: There are only two more days remaining in Jesus’ life, and God is handing Jesus over to become the paschal sacrifice. Jesus is in control and tells his followers what must soon

take place. We then see the part the leaders will play in this central drama of history as they plot Jesus' death; they only think they are in control!

Charles Swindoll: While Jesus tried to mentally prepare His closest followers for what was coming, His archenemies were on the move in the shadows and behind closed doors, plotting a seek-and-destroy mission against the Messiah (26:4). He had ruffled their feathers of self-righteousness and riled them up by His bold proclamation of truth against their hypocritical falsehoods. Now they wanted to put an end to Him once and for all.

I. (:1-2) PREDICTION OF HIS PASSOVER CRUCIFIXION – JESUS CONTROLS HIS OWN DESTINY

A. (:1) Transition from a Ministry of Public Teaching

*“And it came about that when Jesus had finished all these words,
He said to His disciples,”*

Donald Hagner: Here πάντα, “all,” occurs for the first time, probably however referring only to the sayings in **chaps. 24–25**. On the other hand, very likely it includes a hint that this is formally the **end of Jesus' teaching**, the last of the great public discourses (cf. **Deut 31:1** LXX, where almost the same formula is used of the formal end of Moses' teaching).

B. (:2) Timing of the Crucifixion of the Son of Man

*“You know that after two days the Passover is coming,
and the Son of Man is to be delivered up for crucifixion.”*

R. T. France: Before we hear of the priests' plot against Jesus, we hear Jesus himself foretelling what is to come. The order of these verses thus tells us that Jesus will not be taken by surprise, but willingly accepts his fate. The apparently free initiative of the priests (**vv. 3–5**) is to be understood within the context of an already determined divine plan.

Donald Hagner: The note about the Passover is more than simply a note of the time. When it is connected, as here, with a reference to the death of Jesus, it gives the latter a **sacrificial significance**; implicitly Jesus is the **paschal lamb** (brought out clearly in **vv 26–28**; πάσχα, “Passover,” is mentioned only in this chapter of Matthew; cf. **vv 17–19**; for explicit comparison of the Passover lamb and the death of Christ, see **1 Cor 5:7**).

Leon Morris: Jesus uses his favorite title for himself, *the Son of man*, and says that he will be handed over (for this verb see on **4:12**) to be crucified. The verb indicates two things: the initiative will be taken by the Jews, who will do the handing over, but the death sentence will be carried out by the Romans, who in any case were the only people who could perform a crucifixion in Judea at that time. The expression indicates that Jesus was well aware of the schemes of his enemies and of the inevitable outcome. This prediction of the passion is found only in Matthew. It is not without its interest that Jesus accurately fixes the time of his death as after two days, while his enemies say that it will be after the feast, that is, more than a week away (**v. 5**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Now we must not think, however, that because the death of our Lord Jesus was something that took place by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God that men are not responsible, for as Peter said, “Him being delivered by the determinant counsel and fore

knowledge of God, ye have with wicked hands taken and crucified.” And in verse 3 through verse 5 we have the wicked hands of the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, together with Judas and they consult together in order to bring about the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. So grace and sin are moving toward the same end, and God makes the wrath of men to praise him. He is in control of these circumstances. We shall see this over and over again as we study the passion of our Lord, so we’ll drop it at this point.

II. (:3-5) PLOT TO KILL JESUS – GOD CONTROLS THE TIMETABLE

A. (:3) The Gathering of Jewish Conspirators

“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas;”

William Barclay: At the same time, the Jewish authorities were laying their plots and stratagems. Joseph Caiaphas, to give him his full name, was high priest. We know very little about him, but we do know one most suggestive fact. In the old days, the office of high priest had been hereditary and had been for life; but when the Romans took over in Palestine, high priests came and went in rapid series, for the Romans appointed and deposed high priests to suit their own purposes. Between 37 BC and AD 67, when the last was appointed before the destruction of the Temple, there were no fewer than twenty-eight high priests. The suggestive thing is that Caiaphas was high priest from AD 18–36. This was an extraordinarily long time for a high priest to last, and Caiaphas must have brought the technique of co-operating with the Romans to a fine art. And therein precisely lay his problem.

The one thing the Romans would not stand was civil disorder. Let there be any rioting, and certainly Caiaphas would lose his position. At the Passover time, the atmosphere in Jerusalem was always explosive. The city was packed tightly with people. . .

It is little wonder that Caiaphas sought some stratagem to take Jesus secretly and quietly, for many of the pilgrims were Galilaeans, and to them Jesus was a prophet. It was in fact his plan to leave the whole thing until after the Passover Feast had ended, and the city was quieter; but Judas was to provide him with a solution to his problem.

Charles Swindoll: Caiaphas, the high priest, becomes the **leading antagonist**, embodying all the forces of the religious elites bent on protecting their power and promoting their personal interests. Caiaphas may have been behind many of the previous attempts to hinder or trap Jesus, to question His integrity, and to weaken His influence. Now, after the numerous, multipronged efforts to foil Christ’s mission and resist His message have come up empty, the high priest and his wicked cabal have murder on their minds: *“They plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him” (26:4).* . .

At the time of Christ, the office of high priest in Jerusalem carried a lot of **clout**. Not only was the high priest the head of the temple proceedings, but he was also the ruler over many civil, social, and political affairs. Those of the priestly class “were the real rulers of the nation, although they did not claim for themselves the title of king.” Since the Jews were under the thumb of the Roman Empire, the appointment of the high priest had to be undertaken by Rome, and the high priest operated under the authority of the Roman procurator.

At the time of Jesus' trial, Caiaphas officially held the office (**26:3**), having been appointed by the Romans, but many recognized Caiaphas's father-in-law, **Annas**, as the real power behind the throne. Annas had been appointed high priest in AD 6, but he was deposed nine years later. However, he remained the powerful head of an elite family, not unlike figures we see in modern organized crime syndicates. After his removal from office, he continued to wield power behind the scenes, first through his son Eleazar and then through his son-in-law Caiaphas, which explains his presence in the trials of Jesus. . .

So, as we visualize the plot to kill Jesus, we should not imagine an aboveboard deliberation among otherwise law-abiding rulers who simply made mistakes because of a lack of spiritual insight. Rather, we should picture the kind of **backroom scheming** we might see in a movie about the Mafia, in which unscrupulous thugs plot how to take out an adversary who is treading on their territory. Members of the high priestly family were in many respects the gangsters of Jerusalem who felt their unchallenged power squeezed by Jesus' words and deeds. And in order to maintain the status quo of deep corruption, they were willing to commit murder.

B. (:4) The Goal to Seize and Kill Jesus

“and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth, and kill Him.”

Donald Hagner: The plotting against Jesus is described as δόλω, “*by deceit*” (only occurrence in Matthew). Implied by this are both the innocence of Jesus and the unrighteousness of his opponents. The word is commonly used in the LXX to describe those who oppress the righteous (e.g., LXX Pss **9:28; 34:20; 51:2; 54:11; Prov 12:20; Jer 5:27**).

D. A. Carson: The use of both *assembled* and *plotted* is deliberately suggestive of **Psalm 31:13**: “*For I am the slander of many; fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life.*”

C. (:5) The Game Plan

“But they were saying, ‘Not during the festival, lest a riot occur among the people.’”

R. T. France: The need for “*stealth*” (more literally “*deceit*”) is explained by v. 5. The manner of Jesus' arrival at the city in **21:1–11** had been enough to alert them to his potential as a popular leader, and his robust performance in debate with Pharisaic and other leaders during the following days in the temple courtyard would be likely to have won further support. Note his popular reputation as a prophet (**21:11, 46**) like John (**21:26**). Given the volatile mood of the crowded city during the festival, a public arrest of Jesus would be very risky; the reaction of the Galileans among the pilgrims would be particularly likely to erupt into violence. Yet they could hardly have intended to wait until after the full eight-day festival period, as Jesus would be likely to have left Jerusalem by then. **J. Jeremias** has therefore argued that the Greek phrase here means “*not in the presence of the festival crowd,*” and perhaps that represents the gist of their thinking, even though it is not a natural sense of εν τῷ ἑορτῇ. It certainly represents what in fact happened, a secret arrest at night away from the crowds, especially Jesus' Galilean supporters; vv. **14–16** will explain how this proved to be possible, more quickly than they may have expected.

Richard Gardner: According to the text, the session ends on a note of unrelieved tension: The conspirators want to arrest Jesus while he is in town for Passover. But how can they do so without inciting a riot among Jesus' supporters? Not until **verses 14-16** will a solution present itself.

D. A. Carson: The leaders were right in fearing the people. Jerusalem's population swelled perhaps fivefold during the feast; with religious fervor and national messianism at a high pitch, a spark might set off an explosion. They decided to suspend action, but Judas's offer to hand Jesus over at a time and place when the crowds were not present was too good an opportunity to pass up (**vv.14–16**). Thus in God's providence, the connection between Passover and Jesus' death that he had just predicted (**vv.1–2**) came about.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was different about this prediction of Jesus' death?
- 2) Why is the connection to Passover so important?
- 3) Why did God frustrate other earlier attempts to kill Jesus while allowing these wicked conspirators to carry out their plans?
- 4) What is the significance of the role of Caiaphas in this conspiracy?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Gardner: Prelude to Passion (26:1-16)

- Consigned to Death, **26:1-5**
- Anointed for Burial, **26:6-13**
- Marked for Betrayal, **26:14-16**

R. T. France: The one who has just been portrayed in **25:31–46** as the king on his glorious throne will undergo this rejection and suffering not because he has no choice but because it is his Father's paradoxical purpose which he has freely chosen to fulfill (**26:39, 42, 52–54**). Even as the court condemns him he is entering into his sovereignty (**26:64**). When the Roman soldiers mock him as King of the Jews (**27:27–31**) and the Jewish crowds mock him as temple-builder, savior, king of Israel and Son of God (**27:39–43**) they speak truer than they know. The supernatural events accompanying his death on the cross (**27:51–54**) reveal in vivid symbolism that this is not the end but the beginning, and the supreme title "*Son of God*" is declared even by neutral observers. The resurrection reverses the human verdict of Jerusalem (**28:1–15**) and in the concluding scene of the gospel the resultant sovereignty of the enthroned Son of Man will be triumphantly declared (**28:18–20**).

John MacArthur: Preparing for Christ's Death

Everything to this point is only prologue. Everything to this point is only introduction. This is the main theme. **This is the main event.** This is the issue in the revelation of God – the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so we come to the **climax of Matthew's gospel**, the climax of redemptive history, and the greatest event in the history of the world, the greatest source of hope in the heart of any man or woman who ever lived – the cross of Jesus Christ. No wonder the hymn writer said, “In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o’er the wrecks of time.” And then he said, “All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.” Everything in the sacred story gathers around the cross. You cannot have Christianity without the cross of Jesus Christ. It’s the focal point. And thus the apostle Paul said, “*I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*”

The cross is the epitome of redemptive truth, foreshadowed in the acceptable sacrifice of Abel, foreshadowed in the ark of safety that saved Noah, foreshadowed in the sacrifice provided on Mount Moriah – a ram in the place of Isaac, prefigured in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, where Moses said, “The Lord is my strength, and my song, and He is become my salvation.” We see the cross foreshadowed in the smitten rock in the wilderness that brought forth water to quench the thirsty people. We see the cross foreshadowed in the Levitical ceremonies, sacrifices, and offerings. We see it foreshadowed in the serpent lifted up in the desert for healing. We see it even in Boaz, the kinsman redeemer. We see the cross detailed in **Psalm 22** and **Isaiah 53**. We see the pierced and wounded Savior in **Zechariah, chapter 12**. All the way through Scripture. And then we hear John, the last of the Old Testament prophets, pointing to Jesus and saying, “*Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*” All of Old Testament Scripture, all of the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist points to the cross.

And then comes the cross and all the gospel writers and the epistle writers write of the cross, for it is the **focal point of everything**. Christianity is, more than anything else, a belief in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the salient truth of the Christian faith. And so we come now to the greatest truth, the greatest portion of this gospel of Matthew. And Matthew deals with the cross in very concise, straight-forward, simple, clear terms. This is **the narrative of the cross**. This is the history of it. . .

And in these final three chapters, Matthew breaks up the picture of the cross into some very clear, distinct elements.

- In **chapter 26** we’ll see the preparation for the cross.
- At the end of **chapter 26**, the arrest of Jesus Christ.
- And then as we move in to **chapter 27**, the trials of Christ.
- Then in **chapter 27**, His execution.
- And then in **chapter 27**, His burial.
- And then finally in **chapter 28** comes the resurrection and His final instructions to His disciples.

So we move through the preparation, the arrest, the trial, the execution, the burial, the resurrection and the final instructions. Very simple, very concise, to the point, as Matthew describes the greatest event ever happened in the history of the world. . .

So we see sovereignty, the **sovereign grace** of God that brings Christ to the cross to die for the sins of men. Two days from Wednesday is Friday when all the Jews would be celebrating their Passover, when lambs were being slain all over every place. He would be offered as the Lamb of God. What a fitting moment, right? **What a perfect timing**. The sovereign One has planned that the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world will be sacrificed on the Passover, when

the lambs that couldn't take away sin were being sacrificed. This was the unchangeable plan of God. . .

So [Caiaphas] was the epitome of symbolism in the religious system of Israel, decadent as it was. And yet he carried out all the priestly function. He alone could go into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. He had to carry out all the leadership and ceremonies and sacrifices and rituals. He was in charge of everything. And along with him at this meeting were the chief priests. Those were the leading priests. That meant the guy who was second in command, called the captain of the temple, who was also in charge of the temple police. Under him there was the priest over the daily course and the priest over the weekly course. And then there was the temple treasurer and the temple overseer. That little group made the chief priests. The scribes were those who worked with the Law. And the elders were those who were the nobility out of the laity, having no priestly office but being the leaders of the people that were sent to sort of rule and govern on behalf of the people. And so the envious hypocrite Caiaphas gets his group together and they've got to do something with Jesus. I mean, **chapter 23** alone would have been enough to bring this about, where Jesus blisters them up one side and down the other side with the fire of His wrath and pronounces their condemnation and that was the last straw. . .

So we see then in **verses 3 to 5** the **hateful rejection** is part of the preparation. You understand that in order for the Savior to be crucified, it had to be done by hating men. So God brings that to a fever pitch – the resurrection of Lazarus, the hosannas that threatened their positions of power. If this was the Messiah, they knew they were all going to be deposed. Jesus' threat to destroy their whole system and smash it and crush it and leave it desolate. His pronouncement on them as whited sepulchers, all of these things came to a culmination and their hatred had reached such a fever pitch that they were moving right in line with the sovereign plan of God to pull it all together. They could stand more of this holy perfection from Jesus Christ, and so grace and sin are moving toward the same end. Grace in the person of God's King planning for the cross; sin in the person of the ruler's plotting for the cross.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Son of Man Will Be Delivered Up

This brief passage serves as an introduction to everything which is going to follow in Matthew 26, 27 and 28. It's almost like the opening ceremony of the Olympic games ceremony. Let the games begin. For thousands of years the Lord had been planning and predicting through his prophets of the day when the Messiah would arise, and not only when the Messiah would arrive, but when the Messiah would give himself for the sins of his people. Daniel, the prophet, had spoken of this. Jesus' words now when He speaks to His disciples, He says, "Yet two days hence and the Son of man will be delivered over, or as it were in word and instruction, 'Now My friends the three or four years of ministry which I have been involved in, My days of training you, my days of preaching and proclamation. Those days have come to an end. And now the time has come where I will lay down My life for the sins of the world. And so our feet are on holy ground as we come to the final chapters of the gospel of Matthew. . .

Now understand that Jesus is doing some beautiful things when He predicts His coming death. First of all, He's telling His disciples over and over, "**I know what's coming**. What is going to happen is not an accident." Secondly, He is **preparing them** for the day when that comes, so that they will not say, "Jesus didn't tell us that this was going to happen. We're totally unprepared for this unexpected event which has occurred." He is preparing them to be able to persevere in this tremendous event which is going to occur. But at the same time He is also **explaining to them what His death means**. Why it is that He has to die. Even in the process of predicting to them.

And now when you get to **Matthew, chapter 26, verse 2**, He is more explicit than ever. Now, He not only tells them that He's going to be handed over to the leaders of His people to die, He tells them it's going to happen in two days. This is Tuesday of Passover week. He's saying on Thursday night I'm going to be handed over to my enemies. And on the next day I'm going to die for the sins of the world.

The **connection between Jesus' death and the Passover** is not only significant for Jewish history, but is also significant for explaining the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did Jesus die? Most of us who have grown up in the evangelical tradition, know instinctively the answer is that He died for our sins. But what does that mean? What does it mean that He died for our sins. And the gospel is helping us in these words of prediction understand what it means that He died for our sins. When we say that He was the Passover lamb, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, we are saying something which is at the very heart of the Scripture teaching about the death of Christ. Because understanding Jesus' death as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb, is at the very core of the Christian understanding of the death of Christ: The atoning work of Christ. Think of the shock. Think of the impact on the disciples. They just heard Jesus describing His glory as He comes in clouds to judge the world, and before those words have left their ears, He's now telling them that in two days he is going to be killed. **J.C. Ryle** puts it this way: "The connection of these words with the proceeding chapter is exceedingly striking. Our Lord has just been dwelling on His second coming, and He has been describing the last judgment and all it's awful accompaniments. He has been speaking of Himself as the Judge before whom all the nations will be gathered and then at once without a pause, without an interval, He tells them once and again of His coming sufferings. He reminds them that **He must die as a sin offering before He reigned as a king**. That **He must make atonement on the cross before He took the crown**. The gospel over and over emphasized this aspect of the Lord's ministry."

Bob Deffinbaugh: The Passover Plan: Man Proposes, God Disposes (26:1-29)

The possibility of our Lord's death had probably haunted His disciples for some time. Think of all the attempts on His life.

- For example, Herod sought to kill Him while just an infant (**Matthew 2**).
- After Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, the Pharisees plotted to kill Him (**Matthew 12:14**).
- When Jesus introduced Himself as the Messiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, He then spoke of His bringing salvation to the Gentiles, as well as to Jews. Hearing this, the crowd sought to throw Jesus over a cliff (**Luke 4:28-29**).
- Jesus spent a good bit of His time in Galilee because the Jews in Judea were seeking to kill Him (**John 7:1**).
- When Jesus determined to go to Bethany, where Lazarus already had died, His disciples realized the danger that this posed:

So Thomas (called Didymus) said to his fellow disciples, "*Let us go too, so that we may die with him*" (**John 11:16**).

Jesus was referring to more than just these attempts when He told His disciples that they knew He was to die. On several earlier occasions in Matthew, Jesus specifically foretold His coming death:

- From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (**Matthew 16:21**).
- When they gathered together in Galilee, Jesus told them, “*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men*” (Matthew 17:22).
- “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the experts in the law. They will condemn him to death, and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged severely and crucified. Yet on the third day, he will be raised” (**Matthew 20:18-19**).
- In **Matthew 16:21**, our Lord informed His disciples that He would suffer and die in Jerusalem, and then be raised from the dead on the third day. He also indicated that He would suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes.
- In **Matthew 17:22**, Jesus added that He would be betrayed.
- In **Matthew 20:18-19**, our Lord added that He would be handed over to the Gentiles, and that He would be crucified. All these things the disciples “*knew*,” or should have known, because Jesus told them so.

Now, in **Matthew 26:1-2**, Jesus underscores two very important details regarding His death. The first is not new – He will be crucified. The second detail is new – He will be crucified during Passover. The death of our Lord will be soon, just a couple of days away. And His death will be by crucifixion, a very public death. . .

And so here is the dilemma. Jesus told His disciples He would die during Passover, in just two days. The Jewish leaders agreed that He must not be killed for nearly two weeks. Jesus said that He would die by crucifixion, and (earlier) that the Romans would be involved. In other words, Jesus indicated that His death would be brought about in a very public matter, and it would involve much suffering and persecution. The Jewish leaders purposed to wait until after the feast; Jesus said He must die during the feast, as the Passover Lamb.

No two plans for His death could be more diametrically opposed. What Jesus told His disciples would happen was exactly what the Jewish leaders determined would not happen. Somebody is not going to get their way. Someone is going to have to give way to the other. This is the tension Matthew sets up at the beginning of the events leading to the cross. It is a tension Matthew wants us to feel. Matthew wants his readers to pay attention to whose plans are fulfilled, and whose plans are not. If Jesus is to die as He has said (and as prophecy has required), He must do so against the plans and efforts of the most powerful Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. I am reminded here of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, or of the “battle of the gods” at the exodus.

TEXT: Matthew 26:6-13

TITLE: WASTE OR WORTHY OF WORSHIP? ANOINTING OF JESUS FOR BURIAL

BIG IDEA:

EXTRAVAGANT WORSHIP LAVISHED ON THE MESSIAH AS HE IS ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Jesus is here presented as the suffering Messiah, “anointed” for his messianic destiny as the one who will die for our sins. The woman’s worshipful act of anointing stands in contrast with both the leaders’ decision to kill Jesus and Judas’s decision to betray him. So her act has a twofold significance—a messianic anointing and a washing of his body beforehand for burial.

Leon Morris: Having made it clear that Jesus’ enemies were plotting his death, Matthew gives us a little glimpse of the Master’s last activities among his followers. There is the anointing at Bethany, expressing love and devotion right at the time when the religious leaders of the people were giving vent to hatred and planning murder; the contrast is striking.

Richard Gardner: The point Jesus makes is not that poverty is predestined, nor that his community should ignore the poor. Instead, he argues that this particular act of extravagant love is proper at this particular point in the story in light of what lies ahead.

Stu Weber: Loyalty to the Messiah requires extravagant worship, as we give unreservedly of ourselves. . . . Jesus referred to the short time of his stay on earth. The Messiah should have been the guest of honor, welcomed and respected not only by Israel but by the entire world. He had been on earth a few short years, and he would die in a matter of days. There would always be opportunity to minister to the poor, but the opportunities to minister to the Messiah in the flesh were limited. Timing is always an issue in the spending of kingdom resources.

I. (:6-7) REMARKABLE DISPLAY OF EXTRAVAGANT WORSHIP

A. (:6) Context -- Flashback

“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper,”

Leon Morris: Matthew locates the incident in Bethany but says nothing of precisely when it took place or why Jesus was there. John dates his incident of anointing six days before the Passover and says that the triumphal entry took place the next day (**John 12:1, 12**); neither Matthew nor Mark mentions when the incident took place. John tells us that the home of Martha and Mary was in Bethany (**John 11:1**); presumably it was the house where they lived that was called the house of Simon the leper. Since people were very fearful of leprosy and had no way of curing it, quarantine was the normal requirement: those with this disease must stay away from other people. Therefore Simon could not have had the disease at this time; he may have been cured of it (as we saw in the earlier note, some of the diseases included under the general name “leprosy” were curable; or Jesus may have healed him). Even after his cure he would have still been known as the leper. Alternatively he may have been dead at this time, but the house was still known by

his name. None of the Evangelists tells us why Jesus was in this home, only that he was there. In John's account we find that Lazarus and his two sisters were there, so it is possible that Simon was their father. Jesus was there for a meal, for Matthew speaks of him as reclining at table (v. 7). John tells us that Martha was serving at the meal and that Lazarus was there (**John 12:2**).

B. (:7) Costly Anointing

“a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it upon His head as He reclined at the table.”

Grant Osborne: From **John 12:3** the woman is Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, but Matthew leaves her unnamed to center on her worshipful act. An alabaster flask was itself expensive, made of a soft stone that looked like marble and imported from Egypt. The stone was shaped into a small flask with a lengthy thin neck and was thought to preserve the perfume better.

D. A. Carson: The evangelists stress the **cost** of the “*perfume*” (v.7, most likely a fairly viscous fluid, possibly from the nard plant native to India), which was extracted from the thin-necked alabaster flask by snapping off the neck. According to **John 12:3**, the nard was worth about three hundred denarii—approximately a year's salary for a working man.

Leon Morris: Mary did not regard Jesus as a casual, run-of-the-mill guest but as a very special person; for him a very costly offering was just right. Kings were anointed (e.g., **2 Kings 9:6**), and it may be that this was in the woman's mind. We should also remember that “Messiah” means “*anointed one*,” and that she may have been giving symbolic expression to her conviction that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Warren Wiersbe: When we combine the gospel records, we learn that she anointed both His head and His feet, and wiped His feet with her hair. A woman's hair is her glory (**1 Cor. 11:15**). She surrendered her glory to the Lord and worshipped Him with the precious gift that she brought. It was an act of love and devotion that brought fragrance to the whole house.

Homer Kent: It is unwarranted to suggest that Jesus was inventing motives for Mary. He had previously announced his approaching death (**Jn 10:11, 17, 18; Mt 16:21; 17:22; 20:18**). Instead of closing her mind to the prediction, as the disciples seemed to do (cf. **Mt 16:22**), Mary believed it. She apparently realized that when the tragedy struck, there would be no time for customary courtesies. Only if Mary's act is seen as born of her spiritual comprehension can the tremendous praise from Jesus be properly understood. As it happened, this was the only anointing his body received. The women who later came to perform this task found only the empty tomb.

II. (:8-9) REACTION OF THE DISCIPLES AGAINST EXTRAVAGANT WORSHIP

A. (:8) Indignation of the Disciples

“But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, ‘Why this waste?’”

B. (:9) Idealistic Justification for Their Indignation

“For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.”

Charles Swindoll: Why would Matthew push the pause button on the story line to provide this flashback here in the midst of the narrative? The answer is simple: The scene provides the motivation for Judas Iscariot's betrayal, which would give the Jewish leaders an opportunity to apprehend Jesus during the festival rather than having to wait until its conclusion. . .

John's Gospel gives us an illuminating detail about the disciples' complaint. It originated from Judas Iscariot: "*Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?' Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it*" (**John 12:4-6**).

III. (:10-11) REBUKE OF THE DISCIPLES AND REJECTION OF THEIR REASONING

A. (:10) Rebuke of the Disciples for Their Indignation

"But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.'"

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus knew what they were saying (v. 10). In contrast to their condemnation, He judged her actions "*a good work,*" a good work done to Him. The Twelve scolded Mary for extravagant giving (**Mk. 14:5**) but Jesus scolded them. He accepted her offering. It was expensive. It was from the heart. It was something for which there was only a small window of opportunity to give and she was wise to do what she could while she could (v. 11). It had greater meaning than even she knew (v. 12).

B. (:11) Rejection of Their Idealistic Justification

"For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have Me."

Beare: The beauty of uncalculating generosity is not to be measured by the yardstick of utility.

IV. (:12-13) RECEPTION OF EXTRAVAGANT WORSHIP AND REMEMBRANCE MEMORIALIZED

A. (:12) Reception of Extravagant Worship and Explanation of Its Significance

"For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial."

Grant Osborne: It was common at burials to spread aromatic oil over the body to hide the smell because the Jews did not embalm corpses. **John 19:39** tells us that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus used seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes on Jesus' body, turning their act virtually into a royal burial. Jesus is saying that the woman's anointing is a precursor of that. Matthew omits Jesus' burial anointing as well as Mark 16:1 (the women going to the tomb "to anoint Jesus' body") and so suggests that this is his official burial preparation.

Charles Swindoll: Mary likely intended the anointing of Jesus' head and feet to be an act of worship and a confession that He was the true Messiah ("*anointed one*"). Yet Jesus provided a more profound interpretation of her act: "*When she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial*" (**Matt. 26:12**).

B. (:13) Remembrance of Remarkable Display of Extravagant Worship Memorialized

“Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her.”

Leon Morris: **Gospel** is a significant word here. Jesus knew that his death would not mean the end of the movement he had started, but in a very meaningful sense its beginning. The “good news” that he had come to bring involved his death, and the dark days that lay immediately ahead for the disciples did not alter that basic fact. So Jesus now looks through the atoning work he would accomplish on the cross to the proclamation that would follow and that would go right through the world.

Robert Gundry: Her anonymity and “*the whole world*” make a fulfillment of these predictions unlikely and therefore the fulfillment more impressive when it actually happens (as it has!). “*Amen I tell you*” gives Jesus’ disciples assurance of the unlikely fulfillment.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Matthew present this event out of chronological sequence?
- 2) How is this event differentiated from the anointing of Jesus described in **Luke 7**?
- 3) Do you think Mary was aware that Jesus was going to be put to death shortly?
- 4) What is the significance of this anointing from a Messianic standpoint and from a burial standpoint?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: The death of Christ is the central moment of history. Past and future meet at this event, the culmination of God’s salvific plan to bring his creation back to himself. It is this act of atoning sacrifice that has made the second coming and the last judgment (**25:31–46**) possible, an event that will allow any of us to enter eternity as the children of God. Here divine love has its defining moment, and the triune Godhead has acted with finality to bring humankind and creation (**Rom 8:19–22**) back to themselves. It is fitting that the moment of love and self-sacrifice on the part of the woman bridge from the Olivet Discourse to the events of Jesus’ passion, and her love in contrast to the evil plots of the leaders and the betrayal of Judas sets in motion this final act in the life of the incarnate God-man.

Warren Wiersbe: Notice that every time Mary sought to do something for Jesus, she was misunderstood. Her sister Martha misunderstood her when Mary sat at Jesus’ feet to hear Him teach the Word. Judas and the other disciples misunderstood her when she anointed Jesus. Her friends and neighbors misunderstood her when she came out of the house to meet Jesus after Lazarus had been buried (**John 11:28-31**). When we give Jesus Christ first place in our lives, we can expect to be misunderstood and criticized by those who claim to follow Him.

John MacArthur: Preparing for Christ's Death

Now we have taken a **flashback**. We have moved from Wednesday back to Saturday. Now Matthew says, "*When Jesus was in Bethany.*" You say, well why does He jump back? Because what He pulls in here is **part of the preparation**. And so He goes out of the chronological sequence and He pulls in a very special incident that also fits the preparation for the cross. And it happened on Saturday when Jesus arrived. Why? Because John records the same event in chapter 12 and in verse 1 he says it was six days before the Passover, that's Saturday.

On Saturday, when Jesus came to Bethany, that first day as He came up from Jericho and came to the city to stay with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to be a part of all these events, Simon the leper invited him as a guest for a great supper. Now Simon was no longer a leper. We know that because if he was still a leper, nobody would be going to his house. He was a healed leper. Leprosy in that day was incurable. The only cure for leprosy was Jesus Christ. So it's pretty obvious that Simon was a recipient of the healing power of Christ. And one way he could show his loving gratitude to Christ was to offer Him a supper. Oh, the excitement would be unspeakable. You wouldn't even believe it. Simon a former leper, outcast of outcasts, now having the Healer, God in human flesh, in his own home and hosting Him and inviting Mary, Martha, and Lazarus to be a part and all twelve of the disciples. This is a good group for supper, approaching twenty people. And there may have been others, we don't know. But Mark writes of it, and Matthew writes of it, and so does John, because it is a very important occasion.

There is another anointing like the anointing here that Luke records in **chapter 7** but it's a completely different incident. Even though the man Simon – the name is the same, it's Simon the Pharisee, not Simon the leper. And Simon was a name as common as Joe or John, so we're not surprised there are ten Simons in the New Testament. But it's a different incident in chapter 7. And the woman who does the anointing is different. It isn't Mary; it's a wicked, sinful woman, in that case. But Matthew, Mark, and John record this incident. . .

I mean, in those days, let's face it, they didn't have deodorant. Right Guard was a long way off. And if you'd been out all day tramping around in the dirt and your robes were, you know, a little sweaty, and you came at the end of the day there – and they didn't have the means for cleanliness, of course, that we have nowadays – and you came in there, you would hope that somebody would anoint you with something. It reminds me of the story of the guys who were all packed into the car driving, and somebody said, "Well one of you hasn't used your deodorant," to which one fellow replied, "Well, it isn't me. I never use any." But in this case, nobody ever used any. And so it was a common thing to do in a home, to anoint the guest with a strong perfume which made it a lot nicer, a lot more enjoyable during the time of the meal. . .

Have you ever worshiped the Lord in such way that you lost all sense of restraint and economy? Most of us worship – let's see, what can I afford this week? I'll give that. That won't affect me. We know very little about this, this unrestrained adoration, where you just crush the narrow neck of that alabaster bottle and pour its contents all over Jesus effusively, profusely. She was pouring out her love, her heart of compassion, her devotion. She was honoring the One that was going to die and rise again for her salvation, to bear her sin. She did it for you, for me; we all should have done it. We all – if we'd have been there, knowing what we now know, would have poured out everything on Him, too. She understood what the disciples didn't want to understand. She wasn't bound up in wanting to get right into the kingdom and have the glory. She apparently understood

more of Jesus' teaching than they did. She symbolizes the effusive, profuse, magnanimous outpouring of love that God desires. . .

The Lord makes a memorial out of this act because it's such a beautiful, such a necessary testimony. Here we are two thousand years later, seeing the loveliness, the sacrificial selfless worship of this very dear lady who loved Jesus Christ. That's part of His preparation, too. Those who loved Him were ready for the death to come, a death for them. And so we see the preparation of sovereign grace, hateful rejection, and loving worship.

S. Lewis Johnson: The Order of the Alabaster Box

Mary had learned the meaning of what **William Cooper** wrote about many years later: "Tis joy enough my all in all at Thy dear feet to lie / Thou wilt not let me lower fall and none can higher fly." It is true there is no higher place for a Christian to ever be than at the feet of our Lord Jesus listening and learning and loving and weeping. . .

He was conscious of his royal position and office. He recognized that he was a king. He recognized that it was perfectly all right for Mary to come with this expensive ointment and pour it out over him, because the principle that governs all of his actions when his office is in view is, I first then Thou. He is the king. . .

And finally will you notice how in his answer he commends Mary for her foreknowledge, for her presence, for in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she has done it for my burial. John said she has kept it she has preserved it she knew that this was coming and she was preparing for it. It was customary, I said, to anoint dead bodies with perfume, and so in the anointing there is recognized by Mary the fact that he is going to die.

J. Ligon Duncan: Christ Anointed with Oil (For Burial)

In this passage before us, we see a strange extravagance in this woman pouring this expensive perfume on the Lord Jesus Christ. And we see a vocal indignation in response to this by the disciples. And then we see a wonderful pronouncement by Jesus about what this woman had done. And even as we see these things, we learn something of what our God is like, we are reminded of the priority of Christ. And we are prompted to reflect upon the uniqueness of the person of Christ, the meaning of His death, and the benefits which flow from His work and the promises that God has given to us. . .

He receives Her worship, and her extravagant act of devotion to Him, because He is worthy to be praised. . .

Mary understood the priority of Christ in a way that the disciples themselves were struggling to grasp. The disciples were outraged when they saw this woman take this alabaster vial filled with perfume that John tells us was worth over a year's wages. This had perhaps been a family heirloom. Who knows for how many generations this perfume had been sealed. As long as the seal of that alabaster bottle was shut, that perfume could last a long, long time. And she takes it, and she breaks it open, and she pours the whole thing out the Lord Jesus Christ. And the disciples are outraged, they are shocked. This is over a year's wages. Think how many poor people could have been helped if we only could have taken that and taken the money and distributed it to the poor. And so the disciples are absolutely outraged. They think that the proper use of that perfume is not to waste it on anointing Jesus, but to give it to the poor. . .

You'll never waste anything on Jesus Christ. Waste your time, waste your strength, waste your life, it'll never be wasted on the Lord Jesus Christ. And Mary understood that in a way that Jesus' disciples had yet to grasp. And it's a beautiful thing to see her pour out her heart and her light, even as she pours out this vial of perfume. No gift is too great in such in response to such a love as His. Divine love which not only gives everything, but is content to be unrequited. You'll never outgive His love. Can't you hear David's words? "I will not give a sacrifice that cost me nothing. Who knows how long that heirloom had been in the family? But Jesus was worth it, and so she worshipped Him with what was perhaps what was the most valuable thing that her family owned. The disciples are shocked, but God is pleased, and Jesus is pleased.

And then we see Jesus' response in **verses 10 through 13**, He gives us another foretelling of His impending death, and He gives us a wonderful announcement about Mary. And Jesus' response simultaneously testifies to His uniqueness, it testifies to His death. It forces us to reflect on His coming death, and it includes a blessing. And again we learn that true faith in Christ apprehends who He is. It understands His uniqueness. If you truly believe in Christ, you understand and you embrace him as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And, true faith in Christ also embraces Him in what He's done. He understands the meaning and significance of His death. And the benefits which flow from that death for all those believe in Him. True faith apprehends Christ in who He is, and what He has done and His benefits.

TEXT: Matthew 26:14-16

TITLE: BETRAYAL OF JESUS ARRANGED BY JUDAS

BIG IDEA:
THE TREACHEROUS BETRAYAL OF JESUS EXPOSES THE DEPTHS OF DEPRAVITY

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Without Judas, the arrest and crucifixion would not have occurred during the Passover. Judas serves God's purpose as well as that of the chief priests when his willingness to betray Jesus for money sets in motion the passion events so that Jesus will die as the paschal lamb for our sins.

R. T. France: The devotion of the unnamed woman is sharply contrasted with the treachery of one of Jesus' inner circle, and her uncalculating generosity with his sordid bargaining. The reader has been prepared for this development not only by the repeated use of the verb *paradidōmi* ("hand over," "betray") in Jesus' predictions of what is to come (17:22; 20:18; 26:2) but also by the specific identification of Judas Iscariot in 10:4 as the one "*who also betrayed him.*"

Donald Hagner: It must be disconcerting to every disciple of Jesus that one of the twelve, that group so uniquely intimate with Jesus, became the betrayer of his master. It came as no surprise to Jesus, however, who knew the human heart so well. But it was a surprise to the disciples, who could not bring themselves to believe that one of their company would betray Jesus. We can only speculate regarding Judas' motives, though it seems unlikely that the motive was money alone. Perhaps he was disappointed in the direction of Jesus' ministry and wished to force his hand by having him arrested. Perhaps with the Zealots he shared the ardent expectation of a national-political kingdom that would end the Roman domination of Israel.

Warren Wiersbe: Why did Judas follow Jesus for three years, listen to His Word, share His ministry, and then turn traitor? One thing is certain: Judas was not the victim of circumstances or the passive tool of providence. It was prophesied that one of Messiah's close associates would betray Him, (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14), but this fact does not relieve Judas of responsibility. We must not make him a martyr because he fulfilled this prophecy. . .

Judas's life is a warning to those who pretend to serve Christ but whose hearts are far from God. He is also a warning to those who waste their opportunities and their lives. "*Why this waste?*" asked Judas when he saw that expensive ointment poured out on Jesus. Yet Judas wasted his opportunities, his life, and his soul! Jesus called him "*son of perdition*" (John 17:12), which literally means "*son of waste.*"

Matthew McCraw: Well, we see in this passage, the unfolding of the conspiracy against the divine. In Matthew 26, plans are being made to kill the Son of God. As with some other famous conspiracies to commit murder, this plan did not pan out exactly how the conspirators planned it. However, it did happen exactly as God planned it.

Ray Pritchard: There are two things that perplex us about Judas. First, why did he do what he did? Second, after he had done it, why did he feel so guilty? He was so evil that he sold the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Yet afterwards, he felt such remorse that he committed suicide. .

The most we can say is this. Judas was a potential traitor from the beginning. Circumstances eventually converted him into an actual traitor. That he never intended things to end like they did does not lessen his guilt. It only highlights the tragedy of his life.

I. (:14) BETRAYAL INITIATION – SWITCHING SIDES

“Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests,”

Grant Osborne: It is common today to say we cannot know Judas’s true motivation (e.g., **Hill, Hagner, Davies and Allison**), yet Matthew and John make it quite clear—it was an **act of avarice**. True, it was more complex than that and probably greed mixed with disappointment that Jesus was not the nationalistic hero Judas expected, yet clearly Mammon was the primary reason. Note that Judas is willing to take whatever the leaders offer and settles for what is a decent amount of money though not a lot.

II. (:15) BETRAYAL CONTRACT – SATISFYING GREED

*“and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?’
And they weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver.”*

III. (:16) BETRAYAL LOGISTICS – SEEKING OPPORTUNITY

“And from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Him.”

Donald Hagner: Matthew’s ἀπὸ τότε, “*from that time,*” is characteristic, indicating a clear turning point in the narrative, though not so important as those of **4:17** and **16:21**.

R. T. France: The importance to the priests of an inside informer has already been indicated in **vv. 4–5**, and is underlined by the phrase “*looking for a good opportunity to hand him over.*” It was a matter of letting the authorities know of Jesus’ likely movements so that he could be arrested away from the crowds. The secluded hillside of Gethsemane would offer the ideal answer. There Judas will act as guide to the arresting party, as well as identifying Jesus to them in the dark. We shall note too that at the trial the high priest seems remarkably well informed about Jesus’ alleged claims, more so than Jesus’ recorded public statements would easily explain, and it may be that Judas’ role as informer included passing on aspects of Jesus’ private teaching as well.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How much do we value Jesus?
- 2) Why didn’t Judas ask for a larger amount of money?

- 3) What are the differences between Judas' betrayal of Jesus and Peter's?
- 4) What type of contrast is Matthew making between Mary's devotion and Judas' betrayal?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: We wonder **what motivated Judas to betray Jesus**. Some say Judas was a revolutionary. The name Iscariot might be derived from the Latin term sicarii, which means "dagger-men," that is, insurrectionists. Had Judas expected Jesus to lead an armed revolt against Rome? Had he become disillusioned with Jesus' lack of action? Sickened by his talk of death? Did he believe Jesus was a failed leader who had to be removed so someone else could lead Israel against Rome? No one knows.

But Judas was not merely misguided. We cannot neglect old-fashioned **greed**. John says Judas stole from his fellow disciples (**John 12:6**) and hoped to get more money for betraying Jesus. He sought out the priests and bargained for thirty pieces of silver. After that "*Judas watched for an opportunity*"—literally, a good time!—"to hand him over" (**26:16**). Thirty pieces is an interesting sum:

- In **Exodus 21:32**, thirty pieces of silver is the fine a man must pay if his ox accidentally gores a slave to death.
- In **Zechariah 11:12–13**, God's faithful shepherd rescued Israel from evil shepherds and they paid him thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave. So Judas sold Jesus for the price of a slave.

It is ironic. Judas bristled that Mary spent 300 denarii to anoint Jesus, then he betrayed Jesus for 120 denarii. Mary showed "uncalculating generosity" while Judas drove a "calculated bargain."

The Bible says Judas was led by Satan and destined for judgment (**John 13:27; 17:12; Acts 1:15–20**). Still, we wonder how a disciple—one who witnessed everything Jesus did—could turn and betray him. This invokes a broader question: how can any creature turn against the Creator? Ultimately all sin and rebellion are mysterious, yet God uses even dark mysteries to accomplish his purposes. Wicked men betrayed Jesus to death, but "*God intended it for good*"; it fulfilled his "*set purpose*" (**Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23**).

We thank God for his ability to bring good out of evil. We also hear the warning in this story. It is possible for us, as for Judas, to see all the evidence for Jesus and still turn away. Even something as banal as greed can blind us. May the Lord have mercy on us!

Jeffrey Crabtree: The N.T. writers do not reveal what Judas thought would happen to Jesus. He might not have expected Jesus to be killed (**27:3–5**). His actions fulfilled prophesy (**Ps. 41:9**) and according to Jesus were reprehensible. Judas was guilty of a horrendous sin, a sin so great that no mortal can imagine the torments of hell that are his (**Mt. 26:24; Mk. 14:21; Lk. 22:22**). Even though Jesus knew perfectly Judas' scheme, yet five days after Judas decided to betray Jesus, he

was still numbered with the Twelve. Jesus even washed his feet (**Jn. 13:1-30**). Oh, the vileness of the sinner! Oh, the grace of the Savior!

Richard Gardner: In recent times, interpreters have asked whether Judas might have acted out of **more complex motives**. Might Judas have been trying to force Jesus' hand, to get him to raise an army or call on legions of angels (**26:53**) to free Israel from Roman rule? Was Judas disillusioned, betraying Jesus because he believed that Jesus had betrayed the hopes people had placed in him? Did Judas perhaps come to share the view of the chief priests that Jesus was a false prophet?

Whether one or another of these explanations is historically correct, we cannot say. What is clear is that the figure of Judas presented in the text represents a tragic possibility for disciples in every age, the possibility of betrayal. To be close to Jesus is to have the perilous opportunity either to further Jesus' mission or to subvert it.

Leon Morris: But such views are mere speculation. There is no indication in any of our sources of any motive other than that of money. That seems clear enough in Matthew; while Mark and Luke speak of money only after Judas has made it clear that he wants to hand Jesus over to his enemies, it is mentioned immediately after that; and there is no real doubt in any of our sources that money mattered to Judas. The sequence of stories may be significant. Matthew has just told the story of the pouring out of the costly perfume, and John tells us in connection with this that Judas was the treasurer of the little band and that he had wanted to get control of the money that might have been theirs had the perfume been sold (**John 12:4-6**).

Bob Deffinbaugh: The Biography of the Betrayer

As we look into the betrayal of the Savior by Judas Iscariot, it is my intention to define his act as the logical outcome of several basic flaws in his character, and to defend my contention that the Scriptures describe his traitorous intentions as premeditated and carefully deliberated.

The Biblical Necessity of the Betrayal

We must begin by stating unequivocally that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was no accident, no unplanned event. It was an event decreed from the beginning of time. In fact, to be correct we should say before time began. *“For indeed, the Son of Man is going **as it has been determined**; but woe to that man through whom He is betrayed!”* (**Luke 22:22**; cf. **Acts 2:23**, emphasis mine).

Not only was the death of the Lord Jesus decreed in eternity past, it was declared by the Old Testament prophets as well: *“The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born”* (**Matthew 26:24**). *“I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against me’”* (**John 13:18**; cf. **Acts 1:16-20**).

I find it significant that in each gospel (**Matthew 10:4**; **Mark 3:19**; **Luke 6:16**; **John 6:70-71**) Judas is introduced for the first time by the author as **the betrayer of Jesus**. His character and ultimate destiny were known by our Lord from the start and revealed in the gospels at the very outset of his appearance.

The Biblical Reasons for the Betrayal

Some biblical scholars seem strangely reluctant to pursue the reasons for Judas' betrayal of our Lord. On the other hand, some theories have little or no biblical support and must definitely be questioned. The Scriptures do suggest several reasons why Judas betrayed the Master, and these I believe to be sufficient.

First of all, we must grasp the fact that Judas, distinct from the eleven, was **never a true believer**. We know that the 'Bread of Life' discourse' (**John 6:22-71**) caused many 'followers' of Jesus to turn aside, refusing His teaching of a Savior Who was a suffering substitute for men (**John 6:60ff.**). As an explanation for the turning away of the crowds, Jesus told His disciples that these unbelievers were not unknown or unexpected. One of them, known to Jesus, but not yet comprehended by the eleven, was Judas, the betrayer: "*But there are some of you who do not believe.*' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him" (**John 6:64**).

Moments later Jesus said, "*Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?*' Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him" (**John 6:70-71**).

In the upper room, when Jesus washed the feet of the twelve, He distinguished between the need for what might be called daily cleansing and the once for all washing of regeneration. In addition, Jesus also differentiated between the eleven who were 'clean,' that is saved, and Judas, who was not:

"Jesus said to him (Peter), 'He who has bathed (louo) needs only to wash (nipto) his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, 'Not all of you are clean'" (**John 13:10-11**).

From these Scriptures we conclude that Judas was an unbeliever, a son of perdition (**John 17:12**). As an unbeliever, Judas failed to grasp who Jesus really was. Like Satan, who progressively came to control Judas, there was a stubborn refusal to submit to Jesus as Lord of all. This insubordination may have been carefully concealed, but Judas' own words betrayed his condition. When Jesus announced during the Passover meal that one of the twelve would betray him, the eleven all responded, "*Surely not I, Lord?*" (**Matthew 26:22**). But when Judas spoke to the Savior, he said, "*Surely it is not I, Rabbi?*" (**Matthew 26:25**). Granted, this is a subtle slip of the tongue, but nonetheless an indication of the condition of the heart of Judas.

The second reason given for the betrayal of Jesus is that of **greed**. This condition is most obvious from several evidences. John is careful to inform us that Judas functioned as the treasurer of this little band (**John 12:6**). Judas was especially irritated by Mary's seemingly wasteful use of her expensive perfume¹⁰² to anoint Jesus. While the formal reason for his protest was that this could have been sold and the proceeds distributed to the poor, the truth was that he resented not being able to steal from the proceeds which he would have had in his keeping.

Another evidence of Judas' greed is to be found in his dealings with the religious leaders. His first recorded words with them were, "*What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?*" (**Matthew 26:15**).

Many scholars find it difficult to believe that a desire for money, especially a sum as insignificant as thirty pieces of silver, could compel him to sell out the Savior. But Jesus was not the master of Judas; money was. It is amazing what men will do, even for a small amount of money.

The third reason for Judas' ignominious act was that of **ambition and self-seeking**. This I arrive at by inference and thus some may not consider the evidence compelling. Several things suggest ambition to me. Judas was, in the final analysis, possessed by Satan to do this dastardly deed (**John 6:70; 13:2,27**). We should expect Judas to manifest the character traits of Satan, one of which was ambition and self-seeking (cf. **Isaiah 14:13-15; 1 Timothy 3:7**). I would expect that Judas initially joined this intimate group that followed the Savior expecting to further his own position (not unlike the ambitions of some of the other disciples, cf. **Luke 22:24**).

Some Bible students have determined by careful study that Judas was sitting in the place of honor, second only to Jesus, during the last supper. Many have gone on to suggest from this that Jesus placed Judas here as a kind of last appeal to him to change his mind. But the text gives us nothing to support this conjecture. Indeed, the text (**John 13**) implies that when the disciples entered the banquet room, they jockeyed for the best positions and the seat of honor. They ignored the basin placed by the door which would have been used by the most humble servant to wash the feet of those entering. This is what Jesus did as an example of humility. So it would seem that Judas had the seat of honor because he asserted himself most to get it.

The fourth and perhaps final reason for the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was that **he had long contemplated it, and for some time, intended to do it**. I must confess that I was not prepared for this reason as I began my study.

Then I came across this verse in John: "*But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor people?'*" (**John 12:4-5**). This passage seems to indicate that Judas' act was the result of considerable deliberation and a rather long-standing decision. Then, as I began to investigate the Greek term used here (*mello*) I found it was often employed by John, and sometimes with the sense of intention or volition. "*And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do*" (**John 6:6; cf. 7:35; Acts 20:7,13; 27:30**).

Finally, I discovered this marginal rendering for **John 6:71**: "*Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was intending to betray Him*" (**John 6:71** NASV, marginal rendering). Judas' actions were no impulse, no quick decision. I believe that he had at least toyed with the idea of a betrayal for months.

TEXT: Matthew 26:17-30

TITLE: *OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW --
CELEBRATION OF PASSOVER AND INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER*

BIG IDEA:

JESUS MARKS THE TRANSITION FROM THE OLD COVENANT TO THE NEW BY CELEBRATING THE LAST PASSOVER AND INSTITUTING A NEW MEMORIAL

INTRODUCTION:

These verses are packed with **rich theology**:

- Establishing the chronology of the final week leading up the Crucifixion to establish that Jesus offered Himself as the perfect Passover Lamb at the precise time of fulfillment of OT sacrificial typology.
- Demonstrating the divine sovereignty over all of the events of history – with God even controlling the events for which evil men like Judas must bear personal responsibility and judgment.
- Demonstrating the ways in which Jesus precisely fulfilled the OT sacrificial system and orchestrated the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.
- Exegeting the doctrines of redemption, substitutionary atonement and particular atonement.
- Explaining the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and its memorial significance while refuting the errors of transubstantiation and consubstantiation.

Grant Osborne: In this rich pericope, Jesus' preparations (vv. 17–19) show his control over the situation and perhaps supernatural knowledge of what is about to transpire. His prophecy of the betrayal (vv. 20–25) distinctly shows supernatural awareness not only of Judas's betrayal but also its fulfillment of Scripture, and the words of institution (vv. 26–30) show his sovereignty and also interpret his coming death in its redemptive significance and in establishing a new covenant.

Walter Wilson: The meal scene is divided into two units, each of which concerns Jesus's death: the **prediction of betrayal (26:20–25)** and the **interpretation of the bread and cup (26:26–29)**. Thematically, the juxtaposition of units corresponds to the logic of the woe pronounced by Jesus in 26:24. Both the Son of Man and his betrayer have destinies to fulfill, and these destinies are intertwined. The body of the first unit consists of two parallel exchanges, 26:21b–23 and 26:24–25. Thus a general prediction of betrayal (26:21b) provokes a general response (26:22), to which Jesus responds with a word of confirmation (26:23). This word then segues to a specific prediction of betrayal (26:24) that provokes a specific response (26:25a), to which Jesus responds with a further word of confirmation (26:25b). Supporting the balance of this structure is the similarity of the questions posed in 26:22 (“*Surely it is not I, Lord?*”) and 26:25a (“*Surely it is not I, Rabbi?*”). . . The narrative progression in our text, then, has the effect of **singling out Judas**, making it clear to the reader that Jesus knows not only that there is a traitor in their midst but also which one of them it is (cf. **John 13:21–30**).

Charles Swindoll: At this point in Matthew’s account, everything is moving inexorably toward Christ’s crucifixion. The Last Supper is the calm before the storm. Within a matter of hours, He would be betrayed by Judas, arrested at Gethsemane, pushed through a series of unjust trials by both Jews and Romans, scourged severely, mocked, and nailed to a cross by heartless soldiers, where He would die a slow, excruciating death. But before all this, He and His twelve disciples gathered around a common table for the Passover meal—their last supper together.

R. T. France: It is the group’s last meal together, but already the presence of the traitor casts a cloud over the Passover celebration, and when Jesus goes on to explain the meaning of his own approaching death, by means of a creative reinterpretation of the traditional Passover ceremonial, the atmosphere of foreboding is deepened.

J. Ligon Duncan: He is pre-explaining the meaning and significance of His death tomorrow. It is important that His disciples realize that the death that He is going to die is not an accident. It is something which He is embracing which is part of the plan of God, and so He is pre-explaining what is going to happen to them tomorrow for their spiritual ratification. And, of course, He is instituting a new ordinance which all Christians are to observe in all ages until He comes again. And that ordinance itself is designed to strengthen our faith and give us assurance of His love and of the certainty of His benefits.

Stu Weber: This portion of the narrative includes three brief paragraphs revolving around the Passover meal:

- Jesus' careful preparation for the meal (**26:17-19**),
- his revelation that a betrayer was in their midst (**26:20-25**),
- and the institution of the Lord's Supper (**26:26-29**).

This emphasis on the Passover strengthened the symbolism of Jesus as the Passover lamb (cf. **26:2**).

I. (:17-19) PASSOVER PREPARATION

A. (:17) Secret Itinerary for Passover Celebration

“Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?’”

Charles Swindoll: The Jewish observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread recalled the unleavened cakes baked prior to the exodus from Egypt (**Exod. 12:39**). The festival began with the offering of the Passover lamb. Preparations for the special meal “came during the daylight hours on Thursday, the fourteenth of Nisan” when lambs were offered in the afternoon and prepared to be eaten in the evening—Thursday night. That meal was called the Passover. The rest of the Feast of Unleavened Bread then extended for seven more days.

As the day of Passover dawned, the disciples were naturally becoming concerned about where they would observe the annual meal. To forsake the meal would have been a violation of the Law, which required particular feasts to be observed annually (**Lev. 23**). Undoubtedly, they assumed that their rabbi had arranged for the meal somewhere in Jerusalem, since they were from Galilee. The disciples were more than willing to make the necessary preparations for the meal; they just needed to know the venue (**Matt. 26:17**). . .

If the Passover meal was to be observed at the home of somebody known by the disciples, why didn't Jesus simply tell the disciples outright? Some have suggested that because Jesus knew Judas had set in motion a plot to betray Him (**Matt. 26:16**), He had to make the arrangements for the Passover meal behind the traitor's back. This could be the reason He didn't observe the feast at the home in Bethany where He was staying. That would have been an obvious place for an arrest, and the meal would have provided a great opportunity for Judas, as the streets of the city would have been mostly empty while families remained indoors to observe the Passover. But Jesus wasn't about to let Himself be caught in Judas's diabolical web until it was time. Though His time was "*near*" (**26:18**), the moment for His arrest had not yet come.

Once Peter and John completed the preparations (see **Luke 22:8**) and the time for the Passover meal arrived, Jesus and the disciples assembled at the planned location. I can just imagine Judas following Jesus and the other disciples as they wound through the crowded Jerusalem streets, unsure of where they were going, his eyes shifting back and forth as his brain went into overdrive searching for the best moment to report Jesus' secret itinerary to the Jewish authorities. Yet by the time they arrived at the prearranged room, any opportunity for immediate betrayal had slipped away. He would have to wait for the right moment.

B. (:18-19) Sovereign Control of the Messiah over Passover Plans

"And He said, 'Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.' 19 And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover."

Daniel Doriani: Jesus told two disciples to enter Jerusalem and find "*a certain man*" (**26:18**). That man, Mark says, will be carrying a jar of water. By tradition, men carried water in skins and women carried it in jars—to direct the disciples to a man carrying a water jar is like telling them to go to the mall and look for a man carrying a red purse. When the disciples see the jar-carrying man, they must follow him to a house. The owner of that house will have an upper-story guest room, large and well furnished (**Mark 14:12–15**).

Van Parunak: -**Luke 22:20** tells us that the identification was not by name or address, but by the **unusual circumstance** of a man (rather than a woman) carrying water from the well. Note his **authority** over this otherwise unknown man.

Robert Gundry: This paragraph ends with emphasis on the disciples' exemplary obedience to his ordering them to prepare for his adherence to the law of Passover along with them.

"my time is at hand" – Contrast **John 2:4** – "*My hour is not yet come*"

II. (:20-25) PREDICTION OF BETRAYAL

A. (:20-21) Bombshell Prediction

"Now when evening had come, He was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. 21 And as they were eating, He said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.'"

Craig Blomberg: Jesus interrupts the festivities with the horrible prediction of v. 21. He has never previously mentioned betrayal in his passion predictions, and the topic introduces a painfully dissonant note into the conversation, breaking the intimacy of table fellowship and marring the joy of the Passover festivity (though see **Matt 20:18**). The rest of the Twelve

apparently know nothing of the events of vv. 14-16. By speaking to the issue, Jesus makes it clear that he knows full well what Judas is up to. When the events unfold, he will be giving in to them willingly, not tricked by any ruse.

Leon Morris: by New Testament times they had adopted the Greco-Roman habit of reclining. They would lean on the left elbow with the head toward the table and the feet away from it; the right hand was free to take the food. They used triclinia, couches for three. The tables were arranged in a U shape, with the principal couch at the junction of the two arms. In this case Jesus was in the place of the host, namely in the center of the triclinium at the head.

Van Parunak: Each of the last three parables describing the delay in the Lord's return distinguishes true from false disciples. Judas is an instance of the evil steward, the five foolish bridesmaids, the servant with one talent.

B. (:22-23) Pinpointing One of His Intimate Companions as the Betrayer

*“And being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him,
‘Surely not I, Lord?’ 23 And He answered and said,
‘He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.’”*

D. A. Carson: Jesus' point is that the betrayer is a friend, someone close, someone sharing the common dish, thus heightening the enormity of the betrayal.

J. Ligon Duncan: It's interesting, isn't it, that Jesus with this word in **verse 23** calls the disciples to **examine their hearts** because in **verse 26**, they are going to begin taking the Lord's Supper together. Isn't that interesting? In **I Corinthians 11**, the apostle will tell us, before we come to the Lord's Supper, we are to examine ourselves to see if we have discerned the body. And the Lord Jesus right here is calling on His disciples to examine their hearts. They are going to be taking the Lord's Supper in a few moments.

C. (:24) Prophetic Fulfilment but Personal Condemnation

1. Prophetic Fulfilment

“The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him;”

2. Personal Condemnation

*“but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!
It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”*

Leon Morris: Jesus proceeds to make two things clear: one is that his death has its place in the will of God and thus nothing has been done to him outside the divine purpose, the other that this does not palliate the guilt that rests on the person who is to be his betrayer.

Van Parunak: The Lord anticipates **no restoration for Judas**, and Matthew later (**27:3-10**), alone among the gospels, records his tragic end. The difference between his sin and that of Peter illustrates an important spiritual principle. The Lord instructed Moses to distinguish two classes of sins (**Num 15:22-31**). For sins of ignorance (**15:24-29**), specific sacrifices could be offered. But for presumptuous sins (literally sins “with a high hand,” **15:30-31**), no sacrifice was available, and the offender was cut off from his people, a principle echoed in **Heb 10:26**.

Peter did not purpose or plan his failure. In fact, when the Lord announces it, Peter protests vigorously that it will not happen (26:33). He finds himself in a situation beyond his strength, and succumbs in the weakness of the moment, and (John 21) the Lord restores him to fellowship. But **Judas sins deliberately, with premeditation and preparation**. For him there is no restoration.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now we must not think that this doctrine of the sovereignty of God means that men are not responsible. Notice the next statement that our Lord makes. He said, *the Son of man goeth as it is written of him, but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed*. So he expresses the viewpoint that Judas is liable to terrible judgment even though he is part of the plan of God in the betrayal and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot flee behind the sovereignty of God and say that because God is sovereign, we, therefore, are not responsible. *The Son of man goeth, as it is written, but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed*. And incidentally, that word, *woe*, expresses **terrible judgment** – not light judgment – terrible judgment.

And then to enforce it, he adds, *it had been good for that man if he had not been born*. Now that statement is a statement that **thoroughly and completely refutes the doctrine of universalism and establishes also the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the finally impenitent**. I know that that doctrine has fallen upon very evil times, and it is not popular to speak about hellfire and damnation. In fact, it is generally thought that if a man preaches hellfire and damnation, he's old fashioned, out-of-date, and thoroughly irrelevant. But let me assure you, again, if you read the Bible and pay particular attention to what it says, you will not have any difficulty with the doctrine of eternal punishment.

D. (:25) Focus on Judas as the Betrayer

“And Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, ‘Surely it is not I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, ‘You have said it yourself.’”

D. A. Carson: it is enough of an affirmative to give Judas a jolt without removing all ambiguity from the ears of the other disciples.

III. (:26-29) PRESENTATION OF THE BREAD AND WINE IN THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. (:26) Presentation of the Bread – New Covenant Significance of the Bread

“And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’”

Robert Gundry: The terse commands, “Take,” “Eat,” and “Drink . . .” make the taking, eating, and drinking matters of obedience. “*All of you*” commands drinking from the one cup that represents Jesus' covenant-blood. There's only one source of atonement, to which all must repair if their sins are to be forgiven. So the taking, eating, and drinking represent **appropriation by faith of the benefits of Jesus' sacrificial death**. “*For many*” enlarges the number of beneficiaries beyond the Twelve to include those to be disciplined among all nations (28:18–20). Matthew never gets around to saying that the Twelve did take, eat, and drink. So the accent stays on Jesus' authoritative commands, which thereby become part of his updating the Old Testament law through **escalating the Passover Supper into the Lord's Supper**. “*For*” introduces the outpouring of his covenant-blood as the reason for drinking. Not to drink would represent failure

to appropriate the benefits of that outpouring. Since the forgiveness of sins depends on the outpouring, obedience to Jesus' commands is evidential of true discipleship, not meritorious of forgiveness (compare **Isaiah 53:12**; **Jeremiah 31:34**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Incidentally, he took bread because bread referred to his body, and the body was a necessary means to the incarnation, and so he begins with the incarnation but our Lord took the bread and he blessed it and he broke it. Bread was ordinarily broken, and so it beautifully symbolized not only the incarnation but also the fact of his death. So Jesus took the bread.

Incidentally, when he says this bread is my body, he means this broken bread is my body. We do not feed on a Christ who has not been sacrificed. We feed upon a Christ who has been sacrificed in our Lord's Supper. And when we take the bread, we do not think simply of the fact that he became a man we think also of broken bread. He is food for us only insofar as he has been sacrificed for us. There is no real spiritual food derived from just feeding on an incarnate Savior who did not die. He only becomes food for us because he dies and delivers us from judgment. So Jesus took bread and he broke it and he gave it to the disciples.

Craig Blomberg: Jesus now invests the bread with new meaning. It foreshadows his body figuratively broken and literally killed in his upcoming death. Jesus' words here have led to massive debates, intra-Christian persecution, and huge theological edifices, the weight of which they cannot bear. The doctrines of transubstantiation (the bread and wine become Christ's actual body and blood) or consubstantiation (Christ is really present "in, with, and under" the elements) make no sense of Jesus' words in their historical context. As Jesus holds up a loaf and declares, "*This is my body*," no one listening will ever imagine that he is claiming the bread to be the literal extension of his flesh. Moreover, in Aramaic these sentences would have been spoken without a linking verb ("*is*"), as simply, *this, my body* and *this, my blood*. As frequently elsewhere, Jesus is creating a **vivid object lesson**. The bread symbolizes (represents, stands for, or points to) his crucifixion in some otherwise unspecified sense.

B. (:27-28) Presentation of the Wine -- New Covenant Significance of the Wine

"And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.'"

D. A. Carson: This means that Jesus understands the violent and sacrificial death he is about to undergo (i.e., his "*blood*"; cf. **Morris**, *Apostolic Preaching*, 112–28; **A. M. Stibbs**, *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture* [London: Tyndale, 1954]) as the **ratification of the covenant** he is inaugurating with his people, even as Moses in **Exodus 24:8** ratified the covenant of Sinai by the shedding of blood. "*Covenant*" is thus a crucial category (cf. **NIDNTT**, 1:365–72; **Ridderbos**, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 200–201; **Morris**, *Apostolic Preaching*, 65–111; **John J. Hughes**, "Hebrews ix 15ff. and Galatians iii 15ff.; a Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure," *NovT* 21 [1979]: 27–96; cf. **Heb 8:1–13**; **9:11–10:18, 29**; **13:20**). The event through which Messiah saves his people from their sins (**1:21**) is his **sacrificial death**, and the resulting relation between God and the messianic community is definable in terms of covenant, an agreement with stipulations—promises of blessing and sustenance and threats of cursing, all brought here into legal force by the shedding of blood. . .

It appears, then, that Jesus understands the **covenant** he is introducing to be the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies and the antitype of the Sinai covenant. His sacrifice is thus foretold both in redemption history and in the prophetic word. The exodus becomes a "type" of a new and greater deliverance; and as the people of God in the OT prospectively celebrated in the first Passover their escape from Egypt, anticipating their arrival in the Promised Land, so the people of God here prospectively celebrate their deliverance from sin and bondage, anticipating the coming kingdom.

Leon Morris: When Jesus spoke of his blood as blood "of the covenant," he was surely claiming that, at the cost of his death, he was about to inaugurate the new covenant of which the prophet had spoken. This was a big claim. Jesus was saying that his death would be central to the relationship between God and the people of God. It would be the means of cleansing from past sins and consecrating to a new life of service to God. It would be the establishing of the covenant that was based not on people's keeping it (**Exod. 24:3, 7**), but on God's forgiveness (**Jer. 31:34**).

Jesus goes on to speak of his blood as *poured out*, which is a vivid way of referring to his death. His time on earth is drawing to a close, and he is facing a violent death. But this death, he says, is for many, which means that it is a **vicarious death**. It is also for the **forgiveness of sins** (cf. **1:21; 20:28**). This is central to the covenant he was about to inaugurate. Jesus had taught people a good deal about the way they should live their lives in the service of God, but he had also spoken of their need for divine help and forgiveness. Now he makes it clear that that forgiveness would be brought about by his death.

S. Lewis Johnson: Now if we believe that he died as a substitute, then, for individuals, we must hold to some form of **particularism**. That is, that he came **to die for his own**. He came to give his life for his people, as is taught in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. And **Toplady** is right when he says, "Payment God cannot twice demand first from my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine." If it is taught that Jesus Christ died simply to make all men savable, then Christ has died for the sins of all, and those who refuse shall also die for them, too, and that of course is contrary to the justice of God. Payment God cannot twice demand, first from my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine. So the doctrine of the atonement taught by the Lord Jesus demands a particularism: **a definite atonement, a particular redemption**. . .

So we should never say that blood means simply death. It means **violent death**. If you'll look at passages like **Numbers chapter 35** and **verse 33** and then the context of it through the Old Testament you'll see that our Lord was speaking here in **sacrificial language**. This is my blood, so he means this represents the violent death by sacrifice which I shall die. In fact, the bread and the wine are a kind of two-fold parable. In the case of the bread, it is broken, suggesting death and also suggesting violent death. And then in the case of the wine, which is red like blood – remember in the Old Testament even wine is called the blood of grapes. It was God's way of trying to teach Israel ahead of time what was going to happen. So the bread, the broken body, the wine, the outpoured blood of sacrifice, **animal sacrifice**, was the figure, but here is the **reality**. So what he is saying then simply is this blood is that by which a new covenant is ratified. It is based on this new blood sacrifice that I will accomplish, and it is made with the true seed of Abraham. It is for many.

Van Parunak: Vs. 28 -- This verse highlights two great differences between the blood of Christ and the OT sin offering.

1. First, it is **drunk by the people**. The Old Covenant absolutely forbade the drinking of blood -- **Lev 17:10**
2. The second difference between the OT sin offering and the blood of Christ is **what it accomplishes**.

In the OT, the effect of the blood is universally described as “*atonement*” for sin (**Lev 17:11**). . . . These sacrifices did not remove sin. They simply put them on hold, just as a credit card doesn’t really pay for a purchase, but simply acknowledges the indebtedness. The promise of the new covenant is that God would completely remove the sin: **Jer 31:33ff** -- Thus our Lord describes his blood as “*the blood of the new testament, . . . for the remission of sins.*” In terms of the credit card analogy, he pays off the bill.

C. (:29) Physical Absence of Jesus Anticipates Future Kingdom Consummation

“But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Verse 29 speaks of the kingdom as if it is still future. Some aspects of the kingdom are future, while others are present.

David Turner: The institution of the Lord’s Supper is closely tied to the Passover as well as the new covenant (**Jer. 31:31–34**). It also anticipates the ultimate eschatological feast that inaugurates the future kingdom (**Matt. 26:29**; cf. **8:11**; **22:2**; **25:10**; **Rev. 19:7–9**).

Robert Gundry: The passage ends with Jesus’ saying he’ll abstain from wine till he drinks it in his Father’s kingdom. “*And I tell you,*” “*by no means,*” and “*from now on*” stress the abstinence. “*With you*” implies that Jesus’ physical absence from the disciples in the coming church age—a time of persecution for them, as he has repeatedly predicted—would make wine-drinking, a celebratory sort of drinking, inappropriate for him. He’ll hardly be able to celebrate while his disciples are suffering. But a physical “*with you*” in the future kingdom will consummate his being physically “*Immanuel . . . God [is] with us*” (**1:23**) until his death, burial, resurrection, and implied departure to heaven, whence he’ll come back. “*Anew*” implies that Jesus has drunk with his disciples in the past and perhaps on this occasion—though probably not the wine of the Eucharist, for he gave the cup to them for the drinking of that wine. And since drinking that wine represented appropriating forgiveness of sins by faith in his atoning blood, it would have spoiled the symbolism for him to drink it. His blood was shed for others’ sins, not for any sin of his own. “*In my Father’s kingdom*” means “when my Father fully establishes his reign on earth.” The use of “*my Father’s kingdom*” rather than “God’s kingdom” or “the kingdom of heaven” calls attention to **Jesus’ divine sonship**. One of the Twelve will betray him, but his heavenly Father will vindicate him.

Craig Blomberg: From Matthew's account emerge two key reasons for celebrating the Lord's Supper. One looks **backward**; the other, **forward**. First, we commemorate Jesus' redemptive death. Second, we anticipate his return in company with all the redeemed. These two points remain central to all three Synoptic accounts and should form the heart of any theology of this ordinance.

Stu Weber: We feel this same sense of anticipation as we wait for our adult children to arrive “home for the holidays.” We can imagine the heart of the king waiting for the ingathering of his

entire family before participating again in the meal himself. It has been anticipated nearly two thousand years now by our reckoning. Imagine how long it has been in the reckoning of the Father's heart! What a grand family meal it will be!

(:30) EPILOGUE – FINAL HYMN AND DEPARTURE TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

“And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Daniel Doriani: So whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we share in the benefits of the new covenant: substitutionary atonement leading to the forgiveness of sins, particular redemption granting security to believers. With sins covered, with freedom from guilt, with no need to make amends for sin, we can rest in Christ. If the disciples left the final meal singing a hymn of joy (**26:30**), how much more should we.

D. A. Carson: The “hymn” normally sung was the last part of the Hallel (**Pss 114–18** or **115–18**). It was sung antiphonally. Jesus as the leader would sing the lines, and his followers would respond with “*Hallelujah!*” Parts of it must have been deeply moving to the disciples when after the resurrection they remembered that Jesus sang words pledging that he would keep his vows (**Ps 116:12–13**), ultimately triumph despite rejection (**Ps 118**), and call all nations to praise Yahweh and his covenant love (**Ps 117**). It may be that Jewish exegesis had already interpreted **Psalm 118:25–26** as a reference to Messiah’s parousia (**Jeremias**, Eucharistic Words, 255–62).

Charles Swindoll: Whatever song they sang, the disciples’ supper had concluded, and they began the short trip through the city, across the Kidron Valley, to the Mount of Olives (**Matt. 26:30**). As they did, they stepped into the same dark night that Judas had slithered into earlier. And while they ascended the hill to continue fellowshiping with the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, Judas descended into the depths of treachery, seeking to betray the King for a paltry reward.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Jesus wait until the last minute to reveal His plans for the important observance of the Passover meal?
- 2) How was Judas able to disguise his treacherous intentions and pass himself off as just one of the disciples without them looking at him with suspicion?
- 3) How does the death of Jesus accomplish the reality of which the Passover Lamb was only the type? In what ways did Jesus fulfil all of the foreshadowings of the OT sacrificial system?
- 4) What are the eschatological implications of Jesus viewing His Father’s kingdom as not yet fully consummated and awaiting His Second Coming?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jeffrey Crabtree: The old and new covenants have similarities.

(1) In both covenants, **shed blood**, i.e., lifeblood poured out, meant **death of the sacrifice** (**Newman and Stine** 830) **as the basis for a covenant relationship**. Moses stated (**Ex. 24:8**) after he sprinkled the blood on the people: “*Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.*” In other words, “the blood by which the covenant was ratified and sealed **was the basis for the union between Yahweh and the people**” in the O.T. (**Kaiser**, Exodus 449; emphasis mine). In the same way, Jesus’ shed blood, which He offered on the cross for mankind’s atonement (**Heb. 9:12-14**) and symbolized by the “*fruit of the vine*” at the Lord’s Table, is the basis of the union between the Lord and His people under the new covenant (**Forlines** 191-194). In both covenants, **blood was the basis for a union between sinful mankind and God**.

(2) In both covenants, **faith was the condition** for having the benefits of the blood atonement applied and the union effected (**Rom. 3:28; 4:13-14; Gal. 2:15-16; 3:1-18**, esp. v. 7; **Picirilli**, Romans 79).

Donald Hagner: Amidst the rich symbolism of the Passover meal, Jesus creates a new complex of symbols relating directly to his sacrificial death. It is not an accident of history but the working of divine sovereignty that Jesus was crucified at the Passover season. For Jesus was the new, eschatological Passover lamb (cf. **1 Cor 5:7**), whose sacrificial death was the atonement for the sins of the world. The bread and wine, the **commonest of elements**, come in the institution of the Eucharist to bear **sublime meaning** as the expression of the very center of the Christian faith, the mystery of the death of God’s own Son. For this reason the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is at the center of Christian worship. The Eucharist becomes a Christian Passover.

R. T. France: [Regarding harmony between chronology presented in Gospel of John vs. in the Synoptics] I believe that [the supposed contradiction] is based on a Western cultural misunderstanding: in the Jewish day, which begins at sunset, the evening is the beginning of the day, not its ending as it is for us. So the Synoptic statement that the meal (which was eaten at night, see below) was prepared on Nisan 14 may be understood to mean that it was prepared and eaten during the evening and night which began Nisan 14, rather than that it was prepared late on Nisan 14 (before sunset) and eaten the next (Jewish) day, at the official time for the Passover meal on Nisan 15. This would be an equally natural way for a Jewish reader to understand their words; it is our unfamiliarity with the Jewish method of reckoning days which prevents Western readers recognizing that the evening preceding the killing of the lambs is already the same day, Nisan 14. In that case they are describing the same day as the Fourth Gospel. The last supper and the subsequent trial and death of Jesus all take place on the same (Jewish) day as the killing of the lambs in the afternoon which concludes Nisan 14 and thus on the (Jewish) day before the date for the official Passover meal. The last supper is, then, an anticipated Passover meal, in the Synoptics no less than in John.

John MacArthur: The Last Passover

So, they would celebrate the Passover meal on the 14th of Nisan and then for seven days, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And, of course, we remember what it was for. The Passover celebrated God’s delivering Israel out of bondage in Egypt where they’d been for over 400 years. And you remember, God began to send plagues on the Egyptians, and the last plague was

the death of all the firstborn in every family in Egypt. And God said to them, *“If you will kill a lamb and a spotless lamb, and put the blood of that lamb on the doorposts and the crosspiece, when the angel of death comes to slay all the firstborn of Egypt, if he sees the blood on your door, he will pass over.”* And that’s the Passover. He will pass over your house, pass beyond your house and spare your life. And as a result of that, Pharaoh said, “Get out, I’ve had it. That’s all I can take.” And he sent the Jews out and God ultimately delivered them.

So, the Passover was **commemorating the sacrificial lamb whose blood caused them to escape the judgment of God**. And it was a symbol of God’s ultimate Passover Lamb, whose blood would cause them eternally to escape the judgment of God. And so, God instituted in **Exodus 12** the continual feast of the Passover. It was a meal, and it was held the night before the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Ancient times, it came in the first month of the year called Abib. But after the exile it was celebrated in the month of Nisan and Passover was the 14th day of Nisan and on the 15th day, they began the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

By the way, you might be interested to note that the lamb, according to **Exodus chapter 12**, was to be selected on the tenth of Nisan. And I have been telling you as we’ve been studying the book of Matthew that I believe Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on Monday. His triumphal entry was Monday. There’s several reasons for that. One, it fits the chronology of events better than a Sunday entrance. Two, it eliminates the problem of what has been called through the years “a silent Wednesday.” If you have Christ entering on Sunday, then there’s nothing happening on Wednesday of the Passion Week; it’s a vacuum that’s hard to fill. But thirdly, and perhaps very significantly, Monday was the tenth of Nisan in the year 33 AD in which our Lord died. And that means that the Monday on the tenth was the day in which everyone in the city of Jerusalem was selecting their Passover lamb. . .

Now, it’s **Thursday morning** and it’s time to prepare the Passover meal. They already have their lamb. No doubt they got it on Monday when they arrived in the city. They already have that. But there are many things to prepare for Passover. Do you know what they had to prepare? They had to prepare by the slaying of the lamb which could only be done in the temple court, nowhere else. And could only be done at a two-hour period of time, from three in the afternoon to five, no other time. They had to prepare their unleavened bread. They had to get a bowl of saltwater because at the Passover they set a bowl of saltwater on the table to remind them of their tears shed in slavery, and to remind them of the Red Sea which parted when the Lord delivered them. They had to get bitter herbs like horseradish, and chicory, and horehound, and endive, and other things that they put together in a mix with hyssop to remind them of the bitterness of Egypt and the hyssop with which they spread blood on their doors. . .

Now, you say, “What in the world is all the secrecy about? **Why the clandestine approach?** Why doesn’t He just say, you remember so-and-so, our friend, and follower and disciple? You know where his house is over there on such-and-such a street? That’s where we’re going to do it.” No, He doesn’t say that. Why the secrecy? I’ll tell you one very simple reason: Judas Iscariot. Look at **verse 16**, *“From that time he sought opportunity to do,”* what? Well, the Greek word is *“to deliver Him over.”* Judas was looking for a quiet place, a secluded place, a private place away from the mob where he could turn Jesus over to the religious authorities to be executed. And Jesus knew that if Judas knew where the meal was going to be, that would be the perfect place, and so He wouldn’t say. . .

. . . Galileans, which would be Jesus and His disciples and the Pharisees, could have their Passover on the evening of Thursday because they already began to count the day from morning to morning and it would end on Friday morning. And the others who were from Judea and who were Sadducees, which made up the rulers, wouldn't start their day festivities until late on Thursday and wouldn't kill their lamb until the end of the day on Friday. . .

So, we looked at setting the time. Let's go then, this morning, to **verse 20**. And the second element of this final Passover, after setting the time, is "sharing the table." And very briefly does Matthew treat this Passover. In **verse 20** it says, "*And when evening was come, He reclined with the 12 and as they did eat.*" . . .

And as they move into the meal, we come from the setting of the time, and the sharing of the table to what I call the "shocking of the 12." Look at **verse 21** again. "*And as they did eat, He said, 'Truly I say unto you that one of you shall deliver Me up, or hand Me over, or deliver Me over, or give Me over.'*" It is not really the word "betray." The translators have done that because Judas was a betrayer. But the word simply means, "*one of you will deliver Me up.*" Mark adds the statement in **Mark 14:18** in a parallel account, "*One of you who is eating with Me will deliver Me over.*" Now, this is a shocking thing. One of you who is eating with Me will deliver Me over. And, of course, in that part of the world at that time in history, when you ate a meal with a person, you were identifying yourself as a friend. And the idea of eating a meal with someone and then turning them over to their executioners was just unthinkable, because a meal was a symbol of friendship. . .

So, they didn't identify Judas as the one. Rather, you'll notice **verse 22**, "*Every one of them began to say to Him, 'It is not I, is it, Lord?'*" Every one of them. Now, why would they be so quick to imagine that they themselves might be the traitor? Very easy to understand and it's what I set up a moment ago. The fact that they had just been rebuked for the ugliness of their pride, for their sin, and ambition, and self-will, and self-design, they were whipped. I mean, they had their tails between their legs. They were shamed by their rebuke of Jesus. And then, they were doubly shamed by the washing of their feet. You remember, Peter said, "*You'll never wash my feet. It is not to be that You will wash my feet.*" And then, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "*If I don't wash your feet, you have no part with Me.*" And so, they were rebuked and they were shamed. And now, in that condition where their sin has been exposed, and they can't hide it, and they're very much aware of their weakness, they don't even trust themselves in this regard and they begin to say, every one of them, "It's not I, is it? It's not I, is it?" now that they have been made very much aware of the capability of their evil. . .

That takes us to the last thought, "signifying the traitor," signifying the traitor. **Verse 25**, and this is specific. "*Then, Judas, who delivered Him up, answered and said, 'Master, surely not I.'*" And he had to say that. If he said nothing, he would have been unmasked. He had to play the game. Everybody was saying it so he had to say it. So, he considers himself a part of the group and the group is saying, surely not I, and so he just chimes in, surely not I, masquerading his hypocrisy as if he could hide anything, calling Jesus *ho didaskalos*, the master, the rabbi, the teacher which he no more was committed to than any other element of Jesus, truthfully. All he wanted was **money and glory**. . .

Now, **why this final Passover?** Now, listen very carefully to what I say, it's essentially important in your understanding of Scripture. This was a very, very momentous time in history. Passover was the oldest Jewish institution, older than any other Jewish institution except

the Sabbath itself. For 1,500 years they had celebrated Passover, even before the Aaronic priesthood was instituted, even before all of the Levitical ritual and the giving of the Mosaic Law. The Passover was very old, very ancient. And it was ordained by God to be held every year and every devout Jew did it every year. But now, listen, this Passover, after 1,500-plus years of Passovers, was the last divinely sanctioned and authorized Passover ever held. Any Passover ever celebrated after this one is not authorized by God. It is a remnant of a bygone economy, of an extinct dispensation, of a covenant no longer in vogue. It is vestigial. It serves no significant purpose. Jesus here celebrated the Passover as a way **to bring it to its end.**

The bell tolled in the upper room for the old economy. Christ ended the long years of Passover and began a **new memorial feast** which He begins to institute in **verse 26**. And this new feast is the feast not of the old economy but the new economy, not the old covenant but the new covenant, not the Old Testament but the New Testament, not looking to a lamb in Egypt but a Lamb of God on a hill of Calvary. So, Jesus ends the old before He begins the new. And after having drawn the curtain on the Passover of the old economy, He institutes the feast of the new. And we come to that in **verse 26**. . .

That's why Jesus came. And He instituted the memorial to that the night before His death. So, our Lord headed for the cross to pour out His blood as a sacrifice for sin. And He instituted the bread and the cup as a memorial for all time that we might remember the self-sacrificing, blood-spilling death of Christ for us. The old covenant had all those animals, none of which could take away sin. The blood of Christ alone could do it. And so, the feast that we celebrate is here at this table with the bread and the cup.

Van Parunak: There were four main categories of sacrifices in the system God gave to Moses. In the order presented in Leviticus, they are

1. the whole burnt offering (**Lev 1**),
2. the peace offering (**Lev 3**),
3. the sin offering (**Lev 4-5**),
4. and the trespass offering (**Lev 5:14ff**).

The parenthesis after each offering indicates who ate it in the OT. Nobody ate the whole burnt offering, though the priest got the skin, and ate part of the meal offering that accompanied it. The people could only eat of the peace offering.

These four sacrifices embody two contrasts: their purpose and **when they are offered**.

In terms of **purpose**, the sin and trespass offerings restore a sinner to fellowship with God, while the burnt and peace offerings symbolize the committed service of a worshipper who is in fellowship with God. The sin and trespass offerings focus on the blood as the means of cleansing away sin; the burnt and peace offerings represents the believer's person by the body of the animal that is offered.

In terms of **occasion**, the sin and burnt offerings are general offerings, part of the ongoing liturgy in the tabernacle and temple. The trespass and peace offerings are offered to deal with specific offenses and to give thanks for specific blessings, respectively.

The passover sacrifice was instituted in **Exodus 12**, before the children of Israel came under the covenant at Sinai, so it doesn't fit this scheme exactly. But it does share features of them. Like the peace offering, it is eaten by the people. And like the sin offering, at least in the original

setting in **Exodus 12**, the blood is the center of a special ceremony that protects the people from the angel of death, by marking the lintel and posts of the door.

The two elements of the Lord's memorial fit perfectly with this OT system. His body corresponds to the burnt and peace offerings. The offering of his body shows his complete commitment to the Father in obedience and service. His blood corresponds to the sin and trespass offerings, providing the means to take away sin. We sometimes speak of the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to him, as summarized in

2 Cor 5:21 For he [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This correspondence shows how the death of our Lord fulfills the OT sacrificial system. He both takes away our sin, and provides us with his own righteousness so that we are "*accepted in the beloved*" (**Eph 1:6**). Throughout the OT period, the Mosaic sacrifices enabled God's people to look forward to this twofold transaction on the cross. Now, after the cross, the elements of the remembrance take our minds back to this same twofold transactions.

One further detail requires comment. Throughout the OT, when more than one sacrifice is offered on an occasion, **the sin offering always comes first**, followed by the whole burnt offering, and that in turn followed by the peace offering. . .

The order makes sense. The sin offering must come before the offerings of worship because we cannot offer ourselves in service to God until we have first dealt with the sin that separates us from him. But in every record of the Lord's memorial, he offers the bread before he offers the cup. . . In the OT type, the sin offering came first. Now he starts with the worship offering, and ends with the sin offering.

The change is significant. In the OT, the sacrifices reflected the need of those who brought them. They had to bring the sin offering first, in order for the burnt offering to be accepted. But our Lord had no sin of his own. His whole ministry is based on the fact that **he can begin by offering himself in perfect service to God**, and then provide a sin offering for those who draw near to God by him. . .

TEXT: Matthew 26:31-35

TITLE: JESUS PREDICTS THE FAILURE AND RESTORATION OF HIS DISCIPLES

BIG IDEA:

THE PRIDE BUBBLE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY COLLAPSES WHEN THE FEAR OF MAN LEADS TO DENIAL AND ABANDONMENT

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: The sense of foreboding which has resulted from Jesus' words at the supper about betrayal and death is now underlined as the group makes its way out of the city. But the focus is now not so much on what is to happen to Jesus but on the effect it will have on his disciples. The scriptural pattern which is to be fulfilled includes not only his own death but also their failure, and the imagery of shepherd and flock shows how closely the two are related. Their inability to grasp the seriousness of the situation shows up by contrast Jesus' own awareness and acceptance of his messianic destiny.

Donald Hagner: With the arrest of Jesus and the prospect of his death, his disciples—the ones closest to him—will scatter. Despite their protestations of loyalty, their courage will fail them and they will desert their Lord. The imminent failure of Peter, the first of the apostles, is focused upon, finding its corresponding fulfillment at the end of the chapter. The humanity of Peter and the disciples together with the very real frailty of every profession of commitment will be revealed. Despite the best of intentions, the disciples will not be able to be true to their deepest convictions (cf. v. 56). They, like Peter, will have disappointed themselves as much as Jesus. But in the same breath Jesus gives notice that they will yet have a future with Jesus (v. 32). All is not lost; the setback is only a temporary one though nonetheless serious for that. There is a way back from this failure. God's faithfulness to these vexed disciples remains unshakable just as his forgiveness and restoration are available to every follower of Jesus.

Stu Weber: We must not underestimate our own ability to betray Jesus. Judas's treachery had already been revealed. But Jesus then told the remaining eleven disciples that they would also become disloyal, though not to the point of betraying him to his enemies. Jesus' careful delineation of these events was one more indication that he was not a blind victim. His was a sovereign and voluntary sacrifice.

Van Parunak: He will show them that at this stage in their growth, they still love their own lives more than they love him. Judas actively opposed him, but all of them abandoned him.

I. (:31-32) LEADERSHIP OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD OVERCOMES OUR FAILURE

A. (:31) Prophecy of Imminent Failure by the Fearful Disciples

1. Imminent Failure of All the Disciples Prophesied

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away because of Me this night,’”

Grant Osborne: It will not be just Judas who fails; Jesus now expands his prediction to “*you all*,” a revelation that must have shocked them to the core.

“Fall away” (σκανδαλίζω) has been used several times with respect to leading one to sin (5:29, 30; 18:6, 8, 9), being offended (13:57; 15:12; 17:27), and falling away from one’s faith (11:6; 24:10). Here the first and third are intended, especially the “falling away.” The disciples are going to desert Jesus completely (v. 56); and even when Jesus appears to them on the first night of his resurrection, they will still be cowering behind closed doors “for fear of the Jewish leaders” (John 20:19). That very night they will fail “on account of me” (causal ἐν [“because”], see BAGD, 261, 3). They will perceive that following Jesus is dangerous and run for their lives, leaving Jesus to face the fury of the Jewish leaders and of Rome.

D. A. Carson: The intimacy of the Last Supper is shortly to be replaced by disloyalty and cowardice. The disciples will all “fall away” on account of Jesus. They will find him an obstacle to devotion and will forsake him. As the quotation from Zechariah makes clear, their falling away is related to the “striking” of the Shepherd. Jesus has repeatedly predicted his death and resurrection, but his disciples are still unable to grasp how such things could happen to the Messiah to whom they have been looking (16:21–23; 17:22–23).

2. Importance of the Leadership of the Good Shepherd

“for it is written,

I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.”

R. T. France: The shepherd in **Zech 13:7** is described as God’s shepherd, the man who is God’s “associate” (“who is close to me,” NJB, TNIV). That so exalted a figure should nonetheless be struck down, and indeed by the sword of God himself, expresses in a remarkable way the paradox of a Messiah who is to be killed in accordance with the will of God declared in the scriptures. The sheep in the prophecy are the people of God (as in **Ezekiel 34**), scattered when they lose their leader, but destined to be refined and restored, even if only one third of them (**Zech 13:8–9**). So for Jesus his disciples form the nucleus of the new people of God under the leadership of the Messiah. The fact that the following clause in **Zech 13:7** refers to them as “the little ones” may have appealed especially to Matthew (cf. **10:42; 18:6–14**).

B. (:32) Promise of Future Restoration by the Risen Savior = the Good Shepherd

“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

R. T. France: Galilee, the place of Jesus’ first preaching (4:17) is also to be the place for a **new beginning** which will spread out to “all the nations.” And in that process the disciples, restored after their imminent disgrace, are to have the leading role.

Donald Hagner: This parenthetical statement provides the consoling thought that the smitten shepherd and the scattered sheep will be reunited. After his death, a theme that still dominates, Jesus is to “be raised” to new life (other occurrences of ἐγείρειν in reference to the future resurrection of Jesus are in **16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19**; cf. **27:63**). And then like a shepherd leading his sheep, he will go before them into Galilee (cf. **28:7, 10**; for the imagery of shepherd going ahead of the sheep, cf. **John 10:4**). Authoritative leadership may be alluded to here (see **Evans**). The meeting in Galilee after the death and the resurrection of Jesus is recorded in the last pericope of the Gospel (**28:16–20**; cf. **28:7**).

Stu Weber: Of course, the disciples did not know enough at the time of Jesus’ death to go on to Galilee. In fact, the Lord did not want them to go before they had proof of his resurrection—the empty tomb. At that time he would remind them of his instructions (**28:7, 10**).

William Barclay: We see the **sympathy of Jesus**. He knew that his disciples were going to flee for their lives and abandon him in the moment of his deepest need; but he does not rebuke them, he does not condemn them, he does not heap reproaches on them or call them useless creatures and broken reeds. Far from that, he tells them that when that terrible time is past, he will meet them again. It is the greatness of Jesus that he knew human beings at their worst and still loved them. He knows our human weakness; he knows how certain we are to make mistakes and to fail in loyalty; but that knowledge does not turn his love to bitterness or contempt. **Jesus has nothing but sympathy for those who in their weakness are driven to sin.**

II. (:33-35) FALSE BRAVADO CANNOT DELIVER VICTORY FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A. (:33) Big Words from Self Confident Peter

“But Peter answered and said to Him,

‘Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.’”

Grant Osborne: Peter displays his typical false bravado once again (see **14:28–31; 16:22, 23; 17:4; 19:27**) and impulsively declares an absolute confidence in himself that he will never join the others in apostasy; there is one exception to the prediction, and he is it!

Jeffrey Crabtree: Peter adamantly rejected the idea that Jesus’ words included him (**v. 33**). So confident was he of his own stability and loyalty that he assured Jesus he would be true to Jesus even if he had to stand alone. He would accompany Jesus to prison or even to death if necessary (**Lk. 22:33**). Peter’s attitude toward Jesus’ death was different from what he voiced in **16:22** where he rebuked Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe: Peter thought he was better than the other men, and Jesus told him he would be even more cowardly than the others.

D. A. Carson: On the one hand, he has learned more about Jesus than he knew at Caesarea Philippi (**16:21–28**); as a result he is able to accept the idea of suffering for both Jesus and himself. On the other hand, his notion of suffering is bound up with the heroism of men like the Maccabean martyrs, not with voluntary sacrifice—hence **v.51** (cf. **Jn 18:10**). **He is prepared for suffering but is not yet ready for what he thinks of as defeat.** More important, he reacts on a primal level to Jesus’ prediction in **v.31a**: “It would be natural for him to be too taken up with the implied slur on his loyalty to pay much attention to anything else” (**Cranfield**, Mark, 429).

Van Parunak: Peter is the most prominent of the disciples, but with this position comes temptation. Note the pride in his response. He does not humbly pray that the Lord would protect him in his weakness, but asserts that he is superior to the other disciples.

Let’s set Peter in **perspective**. He is an example of **fleshly confidence that crashes and burns**. At the other extreme, we have Moses, who was so aware of his weakness that even when the Lord promised to help him, he still was unwilling, and incurred the Lord’s anger:

Exo 4:10 *And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. 11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who*

maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. 13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. 14 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. 15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. 16 And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

Isaiah got it right. He recognized his unworthiness for the burden laid on him, but accepted the Lord's provision.

Isa 6:5 *Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.*

David Thompson: Peter's problem is twofold:

- 1) He is not honest with himself;
- 2) He has self-confidence in himself.

These are two things that will ruin any person. Be delusional with yourself and have strong self-confidence in your own abilities and strength and you will go down in a hurry.

B. (:34) Epic Failure Will Be Peter's Reality

"Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times.'"

William Barclay: The Romans and the Jews divided the night into four watches – 6 pm to 9 pm; 9 pm to midnight; midnight to 3 am; 3 am to 6 am. It was between the third and the fourth watch that the cock was supposed to crow. What Jesus is saying is that before the dawn comes, Peter will deny him three times.

J. Ligon Duncan: You know the early church fathers said that Peter, for the rest of his life, could not hear a cock crow without his tears welling in his eyes.

Charles Swindoll: Two wills collided that night: the sovereign will of the God-man who knew the future even more clearly than we know the past and the impetuous and presumptuous will of Peter, who didn't grasp his own weakness. Jesus refused to let Peter get away with that unchallenged statement, so He drove home the ugly truth with a very specific prophecy directed toward Peter himself: Before the rooster crowed at dawn, Peter would deny Him not once, not twice, but three times (**26:34**). In response to this embarrassing prediction, **Peter doubled down**, going all in with a promise that, even if it came to dying with Jesus, he would stay true to his Master (**26:35**). Then, not wanting to be outbid by Peter, the ten other disciples chimed in and made the same bold promise to stay at Jesus' side till the very end.

C. (:35) Self Confidence Ignores All Warnings of Inherent Weakness

1. Doubling Down by Peter

“Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.’”

D. A. Carson: The language of Peter’s protest (the rare subjunctive of *dei*) shows that he does not really think that Jesus’ death is likely; he still has his visions of heroism. Nor is he alone in his brash protestations of loyalty—only quicker and more vehement than his peers.

2. Disciples Concur with Similar False Bravado

“All the disciples said the same thing too.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How quickly does our pride assert its self confidence and self-sufficiency?
- 2) What encouragement can we take from the mercy of Jesus to promise restoration in such a context of denial and abandonment?
- 3) In what circumstances do we imagine that we are superior in strength to others whom we have seen fail?
- 4) Why do you think Jesus picked the visual symbol of the rooster crowing to be the trigger to remind Peter of his failure?

* * * * *

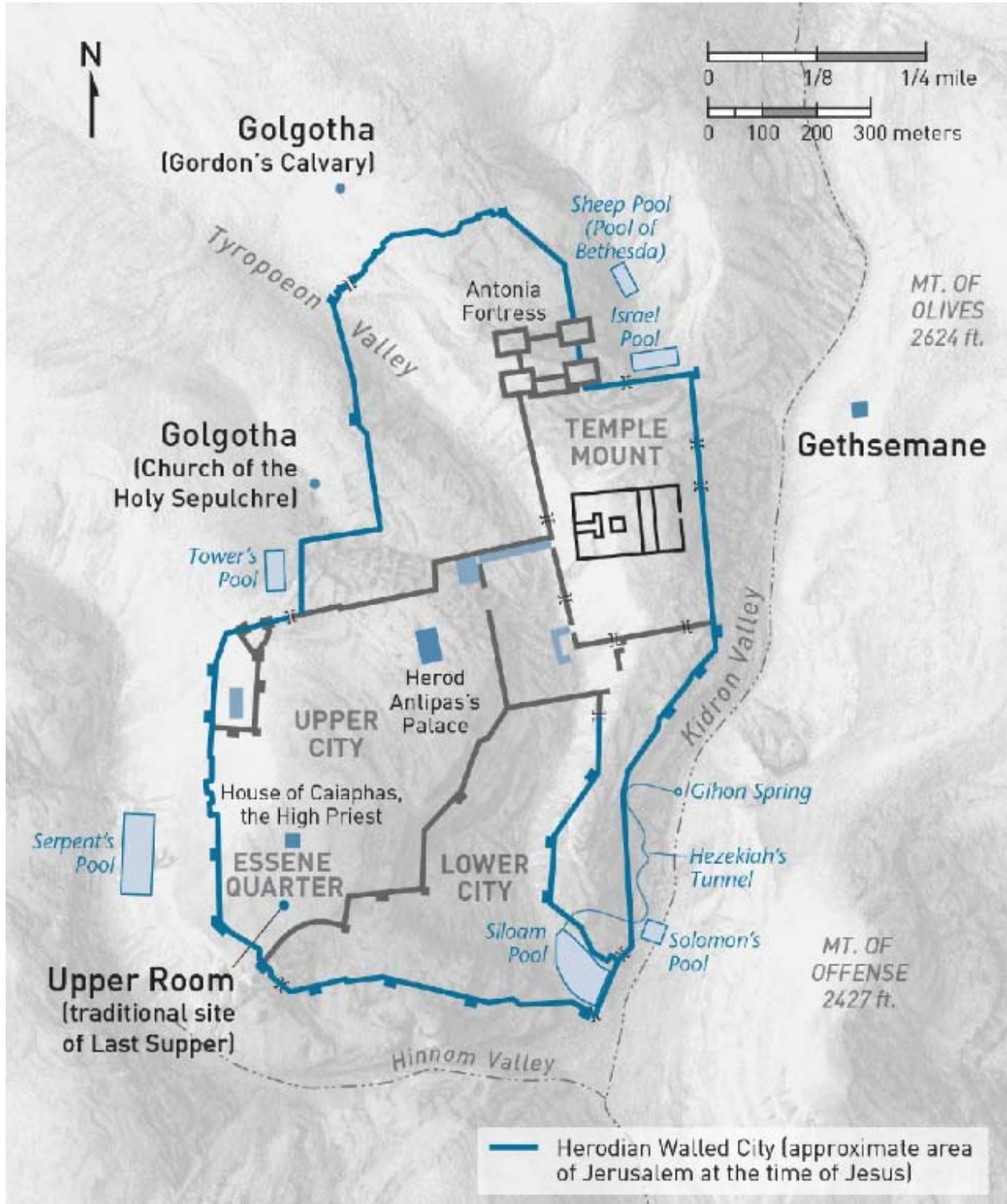
QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: At some point in every person’s educational program, **the teaching time is over and the time of testing begins.** At the end of a college school year, it’s final exam week. A doctoral program is punctuated with comprehensive exams and a dissertation defense. Law school culminates in the grueling state bar exam. Pastoral training usually concludes with a grilling before an ordination council. And let’s not even talk about medical school!

Like a long period of intense training coming to its conclusion, the earthly ministry of Jesus was wrapping up. From this point on, there would be no more extensive teaching sessions, no more discourses, no more lectures or sermons, no more practice runs at preaching, no more question-and-answer exercises. The crowds would no longer gather to hear the Master’s words or witness His magnificent miracles. There would be no more debates with the religious left or right, and no more challenges to the political zealots. All those events were over. **The Messiah’s hour had finally come,** and there was no turning back.

In only a brief period, Jesus would experience trials and tribulations of heart and mind. He would spend hours in anguished prayer followed by hours of brutal beatings. Then His foes would serve

up the ultimate injustice, finding Him guilty in spite of His purity, and executing Him for nothing. Parallel to this, His once faithful disciples would disappoint Him, betray Him, deny Him, and desert Him. Not a single one of them would make it unscathed through the **time of testing**.



Daniel Doriani: Within hours, the band disintegrated at the sight of the arresting soldiers. Courage shattered, they abandoned their promises. That very night, a rooster's crow punctuated Peter's failure. All did fall away. Overwhelmed by fear, they stumbled. When they boasted that they would never fail Jesus, they were foolish, but sincere. They intended to be loyal. But it is easy to make vows when conflict, danger, and temptation are invisible. We should watch ourselves. We should be "slow to speak" (**James 1:19**). When we do speak, we should add, "*If it is the Lord's will*" (**James 4:15**).

But we should watch Jesus even more than we watch ourselves. The disciples will fail, but Jesus will not. He says he will rise and he does. He says he will go before them into Galilee. They will not return, downcast, to their homes, while Jesus remains in the grave. He will rise from the dead and precede them.³ Then they will follow, for even if they abandon him, he will not abandon them. This is an immense comfort. We all make rash promises and empty boasts. We all become frightened and fail. But the Lord does not fail those who have a fundamental allegiance to him. As Paul says in **2 Timothy 2:12–13**:

*If we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
If we are faithless,
he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.*

The apparent paradox is resolved by distinguishing the act of disowning, denying, or repudiating Christ, which leads him to disown us, from the act of "merely" being unfaithful—that is, failing to hold fully to our resolve to follow Christ (see **Matt. 10:33**). Jesus links the disciples' collapse to his arrest: "*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*" (**26:31**). Sheep do scatter when the shepherd falls. The **need for leaders** can be overstated. The need is not simply for leaders, but for the right sort of leader.

John MacArthur: Restoring Deserting Disciples

They defected in this passage. They deserted Christ. He predicts that, and it came to pass exactly as He had predicted it. But it was a profound and unforgettable lesson to them; a lesson which I believe changed the course of their lives. Of all the things that Jesus could have said to them, of all the things that He could have warned them about, of all of the issues that could have been brought up about the future, He chooses to bring up the fact that they will all desert Him and defect. And Matthew, by the Holy Spirit, chooses to place that story right in the midst of this chapter on preparation for the cross, because it is such a monumental lesson to learn. And if, as our Lord has planned, the disciples are to carry the message to the world, they have to be strong. And the first step in strength is to learn how really weak you are, right? So the **lesson of weakness** is the first thing to be learned. And that is the lesson He teaches them here. . .

First of all, there is a **contrast between knowledge and ignorance** – between knowledge and ignorance. The disciples, frankly, are woefully ignorant. We find Peter saying, "*Though all men,*" **verse 33**, "*will be offended because of You, yet will I never be offended.*" Such ignorance. I mean it was only a matter of a few hours before he would be offended. In **verse 35**, "*Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You.*" He didn't know that. He couldn't affirm that. And as it turned out, that was ignorant. And then all the disciples said the same

thing in **verse 35**. They were ignorant. They were ignorant of their own weaknesses. They were ignorant of the strength of Satan. They were ignorant of the test and its great power that they were going to be facing in a matter of a few hours. They were ignorant of so very many things – to say nothing of their ignorance of the Old Testament, of their ignorance of the prophecy mentioned in **verse 31** about the shepherd having to be smitten and the sheep of the flock being scattered. They were ignorant about many things. And their ignorance is obvious.

But over against their ignorance is the marvelous knowledge of Jesus Christ. Notice **verse 31**. “*Then*” – and the ‘*then*’ is indefinite, some way up the Mount of Olives that night – “*Jesus said to them*” – it’s another time for teaching, another time for instruction. And this is a lesson about the **stupidity of self-sufficiency**. He says, “*All you shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written ‘I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad,’ but after I am raised up again, I’ll go before you into Galilee.*” And then in **verse 34** He says to Peter, “*Verily I say unto you, this night before the cock crows you’ll deny Me on three occasions.*” Now that’s knowledge. Listen, He knew they would be offended. He knew that. He knew it would happen this night. He knew it would be because of Him. He knew He would be raised from the dead. He knew He would meet them again in Galilee. He knew they would be offended to the point where, that very night before the cock crowed, Peter himself, the leader, would deny Jesus Christ. He knew they would never pass that trial that night in their own strength. He knew everything. . .

Secondly, we see a **contrast in courage and cowardice** – in courage and cowardice. In **verse 31**, that phrase, “*All ye,*” or “*You all shall be offended.*” The word is **trapped**. You’ll get trapped. You’re going to get caught in a trap, and it’s going to be more than you can get out of. The trap will catch you. You’re going to hit a trial that is too much for you to bear, and you’re going to get trapped – all of you are. And what was the trap? **Proverbs 29:25** says it: “*The fear of man brings a trap.*” They were afraid. They were afraid of what the Romans would do to them, or what the Jews would do to them. And when they saw, it says back in **verse 55** of this chapter, when they saw those soldiers coming with the clubs, and the staves, and the swords, and the torches, and they saw the leaders come, they fled. They were afraid. “*You’re all going to be offended. You’re all going to get in a trap because of Me*” – because of Me. “*You’re going to leave Me,*” He says. “*You’re going to defect. You’re going to forsake Me. You’re going to desert. You’re going AWOL at the heat of the battle.*” And it was exactly as He said. **When the pressure was on, they were gone** – they were gone. . .

And so you see the cowardice of the disciples, but you see **Jesus in perfect courage**, just moving to the cross, committing Himself to the Father, unwaveringly. “*Not My will but Yours be done, whatever it is that You will Me to do, Father, I will do it, I trust You, I put My life in Your hands.*” And they can’t do that. They’re cowards. . .

The third element of the contrast that I see here is a **contrast between power and weakness**. The disciples were afraid to face the moment, because they were weak and they couldn’t handle death; that’s what scared them. In **verse 32**, the Lord says, “*After I am raised up again, I’ll go before you into Galilee.*” The Lord faced death with tremendous courage, because He knew He had the power over death, right? The disciples knew they didn’t. They were looking at themselves and saying, “*We can’t handle death. They’re going to kill us and that’s it. We have no power over death.*” And they wouldn’t commit themselves to the one who did have that power. They lacked faith. Jesus, **Romans 6:4** says, *was raised from the dead by the power of the Father*. Which means that when Jesus went to the grave, here He says, “*I will be*

raised up,” and He said it over and over again, **Matthew 16, Matthew 17, Matthew 20**, *“I must go and be crucified, and three days later I’ll rise from the dead.”* But He committed Himself to the power of God, to divine power over death. He, it says in Hebrews, came to conquer death which had held men in bondage all their life long. He came to destroy Him who had the power of death, Satan. Christ’s power was so great that He faced the cross, because He knew there was power to conquer death. And He took on death as an enemy to be defeated. The disciples paled in the face of death and ran, and so you see their weakness as over against His power. . .

And then there is a marvelous contrast between pride and humility here. . . The stupid pride of men, and the majestic humility of Jesus Christ, who resolutely willingly goes to the cross to die and shed His blood for the stupid, cowardly, weak, proud, disciples who are going to desert Him. Amazing – what condescension, what humility. How dare these men be ashamed of the living God who is not ashamed of them? I mean it would be understandable if God was ashamed to associate with sinners, but for sinners to be ashamed to associate with God? It shows you how twisted they were. . .

I believe these guys learned an absolutely powerful lesson about their own weakness. And I believe that when Jesus came back from the grave, and put His loving arms around those guys, and pulled them back to Himself, and restored them into the community of disciples that they originally designed to be, and recommissioned them and sent them out, they had so profoundly seen His mercy, they had seen His power in the resurrection, they were now not afraid of death because they knew they would rise from the dead like He did. They had seen the glory of Christ and the grace of Christ in their behalf, and I think they went out with a whole new approach. And so it may be in our lives that it isn’t until we’ve been restored from a defection by the sweet and tender grace of the Lord that we’ll go out to conquer uncompromisingly in the future when we face those kinds of difficulties. I thank God for the times that I failed, and the Lord taught me the frailty of my own strength. Aren’t you? And I’m glad for the times when He taught me His own power, and I rest in Him.

S. Lewis Johnson: Peter Learning Romans Seven

Peter, the Bible tells us, was a man of like passions with us, and his denials of the Lord Jesus make up his theological lecture on Romans chapter 7 verse 13 through verse 25. Personally, I do not think there is anyone who understands human nature apart from our Lord any better than the Apostle Paul, and in the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans in the last half of that chapter, he gives us an insight into the psychology of a Christian and his struggle with sin that we do not have anywhere. And we have it in a section that most beautifully reveals the fact that the sin principle still dwells in our members and there is no victory for a Christian believer in independence of the indwelling Spirit.

Paul’s point in those verses it seems to me is simply this. Because of the fact that the sin principle still dwells within us, even though we have new life by virtue of faith in Christ, we cannot expect to please him, apart from a conscious real dependence upon the Holy Spirit for power in our Christian life. And furthermore, he lets us know that there is always a struggle going on. We never reach the state where, in the Christian life, we do not have any struggle any longer. That’s the point of Romans chapter 7, and it seems to me that this is the truth that Peter was exposed to and which he had to learn the hard way. Most of us have to learn these truths the hard way, unfortunately. We do not really take the Bible as seriously as we ought, and so we are forced to learn them the hard way. And Peter had to learn that truth the hard way. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we would just read the Scriptures and respond to them and not have to pass through

these experiences which are so trying and involve so much suffering and disappointment – sometimes tragedy – simply because we don't pay attention to the things that we read in God's word. We really have forgotten that it is God's word. . .

The day we fall is the day when we cease to fear that we shall fall. The self-confidence of the apostle so characteristic of every one of us.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Disciples Will Flee

God teaches us at least three things in this passage.

1. He teaches us something about Himself.
2. And He teaches us something about the Lord Jesus Christ,
3. and He teaches us something about ourselves.

Jesus and His disciples had just finished the Lord's Supper, and they were making their way to the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives was about fifteen minutes away from where they were, and it was about eleven o'clock at night. And as they walked, Jesus had a word of warning and a word of comfort that He gave to His disciples. Had they listened to that word of warning and had they listened and understood that word of comfort, it would have helped them much in the event that we're going to unfold that night and on the next day and on the next day and on the next day. They would have been greatly helped had they taken to heart these words of the Lord Jesus. In fact, the Lord Jesus spoke these words with the precise intent of strengthening His disciples' weak faith.

I. God's warnings ought always to drive us to a greater realization of His and the Son's love and our weakness.

It is so important for you to understand that when Jesus is on the cross, He's not trying to get the Father to love you. When Jesus is on the cross, His death is the expression of the Father's prior love for you. It is the genius, it is the strategy of God the Father's love for you, and that's the first thing that God teaches us in this passage. He teaches us something about Himself. He teaches us that **His love is the source of our salvation**, and His love is the source of Jesus' provision on the cross for our sins. And if we don't understand that, we'll never understand and apprehend and be persuaded of the Fatherly love of God about which we heard from Calvin in the beginning of the service. If you don't understand that **the cross is the expression of the Father's love**, you'll never understand the cross. But that's not the only thing that Jesus teaches in this passage. . .

Jesus emphasizes His own willingness to die by saying to the disciples again. This is not the only time, Jesus has said that over and over. In fact if you're remembering what we've already covered in Matthew, chapter 26, you're saying well Jesus has said this before. You're right. He has emphasized the Father's control, the Father's sovereignty, the Father's involvement, the Father's plan, and He has emphasized His own willingness to accept that, to embrace that, to eagerly embrace it on our behalf. And I believe that the reason that Jesus emphasizes that, the reason that God causes Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to continually repeat these themes is not just because we have bad memories. It's because He has a very important point for us to understand – that Jesus is not the victim in the sense that He is out of control, and He is unwilling in what is about to happen. He willingly embraces this for you. And so He says to these disciples who He has also said are going to desert them. He says to you my Father is going to strike me down. And I embrace that for You, because I love you. The Lord Jesus is saying to these disciples whom He knows are going to desert Him, that even they are going to

desert Him, He loves them enough that He's going to die for them. And He willingly embraces the will of the Father for Him.

And then He teaches them one more thing. He **teaches them about themselves**. He teaches them that **they are all too self-confident**, that they are all too self-trusting, that they've made idols of their own commitment and of their own faithfulness to Christ. They need to understand that apart from Him they are nothing, and that they need to depend completely upon Him because the things that they are going to face in the next hours are literally going to unman them, and they are going to flee. Jesus is issuing a warning here. It's a warning designed to help His struggling disciples in a time of need. If they would only listen. It's a warning that would help them in time of need. Jesus knows them better than they know themselves, and He knows their faith is weak. And so He warns them about their impending failure. We as Jesus' disciples are weak, and we are susceptible to sin; and we ought never to reject His rebuke. We ought never to reject the warnings of scriptures. Jesus' words should have awed His disciples. It should have led them on the one hand to say you have got to be kidding. God the Father loves us so much that in order to forgive our sins, He's going to give you on the tree. You're out of your mind. This is beyond our grasp. This is the most glorious thing we've ever – they should have been awed by that declaration, but they missed it. And they should have been awed by that fact that Jesus was willing to lay His life down for them, but they missed it. And they should have been humbled by the fact that they themselves were going to desert Him. By stressing in just a few moments that Peter was going to deny Him before the rooster crowed, Jesus was just simply saying this. You're not only going to deny Me, you're going to deny Me quickly. I'm going to warn you about this. You're going to deny it, and then you're going to turn right around and do it in a matter of an hour or so. The disciples should have been humble. . .

II. We are always unwise to reject the warnings of God's Word and to trust in our own strength.

Now verses 33 through 35 are a living illustration of **how not to respond to the word of God**. And the fact that this living illustration of how not to respond to the word of God comes from the disciples themselves upon whom the Lord Jesus has built the church ought to send out a very loud message to us. Look at Peter's response. Peter protests in verse 33 that he will be uniquely faithful to Christ even if all the other disciples desert. Peter is going to remain faithful. And we see in this passage that we are unwise to reject the warnings of God and to trust in our own strength. God is teaching us in this passage to trust in His word despite the evidences to the contrary and to distrust the fickleness of our own hearts; to trust in Him alone, to be humbled and to flee to Him.

I want you to see three things that Peter did wrong.

1. First of all, **he disbelieved**. The Lord Jesus Christ did not only say you are going to flee, but He had quoted Scripture, and Peter still says no, I'm not. You're wrong. He disbelieved the word of God. Mistake one.
2. Two, **he disdained his brethren**. He said look, Lord, these guys may desert You. I'm never deserting You. These men they may not be men of substantial character. They may not have obtained the spiritual maturity that I have. They may desert You, but never me. He disdained his brethren and preferred himself over them.
3. And thirdly, **he was overconfident** in himself. Oh no, Lord, I will never desert You. I know myself. I'm not a one to go back on my promises. I'm committed. I'm committed

to this thing to the end. He disbelieved the word of God. He disdained his brethren, and he was overconfident.

My friends, when we are in that position, we are set up for a fall. Jesus then kindly, but firmly, reiterates what he had just said. He said Peter, my disciples, listen to me. Verily, truly, it is an absolute certainty that before the rooster crows, you're going to deny me three times. . .

Matthew goes out of the way, however, to indicate that it was not Peter alone who was at fault here. All the disciples, Matthew says, all the disciples shared the same attitude. We must never underestimate the power of the evil one or the strength of temptation, and we must certainly never overestimate our own ability to resist it. You notice here a twin mistake on the part of the disciples, and it's a twin proneness that we all have. We have a twin proneness to overestimate our own strength and our own ability, and we have along with it a proneness to underestimate the strength of temptation. We think that temptation is weak, and we are strong. Rather than recognizing in humility our own weakness, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and from His grace, and the power of the evil one. That's why the Lord Jesus, in His prayer, tells us to pray. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Albert Mohler: On the way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus gives an ominous prediction to his disciples: that very night their loyalty to him will falter. When their courage is put to the test, they will run, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (**Zec 13:7**). Jesus prophesied judgment for Judas's betrayal (**Mt 26:24**), but the promise to the other disciples is that after they fall away (which indicates that they do not abandon their faith), they will be restored to fellowship with him. Peter, the leader and spokesperson among the Twelve, brashly insists he will never desert Jesus. In reply, Jesus warns Peter that he will fail even more than the others. Before dawn arrives, Peter does not listen to Jesus' warning or heed its caution, and his false bravado leads the rest of the disciples to join his insistent vow of loyalty.

TEXT: Matthew 26:36-46

TITLE: THREE CYCLES OF AGONIZING PRAYER IN GETHSEMANE -- "YOUR WILL BE DONE"

BIG IDEA:

WATCH AND PRAY TO GUARD AGAINST TEMPTATION AND TO SUBMIT YOUR WILL TO GOD'S WILL IN TIMES OF CRISIS

INTRODUCTION:

David Thompson: Verse 37 says that Jesus began to be "grieved" and "distressed." Those two words mean that Jesus was at a terrible emotional low. In verse 38, Jesus asks the disciples to do two things in view of His pending death:

- 1) Stay put;
- 2) Keep watch with Him.

That word "watch" means to be awake, be alert, and stay alive to the things of God (Smith, p. 96). Now verse 39 says Jesus went a little beyond them and prayed "If possible let this cup pass from Me, but nevertheless, not My will but Your will be done." Now the cup Jesus is referring to is the cup of His suffering and what is in the cup is our sin. He is facing the divine reality that the time had come for Him to endure the wrath of God for our sin. This would mean that our sin would be imputed to Him. He who knew no sin would become sin for us. This would also mean that His own Father would have to turn His back on His own Son. After this first session of prayer, Jesus went back to His disciples and notice verse 40—they were sleeping. These men could not spare one hour of their lives for Him, when He was about to die for them. These who said they would stay with Him to the end could not watch with Him the moment He needed them the most. So verse 41 says He told them to keep watching and praying so that they would not enter into temptation because the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Now let us clearly understand this point—staying awake and alert and being a person of prayer is a **key to victory over temptation**. Also notice that Jesus says the flesh is weak. There are many believers who see themselves as strong in their flesh, contrary to what God says about it—our flesh is weak. It will fail us. **The key to victory is staying awake and alert to the things of God and being a person of prayer.**

Stu Weber: The only way we can remain loyal in spite of our weakness is to stay alert to danger and to depend continually on God through prayer.

Stanley Saunders: Jesus, who has been "with" the disciples (26:18, 20; cf. 1:23; 18:20; 26:29; 28:20), now asks them to be with him in preparation for the completion of his mission. But despite their bluster about not stumbling, deserting, or denying Jesus (26:31–35), the disciples will lose energy and then take flight. Jesus spends the last hours before his arrest in prayer, distress, and lament.

Grant Osborne: The apostolic band crosses the Kidron Valley and ascends the western slope of the mountain to an olive grove ("Gethsemane" means "oil press," so this was an olive orchard possibly owned by a wealthy supporter who allowed Jesus to use it). **John 18:2** says that Judas knew the place "because Jesus had often met there with his disciples." So it was a common hideaway for Jesus and his followers, perhaps for R and R away from people. **Luke 21:37** says

that Jesus and the others spent the nights there during Passion Week (probably along with Bethany, see on **Matt 21:17**).

Jesus asks eight of the eleven (Judas has already departed on his nefarious task) to sit at the entrance to the grove while he goes into the garden. The wording here may be “a subtle allusion to **Gen 22:5**, where Abraham instructs his servants to stay back while he and Isaac go a distance away to pray.” Jesus becomes the embodiment of Abraham’s faith and Isaac’s sacrifice.

David Turner: The narrative of Jesus’s agony in Gethsemane (cf. **Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46**) underlines the themes of Jesus’s dedication to the Father’s will and the disciples’ inability to grasp the gravity of the hour. Upon arrival in Gethsemane, Jesus tells his disciples that he will go aside to pray (**Matt. 26:36**). This distance between Jesus and the disciples, both the larger group and the three who fail to stay alert with him, is significant. The narrative presents **three cycles** that contrast Jesus’s prayerful obedience to the disciples’ drowsy oblivion.

Richard Gardner: In between the three petitions Jesus makes, there are interludes in which he returns to his three companions and finds them sleeping (vv. **40, 43**). They have proved unable to fulfill Jesus’ request to keep watch with him in an hour of crisis (v. **38b**). The language of watching or keeping awake is highly metaphorical, suggesting the need for God’s servants to be prepared for the traumatic events by which the kingdom comes (cf. **24:42–43; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 1 Pet. 5:8**). To put it another way: The ordeal of impending suffering that Jesus confronts at Gethsemane is but the first of a series of eschatological crises calling for **readiness** on the part of his community.

Craig Blomberg: The key themes Matthew underlines throughout his passion narrative converge in this conclusion to the account of Gethsemane:

- God is in control of all these events, however tragic they may seem to others.
- Jesus is the Son of God who is suffering and dying.
- His death is humiliating but voluntary, an act of obedience fulfilling God's will.

Bob Deffinbaugh: What I see emphasized in this scene in Gethsemane is the frailty and failures of the disciples, as a backdrop to the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus. They assured Jesus that they would not forsake Him, but they couldn’t even stay awake with Him in His most difficult hour yet. Jesus assured them that He would die as the Passover Lamb, bringing about the New Covenant. He remained faithful to His calling, even when His disciples were weak and failing.

Leon Morris: Matthew brings out something of the poignancy of what was happening in a little passage that brings out clearly both the fact that Jesus knew what was about to happen and the incomprehension of the apostles. At this time they were sure they would never fail Jesus, and they affirmed this in strong terms. But in Gethsemane immediately afterward they failed him. Clearly in this trying hour Jesus looked for his closest followers to support him in their prayers, but found them wanting. Instead of watching with him and praying, they fell asleep. Jesus was left to bear the strain and the suspense alone.

R. T. France: The last scene in which we find Jesus alone with his disciples (until after the resurrection in **28:16–20**) has a dual focus. Its primary subject is Jesus’ own prayer as he faces up to the reality of his approaching death, and the reader witnesses the extraordinary emotional turmoil which this situation now evokes in one who up to this point has spoken of it with a sense

of purpose and settled resolve. But the spotlight falls also on his disciples, or more particularly on the inner circle of Peter, James and John, in their human weakness and their inability to play even a supporting role when Jesus most needs them. The contrast is profound, and the reader is thus prepared for the different responses of Jesus and his disciples when the crisis comes: his prayer will have restored his sense of purpose and his authority, while the disciples, after an initial futile attempt at resistance, will simply give up and abandon him.

(:36-38) PROLOGUE – SETTING THE SCENE IN GETHSEMANE – CONCLUDING THE TRAINING OF THE DISCIPLES BY SHOWING THEM HOW TO HANDLE TIMES OF CRISIS:

- **HOW TO GUARD AGAINST TEMPTATION**
- **HOW TO SUBMIT ONE’S WILL TO GOD’S WILL**

A. (:36) Prayer Must Be Our #1 Strategy in Times of Crisis

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’”

Peter and the disciples had just boasted of their strength while Jesus told them they were weak (**Matthew 26:31-35**). In contrast, Jesus sensed His weakness and so made plans to gain strength from His Father.

Does Prayer matter? John 18:1 – follows high priestly prayer of **Chap. 17** – now we have more prayer – last moments of freedom before Jesus is arrested – How does He spend His time? **Prayer is our #1 strategy** –

William Barclay: It is a strange and a lovely thing to think of the **nameless friends** who rallied round Jesus in the last days. There was the man who gave him the donkey on which he rode into Jerusalem; there was the man who gave him the upper room where the Last Supper was eaten; and now there is the man who gave him the right of entry to the garden on the Mount of Olives. In a desert of hatred, there were still **oases of love**.

B. (:37) Mentoring Close Disciples Requires Transparency in Times of Crisis

“And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.”

John MacArthur: The truth of the matter is He took them because they were the three leaders. He took them because there was a lesson that had to be taught to the rest, and He couldn’t take them all or there wouldn’t be anybody left there to watch. But He took the significant leaders, because whatever it was He wanted them to learn, He wanted them to be able to communicate it to the rest, and these were the ones the rest looked to. They were the ones who would be the teachers. . .

He wasn’t looking for their help. That would be incongruous. I mean there’s a Gethsemane in all of our lives. There may be many of them. There may be many agonizing experiences, agonizing trials and temptations. There seems a deep sorrow and trial through which we all must pass sooner or later. The dark hour of death lurks around all of us, and the bitter cup we drink at some time or another, and maybe often we drink it. And our social nature sort of pushes us manward, to reach out to men for our strength, and we expect too much from them. Even our

dearest and holiest friends, however willing their spirit may be, will find their flesh is feeble, and we need to learn to turn to God. He wasn't taking them for support. He wasn't taking them for sympathy. He found support in God, and He asked no sympathy. And He wasn't taking them to patrol them, because He wouldn't have left them alone, and He had done His work for three years, and He was ready to leave, and the Spirit would take over where He finished. No, He took them for instruction's sake, that they might learn how He faced a trial. What a lesson they needed to learn.

Van Parunak: These three were the disciples closest to the Lord.

- They were the first called, along with Andrew, in (**Matt 4:18-21**).
- They alone went with him to Jairus' house for the raising of his daughter (**Mark 5:37**).
- He chose them to accompany him into the mount of transfiguration (**Matt 17:1**).
- These were the first three mentioned when the disciples gathered after the ascension (**Acts 1:13**).
- When Paul came from Antioch to Jerusalem with Barnabas at the time of the famine (**Acts 11:27-30**), he mentions the three as pillars of the church.

3 groupings – Do we have **circles of support relationships** / of mentoring relationships ... or are we a Lone Ranger? **All about relationships**

William Barclay: We see the **loneliness of Jesus**. He took with him his three chosen disciples; but they were so exhausted with the drama of these last days and hours that they could not stay awake. And **Jesus had to fight his battle all alone**. That also is true for us all. There are certain things we must face and certain decisions we must make in the awful loneliness of our own souls; there are times when other helpers fail and comforts flee; but in that loneliness there is for us the presence of one who, in Gethsemane, experienced it and came through it.

Grant Osborne: We now see the depth of Jesus' emotions that he has kept under control until now. He knows this is his destiny and he has come for this purpose. But as the God-man, he still feels human emotions, and now dread overwhelms him. As many have noted, the anguish is not due so much to his approaching death as to the fact that he will bear the sins of all humanity and thereby be separated from God. The two infinitives show the horror he feels, with "*to be sorrowful*" (λυπεῖσθαι) pointing to sorrow and grief (see also **17:23; 26:22**) and "[to be] *distressed*" (ἀδημονεῖν) pointing to his deep distress (only here in Matthew).

Charles Swindoll: In this alarming scene, the true humanity of Jesus is on full display. A surprisingly powerful but understandable desire for preservation —compounded by satanic attack —took hold of Jesus' very human heart and mind, urging His human will to seek some way of escaping the pain. Just as he had done to Adam in the first garden, the serpent offered the second Adam, Jesus, an alleged alternative to obedience and a feigned fast track to glory. As always, Satan made self-preservation more appealing than self-sacrifice. Yet unlike Adam, Jesus cried out to the Father and submitted His human will to the divine will through agonizing hours of extreme spiritual warfare (**26:39**). So distressed was Jesus that His sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood (**Luke 22:44**). . .

In the midst of all this anguish, the divine will prevailed when Jesus, the God-man, surrendered unconditionally to the good and perfect plan of God the Father: "*Not as I will, but as You will. . . . Your will be done*" (**26:39, 42**). His divine will and human will perfectly aligned, and Jesus

resolved to face the journey to the Cross. He was ready. But the disciples were not. He warned them, “*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (26:41). Their eagerness to stay faithful would be no match for their flesh. Within minutes they would become the very deserters and traitors they had vowed never to become.

R. T. France: Only as we are allowed to share Jesus’ deep distress are we enabled to grasp the seriousness of the settled purpose of God which calls for his Son to be rejected and killed in Jerusalem. But even so, the will of God is not imposed on an unwitting victim, but is deliberately faced and shared by the Son himself. The relationship of trust and loyalty between Father and Son which was put under scrutiny at the outset of Jesus’ ministry (4:1–11) proves able to survive even this ultimate test. Only in the terrible cry from the cross in 27:46 will we be given a similar insight into Jesus’ emotional turmoil, when for a moment even the hard-won harmony of will achieved in Gethsemane will appear to be disrupted.

C. (:38) Spiritual Vigilance is Key in Times of Crisis

“Then He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.’”

J. Ligon Duncan:

- You will never understand Jesus’ agony until you realize that His distress is not over death but judgment.
- You will never understand Jesus’ agony until you understand His aloneness.

David Turner: Perhaps the stress on **watchfulness** is meant to reenact the vigil of Passover night (Exod. 12:42).

I. (:39-41) FIRST CYCLE OF PRAYER – YOUR WILL BE DONE

A. (:39) Model for Victory

“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.’”

Jesus had set His face to go to Jerusalem; He knew what lay ahead for Him there – complete commitment to the will of His Father and to His mission of Redemption – the ultimate Sacrificial Lamb offering Himself up on our behalf.

How difficult for us sometimes to be sincere in saying *not my will but God’s will be done* – and embracing that will no matter how difficult it proves to be.

Grant Osborne: “*Cup*” (ποτήριον), as in 20:22–23, is the cup of suffering due to God’s wrath (e.g., Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 51:7), further evidence that Jesus is conscious of the vicarious nature of his death. Jesus’ deep personal desire is for God to take away the necessity of this vicarious sacrifice. However, his greater desire is to see God’s will accomplished, and this is where Jesus’ victory over himself occurs. Jesus is aware of the significance of his death for God’s plan of salvation and for the salvation of humankind, so he surrenders himself to the greater will of the Father.

B. (:40-41) Model for Defeat

“And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”

Grant Osborne: “*Flesh*” (σάρξ) is not satanic powers (as at Qumran) but represents “people in their tangible, perishable, and earthly aspect,” yet still “the means through which Satan moves to distract people from God’s plan; it represents the vulnerability of the human being.” Finally, πρόθυμον means to be “ready, eager, or desirous” to do something. It connotes goodwill and the willingness to do what God wants. So Jesus is saying that the disciples desire to stay awake and do what he is asking but lack the personal strength to do so.

Thomas Constable: The contrast between the flesh and the spirit is not between the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit (as in **Galatians 5:17**) but between man’s volitional strength and his physical weakness (cf. **Matthew 26:35**). We often want to do the right thing but find that we need supernatural assistance to accomplish it (cf. **Romans 7:15-25**).

Van Parunak: This instruction helps us understand the purpose of his request to them that they “*watch with me*” (v. 38). The purpose of their watching is not just to uphold him, but **to gain strength for their own test**. In v. 31, he foretold two things: his own suffering (the smiting of the shepherd), and their offense at him. Now he withdraws with the closest three disciples, to pray in preparation for this coming trial. His own prayer focuses on his coming suffering. He expects them to pray, not just for him, but for the trial that he has warned them they will face, the pressure to be offended at him and to desert him. They need to come before the Father for his help in this struggle. Their sleep shows their lack of emotional engagement with either part of this crisis—the Lord’s suffering, and their incipient failure.

II. (:42-43) SECOND CYCLE OF PRAYER -- YOUR WILL BE DONE

A. (:42) Model for Victory

*“He went away again a second time and prayed, saying,
‘My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.’”*

B. (:43) Model for Defeat

“And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.”

III. (:44-45) THIRD CYCLE OF PRAYER -- YOUR WILL BE DONE

A. (:44) Model for Victory

*“And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time,
saying the same thing once more.”*

Grant Osborne: In the ancient world, doing something a second time (e.g., John’s double “*amen*” structure for Jesus’ teaching, cf. **John 5:19, 24, 25; 6:26**; et al.) emphasizes it greatly, while a third time makes it superlative or ultimate (e.g., “*holy, holy, holy*” in **Isa 6:3** and **Rev 4:8** means ultimate holiness, and “666” in **Rev 13:18** means ultimate finiteness or sinfulness). So Jesus becomes the **ultimate model of intense, persevering prayer**.

David Turner: This cycle of three lost opportunities to stay alert anticipates the cycle of Peter's three lost opportunities to confess Jesus in **Matt. 26:69–75**.

Thomas Constable: Jesus' repetition of His request illustrates persistence in prayer, not vain repetition. Persistence expresses the intensity with which we feel the need for our petition and our faith in God's ability to meet our need. Vain repetition relies on the simple repetition of words to wear God down.

D. A. Carson: Some interpreters have seen a certain progression in Jesus' three prayers, but Matthew says that Jesus said "*the same thing*" (v.44). The variations between v.39 and v.42 must therefore be incidental. "*May your will be done*" mirrors one of the petitions of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (6:10). As Jesus learned obedience (**Heb 5:7–9**), so he became the supreme model for his own teaching. In the first garden, "Not your will but mine" changed paradise to desert and brought man from Eden to Gethsemane. Now "Not my will but yours" brings anguish to the man who prays it but transforms the desert into the kingdom and brings man from Gethsemane to the gates of glory.

B. (:45) Model for Defeat

*"Then He came to the disciples, and said to them,
'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand
and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.'"*

Robert Gundry: "*Are you sleeping for the remainder [of the time till the betrayer arrives] and resting?*" Jesus' question arises out of **disgust at the disciples' sleepy prayerlessness**. Or we could translate with a disgusted exclamation: "*You're sleeping for the remainder of the time and resting!*" Under either translation, the present tense of "*comes*" and "*says*" highlights the **disgust**.

R. T. France: Jesus' words on his final return to the sleeping disciples are hard to interpret as a whole; they seem to pull in opposite directions. The opening words, taken at their face value, give permission to the disciples to go on sleeping, while v. 46 tells them to wake up. Two kinds of solution have been pursued: either there is a significant time-lag incorporated within what appears to be a continuous speech, with something occurring in the middle which changes Jesus' attitude, or the opening words are not to be taken at their face value. The first type of solution may be supported by v. 45b, the announcement of Judas' imminent arrival. So perhaps after saying "*Sleep on and rest*" Jesus heard or saw the approach of the arresting party and so concluded that after all there was no more time for sleep. But if that is what Matthew intended, the lack of any narrative indication of an interruption between vv. 45a and 45b is at best clumsy. Most interpreters therefore look for an alternative way of understanding Jesus' opening words. They have been taken as an ironical question ("*Are you still sleeping and resting?*"), an indignant observation ("*You are still sleeping and resting!*"), or an ironical command ("*Sleep on and rest!*") intending that they should in fact do just the opposite. All these suggestions come to much the same conclusion, that Jesus did not in fact want the disciples to go on sleeping at this point any more than he did before, and in that case vv. 45b-46 follow more naturally. Appeals to a supposed ironic intention are of course always suspect as an easy way to avoid an exegetical embarrassment, but in this case, by giving no indication of a time-lag or change of situation between vv. 45a and 45b, Matthew seems to have left us little choice.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Jesus spoke of those coming to get Him as "*sinners*." Though He came to die, He condemned those who took part in His death. He was innocent of any wrongdoing. They

were guilty of wrongdoing. They might have had the title of religious leaders or were representing the religious leaders, but to Jesus they were sinners. This included Judas, His former, trusted disciple.

(;46) EPILOGUE – COURAGOUSLY FACING HIS CRISIS

“Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

William Barclay: We see the **courage of Jesus**. ‘Rise,’ said Jesus, ‘*let us be going. He who betrays me is near.*’ **Celsus**, the pagan philosopher who attacked Christianity, used that sentence as an argument that Jesus tried to run away. It is the very opposite. ‘Rise,’ he said. ‘The time for prayer and the time for the garden is past. Now is the time for action. Let us face life at its grimmest and human beings at their worst.’ Jesus rose from his knees to go out to the battle of life. That is what prayer is for. In prayer, we kneel before God that we may stand erect before the world. In prayer, we enter heaven that we may face the battles of earth.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are we demonstrating that prayer is our #1 strategy?
- 2) Are we always supposed to be giddy and happy and excited about God’s will?
- 3) What are the ways in which we keep watch; what is the opposite of keeping watch?
- 4) Where have we found it to be true in our life that our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Wilson: What the episode illustrates, however, is not merely the idea that expressions of grief and supplication have an appropriate place in Christian spirituality. More critically, the experiences imputed to Jesus in this story illustrate the real challenge of the Lord’s Prayer, that is, of **aligning one’s own will with the will of God**. The fact that Jesus himself struggles in this regard—that he is a savior who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (**Heb 4:15–16**)—and yet ultimately retains his resolve makes him a model for how the readers can be strengthened through prayer in their time of need. As his example shows, very often people must face such times alone. The prayer further illustrates the appropriateness of expressing one’s own will in prayer even (or especially) when it differs from God’s will.

David Turner: Gethsemane also reminds disciples of their weakness (cf., e.g., **6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8, 22; 17:20; 18:21; 19:13**). Their lack of perception at Jesus’s anointing in Bethany (**26:10**) has already shown that they were not focused on his reminder that his death was near (**26:2**). Their unanimous denial that they would desert Jesus when he predicted they would shows their unbelief and sinful self-confidence (**26:31–35**). Such apparently brave disciples should be able to

watch with Jesus through the night, but even their inner circle fails him at the moment of deepest need. Zebedee's sons wanted the highest honors in the kingdom and promised they could drink his cup (**20:22**), but now they do not even stay awake to share Jesus's burden over the cup he alone will drink. After their performance in Gethsemane, the disciples' desertion when Jesus is arrested (**26:56**) does not surprise. Their sleep reminds disciples of the necessity of spiritual alertness during moral testing (cf. **1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 5:14; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:6–8; 1 Pet. 5:8**). Jesus's promises can sustain alert disciples (e.g., **Matt. 16:18; 19:28–29; 28:18, 20**).

Leon Morris: Jesus' **deep anguish** comes out in the further words spoken to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. In words reminiscent of **Psalm 42:6, 11; 43:5** Jesus speaks of his soul as very sorrowful; the addition to the point of death indicates that this is no normal perturbation, but something that goes very deep (cf. **Jonah 4:9**; Rieu, "*My heart is heavy to the point of death*"; REB, "*my heart is ready to break with grief*"). It is "anguish that threatens life itself" (**Hill**). Matthew does not leave his readers to think that Jesus was troubled in the same way as we all are from time to time. In Gethsemane he underwent a most unusual sense of being troubled that we must feel is connected not only with the fact that he would die, but that he would die the kind of death he faced, a death for sinners. Jesus was a brave man, and lesser people by far, including many who have owed their inspiration to him, have faced death calmly. It is impossible to hold that it was the fact of death that moved Jesus so deeply. Rather, it was **the kind of death** that he would die that brought the anguish. In due course Matthew will record the cry from the cross that says the Father had forsaken Jesus at the point of death (**27:46**; Paul says, "*him who knew no sin he made sin for us,*" **2 Cor. 5:21**). Jesus would be one with sinners in his death, he would experience the death that is due to sinners, and it seems that it was this that brought about the tremendous disturbance of spirit that Matthew records. . .

The question at issue was not whether Jesus should do the Father's will, but whether that necessarily included the way of the cross. The kind of death he faced was the kind of ordeal from which human nature naturally shrinks; thus we discern here the natural human desire to avoid it. But we discern also Jesus' firm determination that the Father's will be done. So he prays for the avoidance of the death he faced, but only if that accorded with the divine plan.

John MacArthur: The Son in Sorrow

Now, I think most of us who have been in the church for any time are somewhat familiar with a hymn about our Lord, a very beautiful hymn written by a man named **Philip Bliss** many years ago. The hymn says, "Man of sorrows, what a name for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim, hallelujah, what a Savior." The hymn writer says, "Man of sorrows, what a name" and he borrowed that from **Isaiah chapter 53**, where Jesus is said to be *a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief*. When you study the life of the Lord, you realize that indeed He was a man of sorrows. There is no record in Scripture that Jesus ever laughed. There are statements about His grief. There are statements about His sighing out loud, about His being grieved, about His feeling sad. . .

Well remember, this is midnight Thursday of the last week of our Lord's life. The years of ministry are over. The Galilean ministry, the Judean ministry, the Perea ministry east of the Jordan, it's all over, the miracles, the healings. He is now come to Jerusalem at the Passover, in the year 33 A.D., most likely, perhaps 30 A.D., one of those two years. And He has come not only to attend the Passover but to be the Passover. And Thursday was the day to get ready, because that evening they ate the Passover, and so the disciples made ready the Passover, and Thursday evening they ate the Passover. The meal is over, the final hymn has been sung, they

have left the upper room, gone through the city of Jerusalem with the bustling crowds, near midnight because of the holiday, because of the festival, because of the Passover season, out the gate north of the temple, which would be the eastern gate, down the slope of the temple mount, across the Kidron, up the Mount of Olives. And after the little interlude on the Mount of Olives where the Lord warned them about their defection, they now come to the garden of Gethsemane.

Now, with that as a background, let's look at the first word, **key words that help us unfold the text**. The first word is the word "**sorrow**" – the word "sorrow." I only wish to God that I were a person of eloquent words and could express what I feel in my heart about this. I'll do the best I can. In verse 37, after having gone on with Peter, James and John, some distance further from the other eight, it says, "*He began to be sorrowful and very depressed*" – very depressed. Now here our Lord is entering into deep anguish. If you think for a minute that Jesus just lived His life, and went to the cross and died, ho-hum, and rose again, and said, "There, it's done," you're wrong. Every single thought of anticipation of that cross that dwelt in His omniscience repulsed everything about Him. He agonized every conscious moment of His incarnation over the reality of the cross, because everything in it He despised – **the guilt, the sin, the death, the isolation, the loneliness, the estrangement from God**. This is not something He coolly and calmly engaged in, as if it were turning the page of a book on redemptive history, but something which brought Him to an indescribable agony. His whole soul is so repulsed with everything that has to do with the cross, the horror of it is so large, that it's beyond our description. And in that I think lies a new understanding of the love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. . .

The word here for being sorrowful means **deep sadness** – not superficial, but deep. And it says He was very *depressed* – that is a very interesting word. . . The word literally means, in a sort of a wooden sense, *to be away from home*, so it's a beautiful concept. Home is where comfortable things are. Home is where you belong. Home is where your family is. Home is where love is. Home is where you're at ease. Home is where you're accepted. Jesus was away from home. He was isolated in conflict with hell. This was depressing, so that the word "to be away from home" ultimately came to mean "*depressed*." It says in **Psalm 42**, and I think in a Messianic way describing Christ's experience, that wave upon wave rolled over Him, waves of grief, deep called unto deep. There is a desolate, profound kind of loneliness and sorrow here that causes Him to be depressed, deeply depressed. . .

The second word we see, not only sorrow, but the second word we see is **supplication** – supplication. In the midst of His sorrow, He cried out to God. In **verse 39, 42, and 44**, we have the three different periods of prayer in which He cried out to God. Now, what was going on here? I believe without a question this was a **temptation**. There are some people who have suggested to me personally that this was not a temptation. I feel it was a temptation. I feel Satan was there in full force, trying to keep Christ from going to the cross, preventing the cross, preventing the resurrection. You say, "What makes you think that? Satan isn't mentioned in this passage." That's right, Matthew gives no dignity to Satan. He gives no place to Satan here. But Satan is behind the scenes, and that's very obvious. If you go back into the upper room, you will remember that Satan appeared there and filled Judas, right? Filled Judas to do what he was going to do. And I don't know if you recall that most provocative verse in John's gospel, **chapter 14, verse 30**, where Jesus is in the upper room just before they left, and He said, "*Hereafter, I will not talk with you much.*" We're not going to talk much more. Why? "*For the prince of this world comes.*" I'm going now, is what He's saying, into conflict with Satan. I believe He knew that. . .

His supplication was so intense, **verse 38** says, that it was *unto death*. And as I suggested to you last time, it may well have been that Jesus might have died in the garden, except for an angel from heaven that strengthened Him. The angel came and strengthened Him in the midst of this excruciating agony, which caused blood to appear on His flesh. The sorrow is just amazing. The solitariness of His lonely prayer adds to the intensity. To be so sorrowful as to be nigh unto death intensifies it. To cry out to God asking if there's another way, then to sweat, and then to sweat, as it were, great clots of blood – unimaginable. The phenomenon of sweating blood is very, very rare – very rare. It can be best explained in simplicity in this way: when a person enters into extreme anguish and sensitivity, such as our Lord here, the resulting strain could go so far as to finally cause the dilation of the subcutaneous capillaries, the capillaries just under the tissue. And as those begin to dilate under this kind of intensity, they could burst. And then the blood flowing out of those burst capillaries has to find its way out, and it does so through the sweat glands. . .

But there's a third word here that we have to consider. It's the word "**sleep**," because that tells us something about this scene as well. **Verse 39**, Jesus went away to pray the first time. He told the disciples to stay there – to stay there. He came back, **verse 40**, "*And He found them asleep – found them asleep.*" Foolish – I mean they were sleeping at the moment of greatest spiritual conflict in the history of the world. They were sleeping when they should have been praying. I mean, it was obvious that when He left them and went forward to pray that He intended for them to pray where they were. He even says in **verse 41**, "*Watch and pray.*" The idea was that they had much to pray about, were they so absolutely indifferent to the agonizings of Jesus Christ that they slept? That they couldn't even stay awake to pray for their own Master? Hadn't they just been told in **verse 31** that they were going to be offended, and they were going to be trapped, and they were going to be scattered, and they were going to run like scared sheep? Hadn't Peter just been told that he was actually going to deny Jesus Christ three times before the cock crow? Didn't they have something to pray about when Jesus had said He was going to die, and be offered as a sacrifice, and rise again, and that it was going to happen this night? How could they possibly sleep? . . .

Oh, what weak men; indifferent to the needs of Christ, indifferent to the power of the enemy, who is going to tempt them. They are about to be utterly overwhelmed with sin. **Verse 56** says they're all going to forsake Christ and flee. They'll never pass the temptation. They'll fall into sin and denial and rejection of Christ. They don't want to be associated with Him. They run. They weren't ready. And what our Lord is communicating here in this is that in all spiritual battles, the victory goes to those who are alert, because they know their weakness. They're not fools like the disciples, who said, "Oh, we would never be offended. Oh, we would never deny You. Why we would go to prison and die before we would ever do that." They put too much stock in their good intentions, and they didn't realize their weakness. The battle doesn't go to the sleepers, it goes to the vigilant. It's a tragedy to see spiritual self-confidence, which is unpreparedness.

There's a fourth word. Key word, it's the word "**strength – strength.**" Notice **verse 45**; oh, this is so magnificent. After coming back the third time and saying, Are you still sleeping? He says, "*Behold, look,*" the word means look. Did He see something? I think so. I think He saw something. What did He see? I think He saw torches. I think He saw men with swords. I think He saw Roman soldiers from Fort Antonius. I think He saw the Jewish leaders. I think He saw Judas. Down the slope of the Mount of Olives, He could see the moving of this crowd of people coming to Him. "*Look, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of*

sinner.” What a contradiction; oh, what a humiliation, the sinless one given to sinners. “Look, look, they’re coming – you’re sleeping – they’re coming.” He had won the victory. He had won the victory – defeated the fleeing hosts of hell. He stood, covered with bloody sweat, victorious; the victor, courageously ready to face the cross. And He said, “You sleep. You’ll never survive this, you’re not ready.” He was ready. He had conquered the enemy in the strength of His Father. They had slept. . .

That brings us to the last word, and it’s the word “**sequence.**” . . .

Now, to conclude: what is the sequence, then, that we see in this lesson? It’s a great one. Let me give you the **sequence for disaster**, all right, in temptation. Here it comes. The disciples lived it out. Here’s the sequence I want you to see. It goes like this: Confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster – confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster. Confidence: I can handle it, I don’t need to pray. I’ll never deny the Lord. I’ll be faithful. I’m never going to get beyond the possibility where I’m strong enough to be victorious. I’m all right – confidence. Sleep follows confidence. What do you have to be vigilant about? Why bother to be alert? Why bother to watch what you see, and what you read, and what you hear, and where you go, and what you think? Just sleep. Sleep leads then to temptation, and to sin, and disaster. The disciples lived it that way.

But what about the **sequence of victory**? Listen to this one. Here’s the pattern we see in the Lord. It’s very different. Instead of confidence, you have humility. Amazing – Jesus humbled Himself and became dependent on God. And while the disciples were confidently saying, “We will never ever fail You,” Jesus, knowing the weakness of human existence, and knowing He was a man, even if a sinless man, knew He needed to go to God to be strengthened, and was strengthened by an angel. So where you have confidence on the disciples’ part, you have humility on His. Confidence led to sleep, humility led to what? What did Jesus do while they were asleep? Prayed – He prayed. Then came temptation, and in the temptation, obedience to the will of God, and victory. You see the sequence? And you make a choice. You make a choice in your life, either to be self- confident, sleep, end up in disaster, or in humility, fall on your knees before God in prayer for strength, and in the temptation comes obedience, and out of the obedience, victory. That’s the lesson our Lord would have us learn.

S. Lewis Johnson: The Agony in Gethsemane

The church, in its study and in its discussion of the passion of our Lord has acknowledged that there was a **progress** in the sufferings of our Lord. We know that the latter part of his suffering is so great that it was given a special name. In the Heidelberg catechism, it is said that he suffered all the time that he lived on earth, but especially at the end of his life. And the Christian church came to call that the *paseo magna* or the Great Suffering. In fact, the Lord Jesus seems to specifically support that, for he says, “*With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*” So he himself thought of his cross as the climax of the suffering, the *paseo magna*, the great passion, Though the passion itself comprehends in measure all of his previous lifetime. . .

The sufferings of our Lord were the work of the Son. They were the work of the world. They were the work of Satan. But ultimately and primarily they were **the work of God**. And it was he who was accomplishing the redemptive sacrifice that would inaugurate the new covenant by which all who are saved have salvation. . .

Why the agony of Gethsemane? . . . You see, I don't think there is any way to explain this other than to say it was the agony of the anticipation of the divine condemnation upon sin. It was the agony of the curse of the broken law. It was the agony of becoming the sin offering. It was the agony of the contemplation of the experiencing of eternal death for us. That's the only thing that can explain this. . . *He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.* That word in the Greek text is a word which in its derivation means "*away from home.*" He began to feel away from home. He began to feel something of the **separation** that would ultimately manifest itself fully and completely when he cried out, "*My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me?*" It is the agony of being forsaken because he has become the skin offering for sinners. That's the only thing that can explain our Lord wallowing and groveling in the ground, crying out, *O my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.* And if this is the only way he says in a moment, *Thy will be done.*

J. Ligon Duncan: The Grieved and Distressed Savior

But let me suggest to you today as we think on these verses together that Matthew is showing us this for at least three reasons. Matthew wants to show us first of all the **weakness of the disciples**. These disciples had just hours before, minutes before, professed that they would stay with the Lord Jesus Christ to the very end, and if necessary, would die for Him. And Matthew is going to show that not only would they not be prepared to die for Him, but they wouldn't even be able to stay awake while He prayed. The Lord Jesus is showing us the weakness of the disciples, and he's showing us the weakness of the disciples because he wants us to be mindful of our own weakness. We can be very blustery in our profession or devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. And He wants us to be in a posture of humble dependence upon Him. So He shows us the weakness of the disciples. But that's not all. Matthew also shows us this because he wants us to see **the strength and resolution of the Savior**. This agony is literally incomprehensible to us. There are aspects to it which we will never understand. And yet the Lord shows us that even in the midst of this agony which Christ felt, not because He was confused about the will of God, but because He knew exactly what the will of the Father was. Even in the midst of this agony He remained entirely committed, resolute to bring about our salvation. And Matthew wants us to see that. But Matthew also wants us to see **something of the agony and the isolation that Jesus was to face** as He rendered satisfaction for our sins. We're seeing as it were a foretaste of Christ's cry of abandonment. His cry of dereliction on the cross when we see Him on His face before His heavenly Father in Gethsemane.

I. You will never understand Jesus' agony until you realize that His distress is not over death but judgment.

II. You will never understand Jesus' agony until you understand His aloneness.

III. You will never understand the commitment of Jesus' love unless you realize that He embraced His betrayal.

TEXT: Matthew 26:47-56

TITLE: *SHOCKING BETRAYAL, SWORD-WIELDING RESISTANCE AND SHAMEFUL ARREST*

BIG IDEA:

OUR RESPONSE TO UNFAIR ATTACKS SHOULD NOT BE VIOLENT OPPOSITION BUT CALM TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Gardner: The spectacle that unfolds in **verses 47-56** is both ludicrous and tragic.

- It is ludicrous in that the arrest party descends on Jesus like a group of commandos on a search-and-destroy mission (cf. v. 55).
- It is tragic in that this militant crowd is led by one of the twelve, namely Judas.

R. T. France: But while Jesus now has no chance of escape, the narrative nonetheless reads as if **he is in charge of the situation**. The contrast with his emotional prayer in the preceding pericope is striking. The Jesus whom Judas and his posse meet is now resolute, calm and authoritative. He himself makes no attempt to resist arrest, and when one of his disciples tries to defend him it is Jesus himself, not the arresting party, who puts an end to the attempt. He speaks of the supernatural resources available to him, and declares that it is his choice not to call on them, because his purpose is that the scriptures should be fulfilled. He even reprimands those who have come to arrest him for supposing that he would need to be overcome by armed force, and his challenge remains unanswered. While Matthew does not go so far as John in depicting the arresting party as recoiling in fear from Jesus' supernatural authority (**John 18:5-6**), his Jesus seems able to lecture them from a superior height even while he is being led away. Jesus is taken into the power of the Jerusalem authorities not because he had no choice but because this is the will of his Father, declared in the scriptures, which he has accepted as his messianic calling.

Donald Hagner: The preliminaries are over, and now the narrative moves into the sequence of events that culminates in the crucifixion of Jesus. The betrayer does his despicable deed; there is a brief attempt at resistance on the part of the disciples. But the central motif from the beginning of the final sequence, when Jesus is taken into custody by the Jewish authorities, is the **fulfillment of the scriptures**. From the arrest of Jesus the narrative moves immediately into his so-called trial and thence to his death. From this point on, the narrative takes on an inexorability that reflects a **mysterious conjunction of human determination and divine superintendence**.

David Thompson: The betrayal of Jesus Christ, which led to His crucifixion, was all part of the plan of God to fulfill prophetic scriptures that predicted that Jesus would die for the sins of Israel, and for the sins of the whole world.

David Turner: The bravery of Jesus, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of the disciples, and the aggression of the arrest party are all in character with the respective figures. Yet the strong emphasis on God's predetermined plan balances these sinful human acts (**26:2, 18, 24, 31, 39, 42, 54, 56**) and provides yet another example of the scriptural pattern of the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

I. (:47-50) SHOCKING BETRAYAL BY JUDAS WHO ABUSED THE MESSIAH'S LOVE

A. (:47) Judas Directs the Armed Arresting Force Executing the Jewish Conspiracy

“And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people.”

R. T. France: To describe Judas as “*one of the Twelve*” is hardly necessary after **10:4** and **26:14**, but underlines the shocking fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction in v. **21**.

Van Parunak: This is the last reference to “*the twelve*” in Matthew. Judas is still considered a part of it. He has not yet taken the final step of delivering the Lord to his enemies. The expression suggests that even at this point, there is still the possibility of repentance, but it is not to be.

Michael Wilkins: The most heavily armed would have been a contingent of Roman soldiers assigned by governor Pilate to the temple for security, who were authorized to carry swords (*machaira*), the short double-edged sword preferred in hand-to-hand combat (cf. **26:51**; **Eph. 6:17**). Levitical temple police and personal security of the chief priests and Sanhedrin carrying clubs would have made up another large detachment in the arresting crowd.

B. (:48-49) Judas Identifies Jesus for Capture with the Kiss of Betrayal

1. (:48) Defining the Sign

“Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him.’”

D. A. Carson: The need for pointing out the right man was especially acute, not only because it was dark, but because, in a time long before photography, the faces of even great celebrities would not be nearly as widely known as today.

2. (:49) Doing the Deed

“And immediately he went to Jesus and said, ‘Hail, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: With premeditated calculation (v. **48**), Judas greeted Jesus with “*Hail, Master*” or “*Greetings, Rabbi*,” normally a greeting of respect, and stepped up to kiss Jesus. This was the prearranged sign between Judas and the arresting officers. Judas’ positive identification of Jesus assured that the right person would be arrested even in the darkness.

Judas, however, did not merely give the kiss of normal greeting. He kissed Jesus with a great show of affection (Greek *kataphileō*; **Grimm’s**) making the identification unmistakable. This is the word Luke used to describe the sinner woman’s kissing of Jesus’ feet (**7:38, 45**) in comparison to the kiss (Greek *philēma*) the Pharisee did not give. The affectionate kiss is what the father gave the returning prodigal (**Lk. 15:20**) and the Ephesian elders gave Paul when he told them they would never see him again (**Acts 20:37**). Judas was a hypocrite. His kiss showed how low he had sunk (**Bruner 2:669**).

Warren Wiersbe: It is tragic to see how Judas cheapened everything that he touched. His name means *praise* (**Gen. 29:35**), yet who would name a son “*Judas*” today? He used the kiss as a

weapon, not as a sign of affection. In that day, it was customary for disciples to kiss their teacher. But in this case, it was not a mark of submission or respect. The Greek verbs indicate that Judas kissed Jesus repeatedly.

C. (:50a) Jesus Surrenders Voluntarily to Judas' Betrayal

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, do what you have come for.’”

Albert Mohler: Jesus addresses Judas as “*friend*,” a title previously applied to those who abuse a privileged relationship (**20:13; 22:12**). Judas is violating his privileged relationship with Jesus the Messiah, abusing the love and friendship extended to him.

Leon Morris: There is a problem relating to Jesus’ next words. They may be a question or a statement, but in view of Matthew’s picture of Jesus as master of the situation it seems more likely that Jesus is telling Judas to get on with the job of betrayal and arrest, rather than inquiring why he is there (cf. **Moffatt**, “My man, do your errand”).

Donald Hagner: Another possible understanding, however, is to take the words quite literally as a comment of resigned disappointment in Judas: “*for this you come!*” (cf. the irony of **Luke 22:48**). It reflects at once disappointment in Judas, a further stage of resignation to the will of God that will take him to his death, and a yielding to the final act of the story (cf. **R. E. Brown**, “Appendix III, C” [Death of the Messiah, 1385–88] and his conclusion that the phrase is a way of indicating Jesus’ knowledge of what Judas is doing). (cf. **Wilson**: “Companion, the thing you are here for!” Thus too **Spiegelberg**: “It is this for which you are here!”; cf. **Rehkopf; Eltester.**)

D. (:50b) Jesus is Forcibly Taken into Custody by the Hands of Sinful Men

“Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.”

R. T. France: The account of the actual arrest emphasizes its physical nature; the Hebraic expression “*to lay hands on*” is perhaps intended to echo Jesus’ words about the “*hands*” of people/sinners (**17:22; 26:45**). We are thus prepared for Jesus’ protest about the unnecessary use of force (v. 55).

II. (:51-54) SWORD-WIELDING RESISTANCE DOES NOT PROMOTE GOD’S KINGDOM AGENDA

A. (:51) Impulsive Use of the Sword to Resist Arrest

“And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear.”

Why was Peter even carrying a sword?

David Thompson: Now we may immediately notice that when some grabbed Jesus, Peter drew a sword (Christ’s disciples were armed, at least two of them—**Luke 22:36-38**) and Peter pulled out his sword and swung it at a man’s head, whose name was Malchus (**John 18:10**), and he missed and cut off his ear. I am fully convinced Peter intended to kill Malchus for laying his hand on Jesus. We may notice that the only Gospel writer who tells us which disciple this was is John. One reason for this is that John was written after Peter had already been killed. The other disciples told the story, but they protected the identity of Peter so more hostility would not be aimed at Him. Say what you want about Peter (emotional, irrational, explosive, fickle), but he

was a loyal friend of Jesus Christ who, on the spur of the moment, would fight to the death for Jesus Christ.

Michael Wilkins: It is likely that Judas brought such a heavily armed contingent because they expected Jesus' disciples to resist arrest, which indeed was the reaction of at least one, whom John tells us was Simon Peter (**John 18:10–11**). Peter tries to defend Jesus by taking the sword he is carrying and striking Malchus, the high priest's servant. At least some of the disciples regularly carried swords, most likely for self-defense from robbers as they traveled (cf. **Luke 22:36**). Essenes were known to carry arms as protection against thieves.

D. A. Carson: Peter's response is psychologically convincing. After repeated warnings of defection, Peter may have felt that the crucial test of loyalty had arrived. He is magnificent and pathetic—magnificent because he rushes in to defend Jesus with characteristic courage and impetuosity, pathetic because his courage evaporates when Jesus undoes Peter's damage, forbids violence, and faces the passion without resisting.

B. (:52-54) Criticism of the Impulsive Use of the Sword

1. (:52) Unwise Approach

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.’”

Jesus seems to be commanding the situation.

Jesus is clearly not leading a political and military rebellion

The disciples were to “*take up their cross*” and **not their swords**.

Secondly, Peter's hasty use of the sword betrayed a lack of faith in the Messiah's ability to defend Himself, and in God's ability to come to His defense, should He wish to do so.

Jeffrey Crabtree: God does not rely on the sword or human might to advance His kingdom (**Wilkins** 858). Rather than urging resistance and before the crowd could understand and react to what Peter had just done, Jesus healed the man with the severed ear (**Lk. 22:51**)—His final miracle before the cross. He told Peter to sheathe his sword and warned him that such actions would bring swift death, a reference either to death in battle or to death by execution (**v. 52**; **Blomberg** 93; **Gen. 9:6**). He reminded Peter of His relationship to God the Father. Jesus did not need human weapons. A simple request to the Father would bring thousands of angels (**v. 53**).

R. T. France: But as a proverbial observation (cf. **Rev 13:10**) on the tendency of violence to recoil on those who perpetrate it Jesus' aphorism reflects common experience, even though not every historical example conforms to this pattern.

Physical resistance was not only wrong in principle but also unnecessary, since Jesus had far more force at his disposal, if he chose to summon it, than a few human supporters could offer.

Donald Hagner: It would be a mistake to take the saying that all who take the sword will die by the sword as a proof text for an **absolute pacifism**. The proverb, to be sure, discourages violence in general as an unproductive path. Peacefulness is surely a clear mark of those who belong to the kingdom of God (cf. **5:9**). Violence only begets more violence. It may, however, at times be unavoidable (cf. **Luke 22:36**) and the lesser of two evils. In the present instance it was clearly out of place. Jesus had incalculable resources available to him if resistance had been an

appropriate action. In this instance **passive submission alone was consonant with the will of God.**

Albert Mohler: Jesus' saying indicates that the way of the world is to assert its will on others through human power, even through violence; likewise, the way of the world is to retaliate against violence with violence. The inevitable consequence of championing violence is often a violent end. Jesus is not giving a blanket endorsement of pacifism, but he does reject the notion that God's will is advanced or should be imposed on others through violent means.

Van Parunak: He goes on to give three specific reasons not to respond to violence with violence (so **Matthew Henry**).

- The first is that it leads to a never-ending cycle of violence. There is no winner:
- The second motive for non-violence is that the believer's defense lies not in his own weapons, but in the Father's care, which is more than sufficient.
- [The third] -- The humbling of the Messiah was not an accident, but required by the plan of God as revealed in the OT.

2. (:53) Unnecessary Approach

*“Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father,
and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”*

A full Roman legion had 6,100 foot and 726 horse soldiers in the time of Augustus. If we take Jesus literally, He's saying that at just a word, more than **81,912 angels** would show up to defend Him.

Michael Wilkins: This is similar to the angelic host that surrounded Elisha, ready to come to his aide, even though his servant could not see them until his eyes were opened (**1 Kings 6:17**).

Donald Hagner: “Twelve” legions may be intended to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel or to a full complement of twelve disciples.

3. (:54) Unenlightened Approach

“How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?”

Jeffrey Crabtree: A second reason Peter's sword was wrong was because Jesus' arrest without any resistance was **part of the plan of God** (vv. 54, 56; **Is. 53:7; Jn. 18:11**). Jesus offered Himself willingly. This seems to have been His point in **verse 55** as well. He was no threat, yet His enemies treated Him as one. They arrested Him as if He were a violent criminal, a threat to society. Events moved quickly as the Jewish leaders unknowingly (**Lk. 23:34; Jn. 11:51, 52; Acts 3:17, 18; 1 Cor. 2:8**) fulfilled prophecy by taking steps to put to death their own Messiah (**Ps. 22; Is. 52:13-53:12; Zech. 12:10; 13:7**). Even the disciples fulfilled prophecy when they all ran (v. 56; vv. 31-35; **Zech. 13:7**).

Grant Osborne: The language of divine necessity (“*it must happen*”) is found in the passion predictions (**16:21**) and related passages (**17:10; 24:6**) and governs all the passion events, with fulfillment passages frequently quoted. In this passage there is no specific OT text intended but all those related to the suffering Messiah (such as **Ps 22; 69; Isa 52–53; Zech 13:7**).

III. (:55-56a) SHAMEFUL ARREST UNDER CLOAK OF DARKNESS BY THE ARMED ENFORCERS OF JEWISH CONSPIRATORS

A. (:55) Shameful Arresting Tactics

1. Treating Jesus Like a Dangerous Insurrectionist

*“At that time Jesus said to the multitudes,
‘Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as against a robber?’”*

Stu Weber: Turning from his confused disciples, Jesus addressed his captors, shaming those who had come in treachery and deceit to arrest an innocent man. They had had many opportunities to arrest him in the temple. He had been there teaching regularly. Jesus confronted their true motives by demonstrating that it was these hypocrites who had much to hide, coming out to this lonely place to capture him in the middle of the night, with swords and clubs. This was inappropriate and unnecessary. It was by his design that they were here to arrest him, and it was his plan to go with them to trial and to the cross.

2. Taking Him into Custody in Secretive Hypocrisy

“Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.”

Leon Morris: Those in whose hands he now was were not interested in justice. They wanted simply to get him out of the way and were prepared to stoop to any means to bring that about. *“You did not take hold of me,”* he says. If they had been honest in what they were doing, they would have proceeded against him publicly. Since a criminal would hide away out of the public gaze, it was fair to arrest such an offender wherever he might be found. But there was something wrong with authorities who treated an honest religious man as though he were nothing more than a brigand.

R. T. France: Jesus’ protest over the manner of his arrest serves to underline the contrast between the Jerusalem establishment, which depends on stealth and physical force, and Jesus’ open and non-violent presentation of his claims in the temple courtyard. They have failed to silence him in public debate, so instead they have resorted to coercion, avoiding a public arrest because of their fear of crowd reaction (**26:5**). So they are treating him like a *“bandit,”* probably meaning simply a common thief (cf. its use in **21:13**), though this is the term Josephus would regularly use for the violent supporters of Jewish nationalism, more generally known as the Zealots. If Matthew has the latter usage in view, its modern equivalent might be *“terrorist.”* In view of Jesus’ clear repudiation of the bandit image here it is ironical that he would eventually finish up crucified along with two such bandits (**27:38, 44**).

B. (:56a) Submission to the Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecy

“But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.”

Robert Gundry: *“This whole thing”* refers to Judas’s having given Jesus over to his enemies. *“Has happened”* indicates a past event that has a continuing effect. The rest of the statement tells the purpose of this betrayal, the purpose of fulfilling prophetic scriptures concerning Jesus’

sacrificial death. But little did Judas and those who seized Jesus know they were contributing toward that purpose. Those scriptures include at least **Zechariah 13:7**, quoted by Jesus in **26:31**.

(:56b) – EPILOGUE – ABANDONMENT BY THE FEARFUL DISCIPLES

“Then all the disciples left Him and fled.”

Donald Hagner: This brief note about their flight poignantly recalls the disciples’ empty promise that if necessary they would die with Jesus (v. 35) and simultaneously fulfills Jesus’ prediction that they would fall away and be scattered (v. 31; cf. **John 16:32**).

Stu Weber: In their perplexity and confusion, the disciples deserted him and fled. In fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction (**26:31-32**), these men lost their nerve. They relied on human courage rather than spiritual preparation. Their downfall was their failure to follow Jesus’ advice to keep watch and remain dependent on God in prayer (**26:41**; cf. **24:42**). They had been so distracted by their own preconceived ideas that they did not recognize Jesus’ exercise of authentic authority when they saw it. Neither did they recognize that the path to victory was through the valley of sacrifice (**16:24-28**).

Leon Morris: This was the last straw for the disciples. They must have been staggered by all that was going on. They had evidently had no inkling of the plot that had been laid, they were surprised that Judas led the arresting posse to Jesus, they saw Peter’s unsuccessful attempt at resistance by violence and heard Jesus’ repudiation of it, and now Jesus, instead of doing something miraculous, was reasoning calmly with the people who held him. This was no place for the followers of Jesus, and there appeared to be nothing more they could do, so they all left him and ran away. All is significant; there was not one of his intimate followers who was prepared to suffer alongside his leader. At this time of crisis they simply ran off. They left Jesus to suffer alone.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How has Jesus manifested His control in difficult times of crisis in your life when it looked like circumstances were out of control?
- 2) Does the bible teach pacificism as the best approach in all circumstances?
- 3) How important is it to study and understand Messianic prophecy?
- 4) What motivated Peter to first fight and then flee?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Gardner: As illustrated below, these episodes evolve in a **chiastic pattern**:

- a. Judas betrays Jesus’ life
- b. Jesus accused by his enemies

c. Peter denies Jesus

b1. Jesus condemned by his enemies

a1. Judas takes his own life

Outline:

Betrayed with a Kiss, **26:47-56**

Faithful Under Fire, **26:57-68**

Denial Under Duress, **26:69-75**

Decision for Death, **27:1-2**

Consequences of Betrayal, **27:3-10**

Michael Wilkins: Jesus, the “*Prince of Peace*.”

Matthew has demonstrated that Jesus’ life is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah concerning a messianic deliverer. But what about the “peace” that was prophesied to come when the “*Prince of Peace*” established his kingdom (**Isa. 9:6–7**)? Many Jews today disregard Jesus as the true Messiah, because he did not destroy the enemies of Israel and establish a time of worldwide peace and prosperity. Shalom is integral to the anticipated eschatological time (cf. **Ps. 85:8–10; Isa. 55:12**), and Ezekiel speaks of the Davidic messianic shepherd, who will make a covenant of peace, shalom, that will usher in a time of blessing and security (**Ezek. 34:23–30**).

Christians also live in the anticipation of the establishment of the kingdom, when Jesus will return to bring worldwide peace. But Christians also live in the reality of the **new covenant peace** that Jesus, the Passover lamb (**1 Cor. 5:7**), has brought through his work on the cross. The new covenant brings personal peace as a disciple’s alienation from God is solved through the forgiveness of sin (**Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20**), but it also brought, and brings, peace between Jew and Gentile as the two become one new person in the church of Jesus Christ (**Eph. 2:11–18**). The new covenant enables Jesus’ disciples to be instruments of peace in this world through their message (**Acts 10:36**) and their lives (**Rom. 12:17–21; 14:19**) and enables them to have personal inward peace regardless of the circumstances of this world (**Phil. 4:7**).

Grant Osborne: We should learn to **pray in the midst of trials** as Jesus did. Jesus asks God to “*remove*” his cup of suffering, and it is not wrong to desire that God will refrain from taking us through certain trials and afflictions. Yet also Jesus surrenders himself to his Father’s will (**vv. 39, 42**) even though he knows that will mean his life. That level of faith is the model for each of us. None of us will have to go through what Jesus did, yet we can entrust ourselves to God’s sovereign will in the same way as Jesus did. The key to victorious prayer is “*not as I will, but as you will*.” We must maintain spiritual vigilance and remain alert lest we “*enter into temptation*” (**v. 41**). We have all felt a sadness so deep we felt we were going to die (**v. 38**) and asked close friends to stand by us in our time of need. Many of us have also, like Jesus, been failed by those friends. Yet he models for us a God-centered trust that can help us to rise above our problems (“*on wings like eagles*,” **Isa 40:31**) and the failures of our friends.

John MacArthur: The Traitor’s Kiss

It’s a shocking scene. It’s absolutely a shocking scene. Instead of welcoming the Son of God, instead of embracing the long-awaited Messiah, instead of falling at the feet of one who was to be worshipped as the living Christ of God, they sent a group of vigilantes, a group of soldiers, to beat Him into submission, to stab Him if need be, to take His life. And as I looked at that scene and meditated on it, thought it over in my mind, I saw in it such a vivid illustration of the wickedness of the world. The wickedness of the world is never made more manifest than it

is in the world's treatment of Jesus Christ, never. If you don't think the world is wicked, then ask yourself how it can reject the most spotless, pure, and wonderful, and lovely person that ever walked on the earth? If this is not a wicked world, then tell me why it rejects the perfect one? There's never a greater illustration of the world's wickedness than this – Jew and Gentile alike, who reject Christ. Think of their wickedness. First of all, their wickedness is manifest in the fact that they are unjust – they are unjust. The world is unjust. Did they have a right to take Jesus Christ and kill Him? What crime had He done? And Pilate even later on says, “I find” – what – “no fault in this man. I wash my hands of this affair.” And Pilate was a man educated in jurisprudence and law. Christ had done nothing wrong. There was no crime. **They are utterly unjust.**

They are utterly unfair. They are of their father who is a murderer, **John 8:44** says, the devil. Their deeds against Jesus Christ have no relationship to truth, no relationship to equity, no relationship to fairness, to rightness, to goodness, to justice. They have no ability to recognize the one who is true and right and good, and that is what marks the Christ-rejecting world in every generation. Their rejection of Jesus Christ is unjust. And listen, when the world can reject the spotless, pure, and lovely Son of God, it tells us they are wicked; because righteousness and goodness would embrace righteousness and goodness, would it not? And not only is the world unjust, but the world is mindless – the world is mindless. What did the soldiers in Rome have against Jesus Christ? What did they have against Him? Nothing, absolutely nothing. What did the priests, who were being led by the nose under the direction of the high priest and chief priests who were intimidated by Christ, what did they have against Jesus? Nothing. Do you remember that it says in John's gospel, “Many of the priests believed on Him?” What did they have against Him? Absolutely nothing. The Roman soldiers had nothing against Him. He had not done anything to offend them.

The priests, what did they have against Him? Nothing. Were they to be the ones who cared for the people of Israel? Yes. Did Jesus assist them? Yes. Did He heal the diseases of their people? Yes. Did He restore their people to spiritual life? Yes. Did He teach their people divine truth? Yes. What did they have against Him? Nothing. But they are mindless, absolutely mindless. They are caught up in the mood of the mob. It just takes one aberrational, perverted leader or two, to decide there ought to be a plot against somebody, to stir up an entire populous. They are as mindless as the people who followed Hitler, or anybody else who leads them into some kind of evil act or acts. It is the **mood of the mob**. They sell themselves to emotion. They hate one they do not even know. They despise what they cannot even understand. They are hirelings of the high priest. They are bribed for the sake of acceptance, for the sake of saving their reputation, for the sake of preserving the peace they imagine cannot exist unless this is done. . .

Thirdly, as I look at the wickedness of the world in coming to Christ, I have to affirm that they are cowardly – **they are cowardly**; a thousand men to take one Galilean – a thousand – swords, clubs, torches in the dark of night?

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus Betrayed

William Hendriksen says that in this present paragraph we are told about three things.

1. The **onslaught of the treacherous**. That is, Judas the betrayer and the multitude that comes with him.
2. We're also taught about the **defeat of the defenders**. We see Peter and the disciples fail to restrain Jesus' arrest and eventually flee, just as He predicted.

3. And we also see the **triumph of the captain**. Jesus willingly embraces this betrayal. He willingly embraces this arrest that He might sacrifice Himself on our behalf.

I. The character and calmness of Jesus stand out in this sad event.

One of the things that strikes you about this passage is that Jesus is always on the high moral ground. Throughout this whole process where He is not only being betrayed, but is being dealt with illegally and unethically, He is consistently never on the same level as His wrongful persecutors. He is consistently on the high moral ground. And so His character shows through. His character was shaped by the word of God and shaped by his awareness of the providence of God. He knew that God's plan was going to be worked out. He knew that God moves in mysterious ways and that this was the plan of God, and therefore He was confident. And His calmness in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the midst of His arrest, certainly is related to those things as well. He knew the Scriptures. In fact, twice in this passage He will say, look, friend, everything that is happening right now is in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Because He knew it was in accord with the Scriptures, He was calm. He was at peace with it. He was ready to trust in God. And He was able to trust and be calm because of His trust in God's providence.

His calmness, too, was based on God's word and providence. You know, crises have a way of revealing our character. In the midst of a trial, we sometimes learn things about ourselves that we would rather not know.

II. Peter's action reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus ministry.

What's Jesus' point of saying this? To stress that it is not because God lacks the power to stop it that He is going to the cross. And it is not because Jesus lacks the ability to ask of God to spare Him that He is going to the cross. He is going to the cross because He has chosen to go to the cross. He is not a passive victim. He is the prime actor, and He has chosen to go to the cross. Jesus goes to the cross not because the Father can't stop it, not because He can't ask the Father to stop it, but because of His desire to fulfill the word of God. **J.C. Ryle** explains this beautifully. He says, "We see in these words" and he's talking about the words how then will the Scripture be fulfilled which says it must happen this way "the secret of His voluntary submission to His foes. He came on purpose to fulfill the types and promises of the Old Testament Scriptures, and by fulfilling them to provide salvation for the world. He came intentionally to be the true Lamb of God, the Passover lamb. He came voluntarily to be the scapegoat on whom the iniquities of the people were to be laid. His heart was set on accomplishing this great work. It could not be done without the hiding of His power for a time. To do it He became a willing sufferer. He was taken, tried, condemned and crucified entirely of His own free will."

III. Jesus proclaims the sovereignty of God and His word to His captors.

And then He goes on to announce to these same people why it is that He is going to be taken captive. Their actions, He says, are in accordance with His predictions, and they have been taken in order to fulfill the scriptures. Think of that. Jesus is saying, Judas, all my captors, temple guards, servants of the Chief Priest, Scribes and Elders of the People, Roman soldiers from the cohort of Jerusalem, you are doing just what I predicted because God decreed it before the foundation of the world. He told His prophets, His prophets wrote it in the Scripture, and I came into the world in order to fulfill that Scripture, and you are merely instruments in the hands of God. I am not being taken today against My will, He is saying. I am being taken today in accordance with the will of God which I have freely embraced.

TEXT: Matthew 26:57-68

TITLE: JESUS TAKEN BEFORE CAIAPHAS THE HIGH PRIEST

BIG IDEA:

THE UNJUST TRIAL BEFORE CAIAPHAS PROVIDES JESUS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLEARLY AFFIRM HIS MESSIANIC IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Doriani: The Jewish leaders sought Jesus' death, nothing less. To reach this goal, they needed to convict him of a capital offense. More to the point, since the Roman governor reserved the right of execution to himself, at least in Judea, they had to find Jesus guilty of a capital crime in both Jewish and Roman law. But what was Jesus' offense against Jewish law? And since he paid taxes and lived peacefully, how could the Romans condemn him? But the authorities did have Jesus in custody, so "*those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled*" (26:57). Peter, meanwhile, "*followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest*" and "*sat down with the guards*" (26:58).

William Barclay: The process of the trial of Jesus is not altogether easy to follow. It seems to have fallen into three parts.

1. The first part took place after the arrest in the Garden, during the night and in the high priest's house, and is described in this section.
2. The second part took place first thing in the morning, and is briefly described in **Matthew 27:1-2**.
3. The third part took place before Pilate, and is described in **Matthew 27:11-26**.

The salient question is this – was the meeting during the night an official meeting of the Sanhedrin, hastily summoned, or was it merely a preliminary examination, in order to formulate a charge, and was the meeting in the morning the official meeting of the Sanhedrin? However that question is answered, in the trial of Jesus, the Jews violated their own laws; but if the meeting in the night was a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the violation was even more extreme. On the whole, it seems that Matthew took the night meeting to be a meeting of the Sanhedrin, for in **verse 59** he says that the whole Sanhedrin sought for false witness to put Jesus to death.

Craig Blomberg: There are numerous apparent **illegalities** in the officials' procedures. For example, Jews were not to hold trials at night or during festivals. No capital verdict could be reached in one day, and the accused should have been permitted counsel for the defense. The testimony against Jesus was too flimsy to hold up, and the procedure for calling witnesses made a shambles of the law (see esp. the Mishnaic tractate Sanhedrin).

Leon Morris: When the Romans conquered a country they normally allowed much of the local administration to continue. It obviously made things easier all around if people could continue to a large extent with the judicial institutions with which they were familiar. But the Romans had to exercise a certain caution lest their supporters in the conquered nation be removed by a judicious use of the local courts on the part of those opposed to Rome. So, while the Romans allowed the conquered peoples a good deal of latitude, the conquerors kept the **death penalty** in their own hands and reserved the right to take over any case at any stage they chose.

In the case of Jesus the situation was complicated by the fact that the Jews saw him as guilty of a religious crime (claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and thus being a blasphemer), but the Romans, who alone had the power to impose the death sentence, would not recognize this as a crime. They could be induced to execute Jesus only by a demonstration that he had committed what they recognized as a serious offense — for example, setting himself up as a King in opposition to Caesar. In what follows Matthew shows us how the Jewish authorities came to condemn Jesus according to their own law and then how they brought a charge before the Roman governor that was not their real grievance but that would induce Pilate to crucify Jesus.

I. (:57-58) PREDETERMINED OUTCOME

A. (:57) Jesus Led to Caiaphas the High Priest Who Had Sanctioned His Seizure

“And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.”

Craig Blomberg: Jesus returns with his captors to Caiaphas's house. John adds that the group first paid a courtesy call to the ex-high priest Annas (**John 18:13**).

Warren Wiersbe: According to Old Testament law, the high priest was to serve until death. But when the Romans took over the nation of Israel, they made the high priesthood an appointed office. This way they could be certain of having a religious leader who would cooperate with their policies. Annas served as high priest from AD 6-15, and five of his sons, as well as Caiaphas his on-in-law, succeeded him. Caiaphas was high priest from AD 18-36, but Annas was still a power behind the throne.

Grant Osborne: It is clear that Caiaphas and leaders in the Sanhedrin had sent out the temple guards and police to arrest Jesus. When he was in custody, they delivered him directly to Caiaphas

B. (:58) Peter Observing in the Courtyard of the High Priest to See the Outcome

“But Peter also was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.”

II. (:59-63a) PREJUDICIAL INQUIRY

A. (:59-60a) Failed Attempts to Find Incriminating Evidence

1. (:59) Dogged Pursuit of Their Wicked Agenda

“Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death;”

Grant Osborne: Of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, twenty-three were required present for a capital trial (m. Sanh. 7:1). There may have been two, an unofficial interrogation here, and an official verdict later at dawn (**27:1**, with the two conflated in **Luke 22:66–71**).

D. A. Carson: Matthew says the Sanhedrin was looking “for false evidence” (*pseudomartyria*, v.59, GK 6019) and obtained it from “false witnesses” (*pseudomartyres*, v.60). It is unlikely this means that the Sanhedrin sought liars only; if so, **why not simply fabricate the evidence?** Rather, the Sanhedrin, already convinced of Jesus’ guilt, went through the motions of securing

evidence against him. When people hate, they readily accept false witness; and the Sanhedrin eventually heard and believed just about what it wanted. Matthew knew that Jesus was not guilty and could not be, so he describes the evidence as “false.”

2. (:60a) Denied Their Goal of Finding Anything of Substance

“and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward.”

B. (:60b-63) Final Fabricated Misquoted Testimony

1. (:60b-61) Confusion Over Jesus Referring to the Temple Structure of His Body

“But later on two came forward, and said, ‘This man stated, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’”

Here's what He really said:

John 2:19-21 AV *Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? 21 But he spake of the temple of his body.*

2. (:62) Call for Jesus to Respond to This Fabricated Testimony

“And the high priest stood up and said to Him, ‘Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?’”

3. (:63) Calm Silence of Jesus

“But Jesus kept silent.”

III. (:63b-64) PROCLAMATION OF MESSIANIC IDENTITY

A. (:63b) Accusing Question Leveled by the High Priest

“And the high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.’”

Daniel Doriani: The question is not “Are you the Messiah?” The Messiah is the deliverer of Israel, but most thought the Messiah would be a talented but ordinary man—a charismatic or military leader—who would liberate Israel from Rome. To claim to be the Messiah is bold, but not blasphemous. The question is, “Do you claim to be the unique Son of God, partaking in the Lord’s deity?”

David Turner: This question and Jesus’s answer raise the key Matthean motif of **Jesus’s divine sonship** (**Matt. 1:1, 23; 2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6; 17:5; 28:19**). Jesus first ambiguously affirms the high priest’s words (“*You said it*”; cf. **26:25**). He continues with an unambiguous biblical citation that combines **Ps. 110:1** and **Dan. 7:13** to the effect that he is indeed the glorious Son of Man who will come from the right hand of Power (cf. **Matt. 19:28; 24:30; 25:31; John 1:51; 1 En. 62.5**). “*Power*” is an attribute uniquely associated with God, and it stands for God by metonymy. **Blomberg** (1992a: 403) points out that **Matt. 26:64** is “the Christological climax of the Gospel thus far.”

B. (:64) Affirmation of His Messianic Identity by Jesus

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

Grant Osborne: There is an imminent and yet inaugurated (speaking of what will continue in the future) thrust, as it means Jesus will take his seat with God immediately at his death and resurrection, and in his resurrection his vindication will be immediately visible to all; yet at the same time he will be in the seat of “power” from his resurrection to the parousia and beyond (so **Gundry, Brown, Hagner**). **Senior** summarizes it well: “Jesus’ messianic identity which is recognized now (although only implicitly in the wording of his question) by the high priest will become awesomely transparent in the future.” . . .

Yet how will the leaders “*see*” (ὄψεσθε) all this? They will not see the parousia, but it is proleptically present in the resurrection. . . **Brown** makes three observations.

- (1) There is both a present and a future eschatology in Jesus and the NT on this issue (often called “inaugurated eschatology”); both his glory and his judgment are an already/not yet in force.
- (2) Jesus does not say he will glorify himself but that God will vindicate him over the leaders; they will see the beginning of this.
- (3) There is a supreme irony in their condemnation of Jesus; everything they accuse him of doing and being is actually true, and the Sanhedrin will see one thing and not realize they are seeing another. On these things Matthew is even more vivid and intense than is Mark.

Van Parunak: The Lord may mean his words not to describe what the high priest will personally recognize, but a statement about how anybody **must view him** from this point on. It will no longer be possible to view him as an insignificant Galilean pretender. **Luz:** “the only perspective remaining is the future of the judgment of the world.” **Carson:** “From then on they would not see him as he now stands before them but only in his capacity as undisputed King Messiah and sovereign Judge.”

Craig Blomberg: Jesus owns none of the nationalistic, anti-Roman associations which the Sanhedrin no doubt still links with “*Messiah*.” So he qualifies his affirmative with a strong adversative (*plen*) “*but*” and goes on to quote **Dan 7:13** and **Ps 110:1**. He is the Christ, the Son of God, when those titles are rightly interpreted. But correct interpretation must allow for him also to be the heavenly Son of Man who occupied the most honored position in the universe, next to the very throne of God, second only to his Heavenly Father, and who will return to earth as judge of the cosmos. Jesus then will judge those who now judge him. Obviously, this kind of Messiah is far more than a human revolutionary.

Leon Morris: It was a difficult question to answer because his understanding of Messiah and that of the high priest were so different. To say either “Yes” or “No” could be misleading. So he says in effect, “That is your word, not mine” (**Melinsky**, “Yes, but not in the way you mean”). But the effect is, “I would not have put it that way, but since you do I cannot deny it” (cf. **Rieu**, “The words are yours. This much I add to them . . .”).

Stu Weber: Jesus affirmed his identity with authority—both in the boldness with which he spoke and with the authority of the Scriptures to back up his claim.

Richard Gardner: Jesus goes on then to make his own statement about his relationship to his accusers (v. **64b**), a statement resembling other Son of Man sayings in the Gospel (cf. **16:27-28; 19:28; 24:29-31**) drawing on imagery from **Psalm 110:1** and **Daniel 7:13-14**. A paraphrase of

Jesus' words might read: The one you are judging now will meet you later as your exalted judge from heaven! It is this claim that evokes the outburst described in **verses 65-66**, in which Jesus is charged with the capital offense of blasphemy (cf. **Lev. 24:16**). This the high priest certifies by the symbolic gesture of tearing his robes (cf. Sanh. 7:5). Following is a scene of mockery (**vv. 67-68**), a counterpart to the later mocking of Jesus by Roman soldiers (**27:27-31**). A final decision on Jesus' fate is not yet reached, however. It is suspended while the spotlight shifts to another scene to one side of the center stage.

Donald Hagner: Jesus' affirmation of being the Messiah, the Son of God (the background for the two combined titles may have been **Ps 2**; see **Lövestam**), may not yet in itself have been sufficient grounds for the high priest to regard him as blaspheming. But when Jesus adds to his answer the quoted material from **Dan 7:13** and the allusion to **Ps 110:2**, identifying himself as that triumphant figure—and thus more than the Messiah as a merely human agent—as the one who is “*given dominion and glory and kingship*” whom all will serve and whose kingdom will see no end (**Dan 7:13–14**), the one who sits at the right hand of God (**Ps 110:1**), the high priest reacts to what he regards as horrifying blasphemy (cf. **v. 65**).

Bob Deffinbaugh: This is an incredibly powerful statement. **Jesus affirms His identity.** He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. He is also the Son of Man, which means that He will return to the earth in power, to deal with His enemies and to establish justice.

These words, if believed, should have struck terror into the hearts of the Jewish religious leaders. Instead, they were taken as blasphemy, a capital offense by Jewish law (see **Leviticus 24:10-16**; **Numbers 15:30**). No one in that group paused to reflect on the implications of Jesus' claim. No one gave serious thought as to whether this claim might be true. In their minds, this was all they needed to condemn Jesus to death. And so the high priest musters all the righteous indignation he can produce, and calls for the death of Jesus.

IV. (:65-68) PERVERSION OF JUSTICE

A. (:65-66a) Vehement Charge of Blasphemy by the High Priest

“Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, ‘He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?’”

B. (:66b) Verdict of Death by the Sanhedrin

“They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death!’”

C. (:67-68) Verbal and Physical Abuse of Jesus by His Captors

1. (:67) Mistreatment

“Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists;”

2. (:68) Mocking

*“and others slapped Him,
and said, ‘Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?’”*

Mark and Luke recorded that they blindfolded Jesus (**Mark 14:65**; **Luke 22:64**).

Grant Osborne: You can almost hear the **dripping sarcasm** as they contemptuously utter, “*Messiah*” (χριστέ). In the blindfolding (assumed by Matthew) and the call to “*prophecy*,” they

may have been playing a cruel version of a “blind man’s bluff”-type child’s game. Three types have been noted:

- a game of tag where one shuts his eyes and the others cry “prophesy” as he gropes for them;
- a game where a player covers the eyes and then others slap as he guesses where they are;
- and one in which a blindfolded player is hit with papyrus fragments and tries to find the others.

The first and third are close to the one here.

D. A. Carson: “*Prophesy*” (v.68) does not here imply foretelling the future but revealing hidden knowledge (cf. 11:13): Messiah should be able to tell who hit him, even when blindfolded.

William Barclay: Even the externals of justice were forgotten, and the hostility of the Jewish authorities broke through. That meeting in the night began as a court of justice and ended in a frenzied display of hatred, in which there was no attempt to maintain even the superficialities of impartial justice.

Cf. “**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God**” (a sermon written by British Colonial Christian theologian **Jonathan Edwards**, preached to his own congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts, to unknown effect, and again on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut.) – here you have “**God in the Hands of Angry Sinners**”

Forbearance of Jesus (in not immediately striking sinners down in judgment) should lead people to repentance – but also can increase their sense of false security and their arrogance and manifestation of hatred and violence.

Donald Hagner: The **mistreatment** and **mocking** of Jesus reflect the hateful animosity of the Jewish leaders toward him. Spitting upon and striking a person (cf. the parallel 27:30 for the same deeds from the Romans) involve insult and pain. The early church soon found this treatment of Jesus to be the fulfillment of scripture (e.g., esp. the servant of Isa 50:6; 53:3, 5; cf. too Mic 5:1). The mocking includes the blindfolding of Jesus (assumed but not mentioned by Matthew; cf. Mark 14:65) and the request for him to “prophesy” (προφήτευσον), i.e., tell supernaturally, who was striking him. The address “Messiah” or “Christ,” which perhaps alludes to the confession in the trial, is, of course, used mockingly. The Messiah would be able to identify his mockers. But not for a minute did they suppose he could be what he claimed. He was for them at that moment a charlatan who deserved no respect.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the role of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin in the seizure of Jesus?
- 2) What were some of the illegal and unjust procedures involved in this inquiry in the middle of the night at the house of Caiaphas?
- 3) Why was Jesus silent initially and then responded with the affirmation of His identity?

4) How could religious leaders respond with such abuse and mistreatment of Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: The Sanhedrin was the **supreme court of the Jews**. It was composed of scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and elders of the people; it numbered seventy-one members; and it was presided over by the high priest. For a trial such as this, a quorum was twenty-three. It had certain regulations. All criminal cases must be tried during the daytime and must be completed during the daytime. Criminal cases could not be transacted during the Passover season at all. Only if the verdict was ‘not guilty’ could a case be finished on the day it was begun; otherwise a night must elapse before the pronouncement of the verdict, so that feelings of mercy might have time to arise. Further, no decision of the Sanhedrin was valid unless it met in its own meeting place, the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts. All evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined and having no contact with each other. And false witness was punishable by death. The seriousness of the occasion was impressed upon any witness in a case where life was at stake.

David Turner: From Matthew’s theological standpoint, it is not ultimately the corrupt Jewish leaders or the weak Roman governor who are responsible for killing Jesus. Rather, it is God’s plan being accomplished through the sinful deeds of Jews and Gentiles alike, so that sinners from every people group might believe in Jesus the Messiah and be forgiven by the shedding of his blood (**1:21; 20:28; 26:28**).

Charles Swindoll: From the perspective of the Jewish authorities, the foxhunt was over. They had finally apprehended the rabble-raising rabbi of Nazareth, thanks to the cunning and conniving of one of His close associates, Judas Iscariot. But there was no time for celebrating. They had apprehended Jesus behind closed doors in the garden of Gethsemane under the cover of deep darkness. The crowds of Passover pilgrims in Jerusalem had all been asleep after the feast, so there had been no throng of curious onlookers to worry about. With the exception of Peter’s striking Malchus, the servant of the high priest (**John 18:10**), none of the disciples put up a fight. Instead, they all fled. And as it turned out, even malchus didn’t end up with permanent damage after all. Jesus healed him (**Luke 22:51**). Thanks to Judas, Jesus had been identified, confronted, and captured, essentially without incident.

All that was needed now was a swift and silent legal proceeding to make official what was obvious to the Jewish authorities: Jesus of Nazareth was a false messiah, a charlatan whose words and actions were leading many people astray. If He wasn’t dealt with expeditiously, He would rile up the common folk and likely cause a revolt, bringing Roman wrath upon the land, upon the people, and – God forbid – upon the cozy, established leadership of the priests and elders of Israel.

To prevent this worst-case scenario, then, everything had to be done quickly and quietly. The Sanhedrin needed to find Jesus guilty of blasphemy according to the Jewish Law. Then the Roman authorities would have to approve a sentence of death in order for the flame of that false prophet and false messiah to be extinguished once and for all. Sure, some corners would need to

be cut and some charges trumped up. But weighing the needs of the many against the needs of the few, the end justified the means.

The result of this reasoning was a series of unjust and illegal trials intended only to bump off the falsely accused. Though Jesus was innocent from start to finish – never once proven guilty of anything punishable by even a slap on the hand – the rush to judgment couldn't be stopped. Diabolical forces rather than power-hungry priests and a corrupt council were at work behind the scenes. . .

The trial was a travesty of justice from beginning to end. And Peter observed the whole thing from outside, unwilling to stick his neck out to come to his Master's aid as a witness for the defense.

Donald Hagner: They got more than they expected from Jesus: not only his admission that he was the Messiah but the unbelievable statement, his self-confession, that he would sit at God's right hand and that they would eventually see him in his glorious parousia, coming with divine glory. From their point of view, he suffered from a severe case of megalomania. He had gone too far in associating himself with God—which no doubt also accounted for his irresponsible behavior with regard to the law and the Pharisaic tradition. The impudent man and his movement had to be stopped. And thus in their zeal to be rid of Jesus, they unknowingly set in motion events that would forever and unshakably establish that movement. For the death of Jesus—the fate they deemed he deserved—is what fundamentally establishes the church. The one they now mock in their mistaken confidence is the one before whom they will some day stand as their judge.

R. T. France: Here then is the climax of the tussle over authority which has been developing ever since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, and it ends in a remarkable paradox, with Jesus asserting his superior God-given authority in ringing tones, but the Jerusalem leaders in fact having the upper hand in terms of the legal process and its outcome. The reader is left feeling that this is not a proper resolution of the conflict, and Jesus' words themselves direct our attention beyond the earthly judgment scene to one of heavenly authority, where those who are now his judges "will see" him as the heavenly judge. Nor is this a vision for the distant future. It will be true "from now on." So the reader is prepared for the climax when, only a few days later, the vindicated Messiah can declare that he now has "*all power in heaven and on earth*" (**28:18**); his reign at the right hand of power has begun. . .

Yet it is, paradoxically, in this setting of the apparent helplessness and defeat of Jesus that we reach the climactic statement of who he is. The setting could not be more dramatically effective. Jesus has spoken frequently of his coming confrontation with the chief priests, the elders and the scribes, those who represent the official leadership of the people of God. Now he stands before them, not in the relatively neutral territory of a crowded Court of the Gentiles but on their own ground, with no one to take his side. And here, in response to the high priest's challenge the element of secrecy concerning Jesus' messianic claim is finally discarded, and the three titles "Messiah," "Son of God" and "Son of Man" are brought together in an open self-disclosure, which then goes beyond any mere title to assert Jesus' unique place at the right hand of God.

John MacArthur: The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus

The Jewish system of jurisprudence and law and judgment was predicated on one Old Testament passage, primarily, and that is **Deuteronomy 16, verses 18 to 20**. This is what it says: "*You*

shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not distort justice, you shall not be partial, you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice and only justice you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

Now, the Sanhedrin in terms of criminal procedure, guaranteed to a person who was under prosecution several things. There were three primary things in relation to criminal procedure that the laws of jurisprudence upheld in the Sanhedrin guaranteed to a person. Number one: **public trial** – public trial. In other words, there was to be no hidden, secret, clandestine trials. Everything was to be open and exposed, so that no one could be framed and railroaded into some kind of execution or some kind of penalty without just trial taking place. The judges were always, then, under the scrutiny of the populace, who were able to see and attend and, to some extent at least, know what was going on. And courts today have maintained the same thing. Secondly, the Sanhedrin guaranteed for anyone brought in on a criminal procedure the **right of self-defense**. That is, there was to be a defender. There was to be someone who provided a defense for the accused. He had the right to bring in defense of himself in the mouth of other witnesses who could participate in the trial. Thirdly, no one could be convicted of anything unless convicted or proven to be guilty by **two or three witnesses**. . .

In the Jewish trial of Jesus Christ, and here’s the key point, they violated every single law of justice and jurisprudence known to them. They violated every single one of them willfully, so that the trial of Jesus Christ is the most unjust trial in human history. It has to be, for this court condemned to death the only truly innocent person who ever lived. . .

No public trial here, no defense, nobody to give testimony for Christ, nothing. And here they are in Caiaphas’ house, absolutely illegal. **Luke 22:54** says they met in Caiaphas’ house in a large room. When He went to Annas’ house, He was in a courtyard. Those houses were large because they were very wealthy men. They would have a wall outside, you go into the wall, and there’s a courtyard there. In the case of Annas, He remained in the courtyard, but now He goes into the courtyard, and is taken into a large room adjacent to the courtyard. Out in the courtyard is a fire and some soldiers, **verse 58**. And Peter, who is following Him afar off, goes into the high priest’s courtyard and sits down with the guards to see the end. He wanted to see what was going to happen. He’s caught between cowardice and curiosity. He’s not brave enough to step out for Christ, but he’s concerned enough to sort of stand in the wings, and it’s in that setting that he winds up denying Jesus Christ on three occasions. . .

And since the session with Annas failed to bring a charge, they had nothing to deal with, so they had to become prosecutors. They had to invent a crime and then try it. The only thing they had was a sentence. They had to make up a crime to go with it. So everything was illegal and unjust. The time, it was night: that’s illegal. The place, the house of the high priest: illegal. The procedure: no crime. The function: prosecutor rather than judge and jury. The season: they were doing this on a feast day at the feast time, when no such thing could take place. The means: the bribery of a traitor named Judas, and no bribery was tolerated, of course, as we read in the passage in **Deuteronomy 16** – and so all the illegalities of the trial before Annas are compounded, in that convening of the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas in his house. . .

He stands silent in majesty, looking into the eyes of Caiaphas, and no doubt gazing at the other men who are around Him. No need for retaliation. No need for vindication. No need for self-

defense. No need to deny anything. He stands there resolutely headed for the cross, knowing this is His hour to die for the sins of the world. There's nothing for Him to defend Himself against, because there's no accusation that's been made legitimately, and so He stands there silently. And **verse 63** says, "*Jesus held His peace.*" The Greek text, "*Continued silent.*" Which means they continued haranguing Him – Caiaphas must have continued badgering Him to say something, and He continued silent. The prophet Isaiah said when He was led to His trial, "Like a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." He opened not His mouth. And Caiaphas knew it wasn't the silence of guilt. It was the silence of innocence. It was the silence of dignity. It was the silence of majesty. It was the silence of integrity. It was the silence of trust. . .

We have seen the illegal and unjust confrontation, convening, conspiracy, condemnation, and the conclusion. I want to show you one more thing, and this will really tell you where their hearts were – the **illegal and unjust conduct**. Look how they respond. This is the supreme court of Israel. Listen, people, this is the religious aristocracy of Judaism. **Verse 67**, "*Then they spit in His face and punched Him, and others slapped Him with the palms of their hands, saying, 'Prophesy unto us, Thou Christ. Who smote You?'*" This is the Jewish aristocracy. This is the high priest and the elders and the chief priests and the scribes. This is supposedly the best of all the leaders, come together to constitute the supreme court. Unbelievable. To show you how utterly possessed they were by the demons of hell, and in **Luke 22:65**, it says "*they did many other things to blaspheme Him.*" Mark that. They did many other things to blaspheme Him. Listen, the blasphemer here is not Jesus. The blasphemers are all the rest of these people. Jesus claimed to be God. That's not blasphemy, that's true; spitting in the face of God, that's blasphemy – that is blasphemy of an absolutely inconceivable type. . .

And the irony of the situation is that those who misjudge Jesus will be judged rightly by Him some day. The tables will be turned. Here we find judges who are nothing but criminals, and they are and will be justly condemned. And here we find one who is said to be a criminal, who is really the innocent who becomes the judge. If you wrongly judge Jesus Christ, He won't wrongly judge you. He'll rightly judge you. Here is the damning sin, it is the sin of unbelief, it is the sin of proud, impenitent, independent, self-sufficient unbelief. It is the sin of standing apart from Christ, and thinking you can be right with God without Him; of attempting to maintain a relationship to God of my own, of by passing the mediator. I look at this scene and I'm overwhelmed at the grace of Christ. My deserved trial is enacted in His undeserved trial. My deserved sentence is enacted in His undeserved sentence. My deserved execution is carried out in His undeserved execution. My deserved condemnation is carried out in His undeserved condemnation.

S. Lewis Johnson: Christ Before Caiaphas, the Cynical Timeserver

The dictionaries define a timeserver as a person who for his own advantage deliberately surrenders his principles. That definition fits Caiaphas the Timeserver to a tee. He was the high priest of the Nation Israel, the supreme pontiff of the Nation Israel, the ruler of the nation spiritually whose duty according to the Scriptures was to keep knowledge, spiritual knowledge. He was the messenger of the Lord of hosts, the angel of the Lord of hosts, and men, if they wished to seek the law of God according to Malachi were to seek the law of God from the mouth of the high priest.

And yet Caiaphas in spite of all of his great privileges and in spite of his place of authority in the nation was a man who was as resolute and defiant and as merciless a man as existed in the nation

that day. What kind of man was Caiaphas? Someone has said he was astute and unscrupulous diplomat, a wily manager of men, a master of assemblies with a fitting gift of speech; a conceiver of bold and daring policies in the hour when others waiver; a man of unflinching will in carrying them out.

If we were to try to put the character of Caiaphas into a sentence or perhaps even a word or two we would say that he was an ecclesiastic. He was the type of all of that long succession of men who have laid heavy burdens upon people interested in spiritual things and often thwarted the purpose of God by expediency. . .

The trial of the Lord Jesus falls into two parts. It is an ecclesiastical trial, and it is a civil trial. And there are three parts of each of these two trials: the ecclesiastical trial and the civil trial. In the ecclesiastical trial he appears informally before Annas. That incident is only recorded in the Gospel of John. Then there is this illegal midnight meeting before Caiaphas which is recorded here in the passage that we have read for our Scripture reading this morning, and then again the council met early in the morning after the sun came up in order to confirm the judgment that was made in the illegal midnight meeting. . .

Now I am sure that as we think about these things, it is obvious to us that one of the most important things is that we truly respond to the decision that faces us between Caiaphas and Christ. Was he a blasphemer or was he the Messiah? Caiaphas said he was a blasphemer because he claimed to be the Son of God. He said he was the Messiah. There is no halfway house between these two positions. You cannot say he was a good man.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus Before Caiaphas

I. Jesus' silence in the trial is a witness to its immorality and to His submission to the will of God.

II. Jesus' answer under oath is a clear and unmistakable claim to Messiahship, Lordship, and Deity

III. The Sanhedrin got the message but they chose the wrong response.

TEXT: Matthew 26:69 – 27:2

TITLE: *THREE DENIALS OF PETER – ESCALATING IN INTENSITY*

BIG IDEA:

DENYING ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST BRINGS BITTER REMORSE

INTRODUCTION:

William Hendriksen: The theme “Peter’s experiences, words, and deeds during the night of Christ’s betrayal and shortly afterward” would provide material for several sermons. The “points” might be: Peter’s boast, Christ’s prediction concerning him, his boast repeated and strengthened, his failure in Gethsemane, his three denials, his bitter tears, and his restoration.

Homer Kent: The three denials occurred throughout the stages of the Jewish trials and are variously grouped by the Evangelists. The differences among the narratives argue strongly for independence of composition. Yet essential agreement can be found, and the details admit various ways of harmonization.

J. Ligon Duncan: Progression of sin:

- So first he’s **overconfident**.
- and then he’s **underprepared**.
 - He’s underprepared by watchfulness.
 - he’s underprepared in prayer.
- And then he’s **compromised**.

Suddenly, he’s in the company of unbelievers, and they begin challenging him on his relationship to Christ. And in the context of his overconfidence and his underpreparedness, what happens? **He falls.**

R. T. France: The story is told with a vivid simplicity, in **three escalating scenes**. The pressure builds as the first challenge comes from a single servant girl, the second from another girl now appealing to the bystanders, and the third from a group of those bystanders coming at him together. And Peter’s response escalates accordingly: first comes an evasive denial, then a direct denial on oath, and finally a much stronger response which (see below) is probably to be understood as actually uttering a curse against Jesus. There is also physical movement “further and further away from Jesus” (**Davies & Allison**, 3.542), in that Peter is at first in the courtyard, then moves out to its gateway, and finally (**v. 75**) escapes right outside. So Peter has comprehensively failed the test of loyalty, and Jesus’ prediction has been exactly fulfilled.

Richard Gardner: The scene with Peter in Caiaphas’ courtyard is presented as a subplot that unfolds during the same time that Jesus’ hearing is going on. Such a juxtaposition of scenes invites the reader to contrast the calm and courageous witness Jesus bears with the sorry way Peter conducts himself. The form of the episode is a series of three statements to Peter by others in the courtyard tying him to Jesus and the disciples. Each challenge evokes a protest from Peter denying any connection.

Grant Osborne: The Sanhedrin trial has three foci—the splendid isolation and majestic demeanor of Jesus, the opposition of the leaders to the extent that they are willing to forego legal procedure in order to condemn Jesus, and the absolute failure of Peter. Both the leaders and Peter are set in contrast to Jesus, the suffering Servant of Yahweh. The great irony is that the very reasons for which they sought to kill Jesus are the greatest truths of history; by putting Jesus to trial and death they were fulfilling God’s plan of salvation and establishing the very church they wished to eradicate from this earth.

David Turner: In many cases Scripture presents the weaker moments of its heroes (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon). Likewise, Matthew’s narrative does not omit the inconsistencies and failures of Jesus’s disciples. Jesus’s subsequent rehabilitation of Peter (cf. **John 21:15–22**) is not narrated by Matthew, and so the reader is left with yet another blunt testimony to the weakness of the disciples. This is tempered somewhat by the teaching on God’s forgiveness (**Matt. 12:32**) and the promise that Jesus will later meet the disciples in Galilee (**26:32; 28:7, 10, 16**). Peter’s denial typifies the weakness of all the disciples (**26:35**), yet their mission will go on if they are true to the resurrected Messiah and live by his power and presence (**28:18–20**).

Stanley Saunders: At the palace of Caiaphas, both Jesus and Peter face trials in which oaths play a central role. Soon after this, Judas will announce to the chief priests and elders his guilt for “*betraying innocent blood*” (**27:4**) and then proceed to hang himself. The trials of Jesus and Judas end effectively in death sentences; Peter’s trial will leave him physically unscathed, but scarred with the guilt of also having betrayed Jesus. These stories also put on trial the Jewish justice system, which is more concerned with power and appearances than with people or truth. These stories portray the diverse ways the various characters—Judas, Peter, the religious authorities—deal with their guilt for betraying, deserting, and condemning Jesus to death.

I. (:69-70) FIRST DENIAL – SIMPLE DENIAL

A. (:69) Challenge

*“Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard,
and a certain servant-girl came to him and said,
‘You too were with Jesus the Galilean.’”*

B. (:70) Denial

“But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are talking about.’”

II. (:71-72) SECOND DENIAL – SWEARS AN OATH

A. (:71) Challenge

*“And when he had gone out to the gateway,
another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there,
‘This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.’”*

Donald Hagner: Peter, apparently sensing imminent personal threat and wishing to avoid any further questioning, begins to leave the courtyard (ἐξελθόντα εἰς τὸν πυλῶνα, “*having gone into the entrance*”) only to be encountered by another servant girl who, recognizing him, makes the same charge, which is now, however, addressed to those standing there.

Grant Osborne: Another servant woman spies him, and the pressure intensifies. The first girl's question was directed only to him, though his answer was to everyone around. This one tells all "those" in the vicinity that he is definitely one of Jesus' followers. "Of Nazareth" intensifies the slight tone of contempt in "of Galilee" in v. 69. As exemplified in **John 1:46** ("Can anything good come from [Nazareth]?") it was a little-known backwater town in Galilee, and something of that is likely in her comment. In light of **2:23** ("he will be called a Nazarene"), there may also be for Matthew's readers a note of messianic identity that further defines vv. 62, 64 (see **Nolland**).

B. (:72) Denial

"And again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.'"

Stu Weber: An oath in Jewish culture made God a party to the assertion, calling down the judgment of God if the words spoken were false. This was an ultimate oath of denial. Peter invited God's curse on himself if he was not telling the truth when he said, I don't know the man!

Leon Morris: Now he says not only that he does not know what the girl is talking about, but that he does not know Jesus. Embarked on this course of denial he is led further into evil; the first denial involved a lie, the second time Peter perjured himself. The first was no more than a declaration that he did not know what the girl was talking about; the second was a clear repudiation of Jesus.

III. (:73-74a) THIRD DENIAL – SWEARS AND CURSES

A. (:73) Challenge

*"And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter,
'Surely you too are one of them; for the way you talk gives you away.'"*

B. (:74a) Denial

"Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'"

R. T. France: Again Peter denies, and again he uses an oath. But this time Matthew's wording goes further, and the verb "began" indicates a new element in this third denial. The verb "swear" alone would have indicated merely another oath as in v. 72, but it is preceded by *katathematizō*, a verb which occurs only here but is generally agreed to be synonymous with the verb used in the Marcan parallel, *anathematizō*, "to curse, anathematize" (and in the LXX "to devote," especially to destruction). *Anathematizō* elsewhere is always a transitive verb requiring a direct object to denote the person cursed; cf. Paul's use of anathema as a curse formula in **1 Cor 12:3; 16:22; Gal 1:8, 9**, in each case **applied to a person other than the speaker**. If the verb here meant, as some versions have suggested, that Peter is putting himself under a curse if he is lying, it would require "himself" as object, as it has in **Acts 21:12, 14, 21**. Here, where the object is not expressed, it means that **Peter is cursing someone other than himself**, and the most natural sense in this context would be that he now began to curse Jesus, as a way of dissociating himself from him; this was precisely what **Pliny** later required those accused of being Christians to do, in order to prove their innocence (**Pliny**, Ep. 10.96.5; cf. also **Justin**, Apol. 1.31.6). Matthew and Mark, by leaving the object unexpressed, refrain from stating in so many words that Peter cursed Jesus, but it is hard to see what else the choice of these transitive verbs could be meant to convey.

Van Parunak: Whom is he cursing? We might think he's invoking a curse on himself, but that's already implied in taking an oath. Perhaps he is cursing those who are questioning him. More ominous is the suggestion that he directs his malicious speech against the Lord himself. Early in the second century, when it was a crime in the Roman empire to be a Christian, civil authorities would test a suspected believer by asking them to pray to the Roman gods, offer incense and wine to an image of the emperor, and declare a curse on Christ. Roman persecution began under Nero after the great fire of Rome in AD 64, perhaps earlier, and may have exploited such tactics. In addition, even during the life of our Lord, the Jews sought to elicit condemnation of Christ from his followers:

Joh 9:24 *Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.*

Sadly, it is likely that Peter's cursing was directed at least in part against the Lord whom he had previously promised to defend.

IV. (:74b-75) COCK CROWS IN FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

A. (:74b) Peter's Memory Triggered

"And immediately a cock crowed."

B. (:75a) Peter's Memory Refreshed

"And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, 'Before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times.'"

Just as Peter would deny the Lord three times, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. **John 21:17-19 AV** *He saith unto him the third time, Simon, [son] of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry [thee] whither thou wouldest not. 19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.*

David Turner: The rooster's crow (**Derrett** 1983b) after this third denial immediately and excruciatingly reminds Peter of Jesus's prediction (**26:34**). Peter boasted he would die before he denied Jesus, but he does not even respond truthfully to a query from a powerless servant girl. His bitter weeping as he departs may reflect not only his sorrow but also his belief that his curses will come upon him. (See **Lampe** 1972–73.)

C. (:75b) Peter's Remorse

"And he went out and wept bitterly."

Bitter weeping of Peter – how different from the intense distress Jesus suffered? Once again, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak; easy to fail at moment of temptation.

Leon Morris: Matthew does not have Luke's statement that Jesus looked at Peter at this moment (**Luke 22:61**), but he makes it clear that the crowing of the rooster brought home to Peter the fact

that what Jesus prophesied had indeed taken place. He had been so confident that he would never deny his Lord, and now he had done so three times. Matthew joins Luke in saying that Peter went outside (the courtyard was no longer a place for the heart-broken apostle) and wept bitterly. But we should understand Peter's tears as an expression of grief and repentance; by the following Sunday he was back with the followers of Jesus. It was his loyalty to Jesus, not his temporary repudiation of his leader, that showed the real Peter.

R.V.G. Tasker: At that moment a cock crowed, and the prophecy of Jesus, so lightly dismissed by Peter but a few hours before as something that could never happen, surged back to his memory to torture him with what was in truth a self-inflicted pain. He staggered out into the night and *wept bitterly*.

(27:1-2) POSTSCRIPT -- JESUS LED AWAY TO PILATE

A. (:1) Rubber Stamp Morning Council

“Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death;”

Craig Blomberg: It is important to see these two verses as separate from vv. 3-10, contra the NIV section headings. **Matthew 27:1-2** is actually linked more closely with the end of **chap. 26** than with **27:3**, but the verses can stand alone as a short passage reflecting a brief daytime reenactment by the Sanhedrin of the nighttime proceedings (cf. **Luke 22:66-71**). This hearing may have functioned like a “rubber stamp,” but at least it would have brought the proceedings more into conformity with the letter of the law.

B. (:2) Referring Jesus to Pilate

1. Bound Him

“and they bound Him,”

2. Led Him Away

“and led Him away,”

3. Delivered Him Up

“and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we undergirding our loyalty to Jesus by remaining steadfast in spiritual vigilance and in prayer, recognizing the weakness of the flesh?
- 2) Why is there a temptation to think that we can get away with lying by denying the truth more loudly and more adamantly?
- 3) What are some key elements of the story that are omitted by Matthew but mentioned by one of the other evangelists?

4) How is Peter's remorse different from the despair of Judas?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. T. France: The three challenges all in different ways point out the “foreignness” of Jesus and his group in Jerusalem. The two epithets for Jesus, “*the Galilean*” and “*the Nazorean*,” mark him as a visitor from the north, and pick up the terms used by the pilgrim crowd when they introduced Jesus to the sceptical people of Jerusalem in **21:11**, and Peter himself is marked out as a foreigner by the way he speaks (see on **v. 73**): he has got to be “*one of them*,” not one of us. There is, probably, an element of xenophobia in the way these Jerusalem servants react to the presence of this provincial group of troublemakers.

Albert Mohler: As Peter waits in the courtyard through the trial proceedings, his association with Jesus becomes increasingly obvious to those around him. Though Peter had courageously stayed through the early morning hours in that hostile environment, his courage deserts him when he is personally targeted. Each time he is accused of being with Jesus, his denial becomes more emphatic.

Donald Hagner: **Peter's guilt** is not greater than that of the other disciples who abandoned Jesus and who thus in effect also denied him. It is, of course, far more conspicuous because of the present passage. Peter is singled out, however, not merely because of his boastful claim that he would never deny Jesus even if it meant death (all the disciples spoke similarly according to **v. 35**) but more particularly because of **his central importance in Matthew**. Peter, even when he was first designated “*the rock*,” had been unable to face the prospect of a suffering Messiah (**16:21–23**), nor, we may be sure, did he relish the words then spoken by Jesus about the need for his disciples to take up their cross and to be willing to lose their lives for his sake (**16:24–25**). Now he had faced precisely that challenge and had failed miserably. We cannot be surprised at the bitterness of his soul at that moment. The fact that Peter, the prime apostle, the “*rock*” upon which Jesus promised to build his church, could exhibit this human weakness and failure should provide both a warning (cf. esp. **10:33**) and encouragement to disciples of Jesus who read the Gospel of Matthew. Obviously it can never be appropriate for disciples to become overconfident in their own strength. The problem of human weakness must always be realistically faced, especially in cases when it is magnified by fear. . . . But if failure occurs, there is also the prospect of forgiveness and restoration.

Charles Swindoll: Like Peter, all of us are, in a sense, on trial. We can see ourselves intertwined in this story of pride and self-assurance, of boasting and self-confidence, of comparison with others and zealous ambition to show ourselves to be better than the rest. Let's be honest: Left to ourselves, every one of us would follow Peter in his denials. In fact, many of us have already done so numerous times in our lives. Just linger in that thought for a moment. Admit your own weakness. Weep if you must. This is the first, essential step to full recovery and restoration. Without it, we're just one more denial away from rock bottom.

J. Ligon Duncan: Peter's Denial

I. We must never forget our weakness apart from the grace of God nor the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Then in **verse 71**, we see Peter, now nervous. He's been spotted once, he's very self-conscious, he's frightened about what's happening to Jesus, and he's probably frightened that some of the friends or colleagues of Malchus, the high priest's servant whose ear he had cut off, might spot him and inflict bodily harm on him. And so he begins to make his way out to the gate, and a second servant girl spots him. Maybe she's the second portress, that is, she's the one who's going to keep the gate after the first servant girl is off duty. And the first servant girl has said to her, you know, there's this man in there that looks an awful lot like one of the disciples. Take a look at him. And sure enough, she walks up to Peter in the presence of others, and she says to them, isn't this one one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth? . . .

But this passage is also a **picture of sin**. It shows us what sin is. Sin is betrayal. To sin is to rebel and to betray God Himself. Yes, I know this is a peculiarly acute sin, but in the end this is a picture of all sin because God has created us all. We are all his creations, and when we sin we betray Him, the one who loves us and who made us. And that's exactly what Peter does here. He betrays his Lord. And it's a truly humbling picture to think of this disciple, who had been given so much by our Savior, turning on Him in this way. **J.C. Ryle** describes it. "It was a great sin. We see a man who had followed Christ for three years who had been forward in professing faith and love towards him, a man who had received boundless mercies and loving-kindnesses and had been treated by Christ as a familiar friend. We see this man denying three times in a row that he knows Jesus. It was a sin committed under circumstances of great aggravation. Peter had been warned plainly of his danger, and he had heard the warning. He had just been receiving the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper from Jesus himself. And he had just been loudly declaring that though he died with Jesus, he would not deny him. And it was a sin committed under apparently small provocation. Two women make the remark that he was with Jesus, and then those who stood by say surely you are one of them. No threat seems to have been used, no violence to have been done. But it was enough to overthrow Peter's faith. He denies Him before them all. It's a truly humbling sight to see an apostle of Christ crumble like that." . . .

Now this passage shows us **our weakness**, it shows the **sinfulness of sin**, it shows us the **pathway to sin**, it shows us the **unhappiness of sin**, but let me say this passage also is a **glorious proof of the inspiration of scripture**. Now you say what in the world are you talking about now? Well, let me tell you what I'm talking about. If you were making up the key story for the foundation of a religion, you would never tell a story about how the key spokesman for that religion was a miserable failure and betrayed his master in the hour of his need. You would never make that up. And you would never record it not once, not twice, not three times, but four times in every main witness to the life of Christ. And that's what we find here. This is a full-wart's biography of Peter. God's going to show you **the weakness of Christ's disciples**, and in the end you're going to see the glory and the strength of Christ because of it. Because this religion is not about them, it's about Him, and what He does for them and in them. And so **we must never forget our weakness apart from the grace of God** or the sinfulness of sin.

II. We must never forget the pain that we have cause/cause Christ, nor the greatness and constancy of His love.

First, let's look at **the suffering which Christ endured**. Do you realize how Peter's denials wounded the heart of the Savior? Luke tells us explicitly what Matthew hints at. Matthew not only tells us that Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him, Luke tells us that Jesus knew that Peter was denying Him. He was conscious in this process of what Peter was doing. The wounds that Peter inflicted by that betrayal on Jesus at that moment, I propose to you were harder

wounds than the wounds that the enemies of Jesus had inflicted. I say that because the Psalmist in **Psalm 55, verses 12 through 14**, a thousand years before this night said some very interesting words. Look what he says. The Psalmist says *“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against Me. Then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion, and my familiar friend, we who had sweet fellowship together and walked in the house of God in the throng.”* And can you imagine the sense of isolation which must have flooded our Lord’s soul as He saw His disciple whom He had loved and had ministered to for three years, denying that he even knew Him while He was suffering for his sins.

And it’s not just the wounds to the heart of our Savior. You see, Peter’s denial wounds the reputation of Jesus, and it exposes Him to derision. And it gives an opportunity for His enemies to be cynical about Him. Can you imagine the hay that Jesus’ enemies could have made from this cowardly act of Peter’s denial. This irreverent and cowardly behavior of Peter gives an opportunity for the enemies of Jesus to reject and discount Him. They can say, well He must not have been much of a Messiah. Look at how His disciples crumbled in the face of a couple of servant girls asking Him questions. Some Messiah He is. All His disciples abandon Him. In the hour of His need, where were they? They were protecting their own hides. Jesus, in all of His ministry, was subjected to derision because of what Peter had done. And this adds to the agony of Christ in the hour of His death.

But that’s not the last word. No, the **glorious love of Christ** is displayed here in contrast to Peter’s failure in the midst of this sad scene. And I’d like to point you to one thing.

Remember how Christ displayed His love to Peter. First of all, He told him ahead of time that He was going to do this. And He did it because He loved Peter, and because He had plans for Peter, and because He was not going to let go of Peter even when Peter let go of Him. Jesus told Peter twice ahead of time that he would deny Him.

Secondly, Jesus did something extremely helpful, in fact, necessary for Peter. He told Peter something which indelibly linked the crowing of the rooster with the word of Jesus. Do you remember that Jesus told Peter that before the night was out, he would deny Him three times. Before the cock crew, he would deny Him three times. So that when that cock crowed, we read in Matthew, that Peter remembered the words of Jesus. Now why did He do that? Because Jesus had already implanted in his mind the connection between the crowing of that cock and His words. You know the early church fathers said that Peter, for the rest of his life, could not hear a cock crow without his tears welling in his eyes. Jesus had implanted the link of that illustration, and it was that which reminded Peter of the thing that he needed to remember, and that was the words of Jesus Christ. But that’s not all.

Jesus’ matchless love was displayed yet again. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 22, verse 61. And as you turn there listen to this quote from **William Hendriksen**: “From **Luke 22:61**, we gather that at the very moment when the rooster crowed, someone is looking into Peter’s eyes. Jesus. Jesus is looking at Peter. When the third denial rolls off of his lips, the Savior is looking at Peter. It’s Jesus. His face likely still covered with spittle and black and blue because of the blows He has received. It seems that the Master, His trial ended, is being led across the court to His prison cell from which in a few hours He will emerge to face the Sanhedrin at daybreak.”

TEXT: Matthew 27:3-10

TITLE: AFTERMATH OF BETRAYAL – DEMISE OF JUDAS AND DISPOSITION OF BLOOD MONEY

BIG IDEA:
BETRAYAL OF JESUS PROVES TO BE A BAD DEAL FOR JUDAS

INTRODUCTION:

Leon Morris: Before moving on to the treatment of Jesus at the hands of the Romans Matthew finishes the story of Judas. He tells of that man's remorse and suicide and of the curious mental processes of the hierarchy who had not scrupled to use the money at their disposal to procure the arrest of Jesus so that he could be killed, but who did scruple to put this same money back into the temple treasury. Characteristically Matthew sees a fulfilment of prophecy in their ultimate use of the funds. The incident is found in this Gospel and in Acts 1 only. **Stendahl** thinks that Matthew's placing of the death of Judas at this point "indicates that he understands the decision of the Sanhedrin as the crucial one" (in v. 3 Jesus is already spoken of as "*condemned*").

Charles Swindoll: As Matthew's camera zooms in on the traitor, we find him in a no-man's-land. Having betrayed Jesus, he could never return to that familiar circle of disciples that had been his family for the past three years. And since he had fulfilled his usefulness to the Jewish leaders by leading the soldiers to Jesus, they wanted nothing more to do with him. Judas stood in the place of an outcast. To make matters worse, as the sun rose over Jerusalem, it suddenly dawned on him what he had done: He had betrayed the Messiah into the hands of sinners. One expositor envisions that the sight of Jesus being brutalized and hauled away "was devastating to Judas, more than even his money-hungry mind, his sordid soul, and his seared conscience could deal with. He felt remorse as he began to experience the intense, excruciating pain that is unique to profound guilt."

Donald Hagner: Did it simply dawn upon Judas that he had been responsible for the great injustice of the condemnation of a truly righteous and good man? At the same time, the narrative has an unmistakable inevitability about it. We can pity Judas, but we cannot make a hero out of him, nor alas even a believer. As the Son of Man fulfills the prophecies, so too do Judas and the Jewish priests, as they act freely out of their own unfortunate motives, unwittingly acting as instruments for the accomplishment of God's purposes and the fulfillment of scripture. In no sense are we allowed to take Judas or the Jewish authorities as representing Jews or Judaism in general, let alone "the essence of Jewishness." In such thinking lies the evil root of anti-Semitism.

R. T. France: There are perhaps three main purposes in inserting this strange pericope here.

- (a) It sets the treachery of Judas alongside the failure of Peter, and allows the reader to compare and contrast their faults and their different fates.
- (b) It narrates the fulfillment of Jesus' dire prediction about the fate of his betrayer (26:24), just as his prediction of Peter's failure (26:34) has also been precisely fulfilled.

(c) It allows Matthew to introduce the most complex and creative of his formula-quotations, to show that even in the betrayal of the Messiah and in the fate of his betrayer Scripture continues to provide the pattern, even to the most incidental details.

I. (:3-5) FINAL DEMISE OF JUDAS

A. (:3-4a) Remorse of Judas

1. (:3) Canceling the Contract

“Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,”

Jeffrey Crabtree: That he “*repented*” means he regretted (Greek *metamelomai*, to feel regret as the result of what one had done; **Louw and Nida** I:318) his action of handing Jesus over to the leaders. He returned the money (v. 3; **26:15**). This is not the usual word for repentance (Greek *metanoeō*), which adds credibility to the position that Judas stopped short of real repentance.

2. (:4a) Confession of Personal Guilt and Innocence of Jesus

“saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’”

Leon Morris: Judas’ remorse leads him to try to undo his pact with the chief priests. It is a futile course, however, for the cynical authorities have no interest in either Judas’ guilt (cf. **Deut. 27:25**) or in Jesus’ innocence. And so, with no apparent way out, Judas succumbs to despair and hangs himself (cf. **2 Sam. 17:23** for an OT incident that parallels the story of Judas).

B. (:4b) Rebuff of Judas

“But they said, ‘What is that to us? See to that yourself!’”

D. A. Carson: But their own words condemn them, for it should have been something to them. Judas has betrayed innocent blood; they have condemned innocent blood.

C. (:5) Response of Judas in Anger and Despair

1. Responding in Anger

“And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed;”

2. Responding in Despair

“and he went away and hanged himself.”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Peter further described Judas’ death (**Acts 1:18-19**) as being gruesome and stated that everyone in Jerusalem became aware of his death and the horrific details. Some interpreters assume the structure (a tree limb growing out over a precipice?) from which Judas hung himself gave way and he fell as described by Peter (**Wilkins** 879; **Hendriksen** 945).

Craig Blomberg: Judas responds in **anger** and **despair**. He hurls the money to the floor, probably in the temple treasury room (*korbanas*, v. 6), and goes out and kills himself. Was he inspired by the gruesome model of Ahithophel (**2 Sam 17:23**)? It is not possible to conclude from Judas’s actions that suicide automatically damns a person. There may be reasons why believers would take their lives when they are not fully in control of their senses (e.g., when there is a chemical imbalance in the body), but the Scriptures never commend suicide as do certain non-Christian

religions. Suicide is always sinful, in violation of the Sixth Commandment (**Exod 20:13**), even if it can be forgiven. In Judas's case, however, there is no scriptural warrant for the sentimental notion that he was actually saved. For the Jews, a hanging would have confirmed God's curse (**Deut 21:23**). By emphasizing Judas's fate, Matthew provides a dire warning to his community about the possible result of apostasy.

Charles Swindoll: In his fit of remorse, Judas cast the thirty pieces of silver onto the temple floor and then hanged himself in a remote field (**27:3-8**). There his body remained, dangling between tree limb and ground until it decayed, became bloated, and eventually fell from the noose. Having landed on the rocky ground, it burst open, and his organs spilled out onto the earth (**Acts 1:18-19**). Ancient people would have considered this gruesome event as the most shameful way to die and an unthinkable way for a body to decay. In the Jewish mind, a hanged man was “*accursed of God,*” and if the corpse was not buried the same day, the land was considered defiled (**Deut. 21:22-23**). Moreover, Jews avoided cadavers at all costs. This was cursed ground. . .

In a twist of irony, the money that had been paid to Judas became the money used to buy the land where he hanged himself. What a tragic legacy for a tragic life!

Daniel Doriani: Judas has blood guilt on his mind. The law said, “*Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person*” (**Deut. 27:25**). Judas believes he is under this curse. The priests will not help him. Therefore, another law applies: to remove such blood guilt, the guilty party must pay for his crime by his own death (**Num. 35:33-34**). Judas took his life “in an anguished attempt to atone for his guilt.”

II. (:6-10) FINAL DISPOSITION OF BLOOD MONEY

A. (:6) Tainted Money

*“And the chief priests took the pieces of silver and said,
‘It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.’”*

Jeffrey Crabtree: The chief priests concluded because the silver had been used to buy the death of a man (Jesus), it could not be placed into the temple treasury (v. 6). They thus confessed they had paid money for Jesus’ death and this was therefore tainted money (**Keener**, Matthew 661). The hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership is clear (v. 6). They would not break the law with improper use of blood money but they were more than willing to break the law to put Jesus to death (**Keener**, Background 125). The fact they spoke of its going into the treasury suggests that they might have used temple money to pay Judas.

Craig Blomberg: The chief priests remain preoccupied with the letter of the law while oblivious to its spirit. They prove totally insensitive to Judas's desperate state of mind, while still concerned with the finer points of their oral traditions about the use of his money.

B. (:7-8) Transaction for the Potter’s Field

1. (:7) Location Function

*“And they counseled together and with the money bought the Potter's Field
as a burial place for strangers.”*

Leon Morris: The result of their deliberations was that the money was used to buy some land that they call the potter's field and that was thenceforth to be used as a cemetery for foreigners, perhaps people who were not numbered among the people of God and who made no attempt to live according to the law, more probably Jews from other lands who died while in Judea. We have no way of knowing which field was the potter's field or why it was given this name, apart, of course, from the obvious connection of some kind with a particular potter.

D. A. Carson: The potter's field, used for the burial of foreigners, probably did not belong to "the potter" (surely there was more than one potter in Jerusalem) but was a well-known place, perhaps the place where potters had long obtained their clay. If depleted, it might have been offered for sale. There are no reliable early traditions of its location, though Matthew's "to this day" shows it was well-known when he wrote. The best assumption is that it lay in the valley of Hinnom near the juncture with the Kidron.

2. (:8) Location Label

"For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day."

C. (:9-10) Tied to OT Prophecy

"Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; 10 and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me.'"

Daniel Doriani: Once again, Matthew reminds us that no element of Jesus' final hours was accidental. Even minor details such as the use of the blood money find their place in God's plan to redeem his people. Matthew will never let us forget that all things happen according to the Lord's plan of redemption.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew again turned to the O.T. where he found some prophetic experiences that paralleled that of Judas and Jesus (vv. 9-10). Jeremiah visited a potter (**Jer. 18:3**), prophesied of a future burial site in the valley of Topheth, and purchased a potter's flask (**Jer. 19:1-13**). Zechariah prophesied that he would be sold for thirty pieces of silver (**Zech. 11:11-13**). The exegetical problems are that Matthew credits Jeremiah with the prophecy that is only in Zechariah and Zechariah does not mention purchasing property with the thirty pieces of silver. The solution appears to be that Matthew quoted Zechariah but merged subject matter from both Jeremiah and Zechariah (**Keener**, Background 125; **Evans**, Matthew 501), a common way of handling multiple Scripture texts in Matthew's day (**Blomberg** 95). Though Matthew referred to two prophets, he only mentioned the most prominent of the two (**Hendriksen** 948). Mark does the same thing in his Gospel (**Archer** and **Chirichingo** 163). See **Mark 1:2-3** where Mark credits Isaiah with both prophecies.

Matthew referenced Zechariah in order to parallel the corrupt leadership of Zechariah's day with the corrupt leadership of Jesus' day. In both instances, the good Shepherd was rejected by His own and sold for a pitifully cheap price; then the thirty pieces of silver were thrown back into the temple. While Jeremiah and Zechariah were neither one foretelling a future Messianic event, there were points of contact in their experiences that Matthew understood as paralleling the circumstances involving Judas, Jesus, and Jewish leadership.

Warren Wiersbe: But, why did Matthew relate this event to a prophecy in Jeremiah, when the prophecy is found in **Zechariah 11:11-12**? One possible solution is that his prophecy was

spoken by Jeremiah (note Matt. 27:9) and became a part of the Jewish oral tradition. It was later *written* by Zechariah. The prophet Jeremiah definitely was involved in the purchase of a field (**Jer. 32:6ff.**), and also with a potter's house (**Jer. 18:1ff.**), and a burial ground (**Jer. 19:1-12**). Matthew may have been referring to these general facts as background for the specific prophecy written by Zechariah.

Leon Morris: But for our present purpose the important thing is not the precise source from which Matthew derived the words, but the fact that for this Evangelist God was causing prophecy to be fulfilled even in such a detail as the disposal of the money the Jewish leaders paid Judas to betray his Master.

David Turner: Matthew sees correspondence between the shepherd doomed to slaughter (**Zech. 11:7**) and Jesus. The thirty silver coins thrown to the potter in the Lord's house (**Zech. 11:13**) correspond to Judas's coins thrown into the temple and used to buy the potter's field. Matthew does not make up a story to fit Zechariah but reads Zechariah in light of his conviction that Jesus's passion is anticipated in biblical pattern and prediction. This concept of typological fulfillment is based on a providential view of history.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Judas change his mind?
- 2) How did his remorse fall short of genuine repentance?
- 3) How would you describe the hypocrisy and callousness of the religious leaders?
- 4) What is the point of the OT prophetic reference?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Donald Hagner: Matthew at this point inserts the story of Judas' remorse and suicide together with the account of the purchase of the potter's field with his thirty pieces of silver. Matthew, the only Gospel with this story, has probably included it because of the correspondence between certain elements of historical tradition concerning the end of Judas and material in Zechariah, which leads him to the last of his special formula quotations stressing fulfillment. Thus, although this story interrupts the narrative of the condemnation of Jesus, it has the desirable effect of further indicating God's sovereign control over the events having to do with the betrayal and death of Jesus (cf. **26:54, 56**).

D. A. Carson: How did Matthew understand the OT texts he was quoting? The question is not easy, because the two dominant OT passages themselves can be variously explained. It appears that in **Zechariah 11**, the "*buyers*" (**v.5**) and the three shepherds (**vv.5, 8, 17**) represent Israel's leaders, who are slaughtering the sheep. God commands Zechariah to shepherd the "*flock marked for slaughter*" (**v.7**), and he tries to clean up the leadership by sacking the false

shepherds. But he discovers that not only is the leadership corrupt, but the flock detests him (v.8). Thus Zechariah comes to understand the Lord's decision to have no more pity on the people of the land (v.6).

Zechariah decides to resign (11:9–10), exposing the flock to ravages. Because he has broken the contract, Zechariah cannot claim his pay (presumably from the “buyers”); but they pay him off with thirty pieces of silver (v.12). But now Yahweh tells Zechariah to throw this “handsome price at which they priced me” (probably **ironical**; see Notes) to the potter in the “house of the LORD,” i.e., the temple (v.13). Temple ritual required a constant supply of new vessels (cf. Lev 6:28); so a guild of potters worked somewhere in the temple precincts. Certainly Jeremiah could point to a potter as he preached and could purchase pottery somewhere near the temple (Jer 18:6; 19:1).

The purpose of Zechariah's action is uncertain. Because a *yōšēr* (lit., “shaper”) was both a potter and a metal worker, it may be that the money in **Zechariah 11:12–13** was thrown to the *yōšēr* so that it would be melted down and turned into a figurine, a little “god.” The people did not want the Lord's shepherd, and so they will be saddled with a silver figurine (cf. Eze 16:17; Hos 2:8)—betrayal money, in effect, since it pays off the good shepherd, who would have kept the people true to the Lord's covenant and who has been rejected by the people. The result can only be catastrophic judgment (Zec 11:14–17).

The parallel between **Zechariah 11** and **Matthew 26–27** is not exact. In Zechariah, the money is paid to the good shepherd; in Matthew, it is paid to Judas and returned to the Jewish leaders. In Zechariah, the money goes directly to the “potter” in the temple; in Matthew, after being thrown into the temple, it purchases “the potter's field”—though at this point the influence of **Jeremiah 19** has been introduced. Nevertheless, the central parallel is stunning: in both instances, Yahweh's shepherd is rejected by the people of Israel and valued at the price of a slave. And in both instances, the money is flung into the temple and ends up purchasing something that pollutes.

The reference to **Jeremiah 19** provides equally telling parallels. The rulers have forsaken Yahweh and made Jerusalem a place of foreign gods (v.4); so the day is coming when this valley, where the prophecy is given and the potter's jar smashed, will be called the Valley of Slaughter, symbolic of the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem (vv.6–7). Similarly in Matthew, the rejection of Jesus (Yahweh) leads to a polluted field, a symbol of death and the destruction of the nation about to be buried as “foreigners.”

John MacArthur: The Traitor's Suicide

Far and away the most dominant reason [for suicide] is what we could call **retribution**. People take their lives to inflict upon themselves a severe punishment which they believe they should receive. They have sinned. They imagine their guilt to be irremedial. There's no remedy for it. They imagine that there's no way they can come out from under the anxiety and the pressure of their own conscience. And because they feel themselves so guilty and so wrong and they lose all sense of self-value and self-worth, their self-image is devastated, they are total failures overwhelmed by guilt, they kill themselves as a ultimate punishment, seeing death self-inflicted as a way to deal with their own guilt. A guilt-ridden conscience then probably is a dominant factor in many, many suicides. It may not be the only factor but it is a dominant factor in many suicides. The guilt that a person feels may be real guilt as a result of real sin and real wrong and

real evil, or it may be artificial. It may be unreal. It may be inflicted upon them by unrealistic standards established on them by their parents or peers or even by their own desires. . .

Now Scripture obviously would infer in the case of Judas and in the case of Ahithophel, of course, that suicide was an act of an evil and deranged mind and is not a viable solution. It is a crime against God. It is a crime against self. Suicide is unacceptable. It is to rebelliously usurp sovereignty. It is to take a prerogative on oneself that belongs only to God who gives life and takes life. It is an act of sin. It is an act of unbelief. It is an act of lack of trust – lack of trust in the wisdom and purpose and plan of God. Even though it is a sin and a violation of the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not murder,” and even though it is a violation of the sovereignty of God and a rebellious act against Him and an evidence of a lack of faith and trust, frankly in the case of Judas it seems to me to have been inevitable. It does seem to have been inevitable. . .

There’s no sense of seeking God. There’s no sense of seeking the Lord. It’s as if he sought not righteousness but relief. He sought not holiness but health. He sought not a Savior but a salve. He had feelings but there was no change in his heart about sin; there was no change in his mind about who Christ was; there was no desire for the truth; there was no belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior. He just wanted to get rid of his pain. He wanted to unload his guilt because he knew that he had betrayed an innocent man. And the essential wrongness of that went off in him like an explosion and created pain in every part of his being. And the blood money which he wanted so badly, the very same thing he longed for so greatly, when he finally got it, burned holes in his hands like hot lead. . .

When he went back, he didn’t just throw the silver into the *hieron*. He didn’t just throw it into the whole place, into the courtyard where anybody could pick it up and put it in the receptacles and use it for whatever they wanted. He didn’t just throw it in there for poor people to put in their pockets. He threw it in the *naos*, he went right inside to the courtyard, right inside to the court of the women where the offerings were given, he went beyond that to the door of the holy place and the **Holy of Holies**, and he took that money and he threw it inside the holy place, the *naos*. Every time that word is used in the gospels it has reference to the sanctuary itself, the inner place, the holy place. He threw it in there. Why? Charity? No. Spite. There was only group of people who could go in there. Who was it? Priests. And he was saying to them, “If you won’t take it willingly and do something with it, I’ll force you to take it and do something with it.” And he threw it into a place where only the priests could go and therefore they had to deal with it. It was an act of spite. . .

The testimony of the Sanhedrin, they can’t find anything against Him. The testimony of Judas, he can’t find anything against Him. The testimony of Pilate, He is an innocent man. The testimony of the Sanhedrin, this is blood money, the whole thing is illegal. We’ve said it; we’ve admitted it. The testimony of the whole population of Jerusalem 30 years later, it is the field of blood. Jesus died because of bribery. The whole testimony comes together. . .

You have the law, the prophets, and the Psalms. It’s the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes all the wisdom literature, Song of Solomon, but its heading is the Psalms. The category of the prophets in rabbinic tradition, in rabbinic manuscripts, and in the Talmud is always headed by the book of Jeremiah. So to a Jew the three sections of the Old Testament would be the law, Jeremiah and the Psalms. So when the writer refers to Jeremiah, he is simply taking the name that was at the top of the prophetic roll which was Jeremiah, because his prophecy was listed first, then came the major prophets and then the minor prophets. And it’s no different than what Jesus did when He

referred to a whole category of wisdom literature as the Psalms, because that is the heading on that scroll as well. So there's no contradiction. Prophecy was fulfilled.

J. Ligon Duncan: Judas' Remorse and Suicide

And what is Matthew doing? And once again he's **fingering the culprits**. This is where this plot started. Judas didn't think this up on his own. He had some promotion, he had some encouragement, he had some financial encouragement in this plot. And here comes the money right back to the ones who are in fact culpable in their complicity in this plot. And Judas' anguished words of confession in verse 4 serve to accent Jesus' innocence, his guiltlessness, his integrity, his impeccability. They show the perfect innocence of Christ. . .

What is Matthew showing you here? He's showing you **the wickedness of the hearts of the religious leaders of the people of God**. They're only concerned about carrying out their own plot. Even as Jesus' court trial highlights the judicial nature of Jesus' death. So Judas' confession highlights His innocence, and the attitude of the chief priest and elders shows their wickedness. They are the wicked ones in this circumstance. They ought to be undergoing the death penalty. You remember in Jewish law if you brought a false charge in a capital crime, you were liable to the penalty of that crime. They themselves should have been being led to the Roman cross. . .

And so what is Matthew showing you? Not only the **judicial nature of Jesus death**, but **His perfect innocence**. Everything was turned upside down. This was a kangaroo court. It was a mock trial. It was something that was a mockery of judgment, and Matthew knows that you need to know that if you're going to understand what happens to Jesus at the end of the passage. He's an innocent man.

David Thompson: There are several things we want to observe here:

- 1) There may be serious consequences to what we make a decision to do, therefore, we had better think very carefully about those consequences before we act (i.e. sell out Jesus).
- 2) Judas had money and he had his sin; but what he did not have was happiness and fulfillment.
- 3) The wages for doing that which is satanic will always be death, not life.
- 4) Remorse and regret are not the same as real repentance.
- 5) The One a sinful person needs to run to is Jesus Christ, not religious leaders.
- 6) Suicide was not the solution to Judas' problem; real repentance was the solution.

TEXT: Matthew 27:11-14

TITLE: ROMAN TRIAL -- SURPRISING SILENCE OF THE KING OF THE JEWS BEFORE PILATE

BIG IDEA:

JESUS REMAINS SILENT IN HIS TRIAL BEFORE PILATE DESPITE THE TRUMPED UP CHARGES BROUGHT BY THE SANHEDRIN

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: When we combine all four accounts of the trial, **John 18:28 – 19:16** gives us the details of the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate inside the praetorium and of Pilate and the people outside, and **Luke 23:6–12** tells of the interview with Herod (perhaps in the same palace, with the incident coming after **Matt 27:14**), while **Matt 27:19** tells us of Pilate’s wife’s dream and **27:24–25** of Pilate’s claim to innocence and the people’s willingness to have Jesus’ blood on their heads. . .

At the outset, the charges are laid before Pilate by the prosecutors (here the Sanhedrin), and the leaders have by necessity twisted their own verdict from blasphemy to high treason by centering on the royal aspects of the messianic claim, thereby making Jesus “*King of the Jews*” (for this title see also the Magi in **2:2**) to make it sound as if Jesus is plotting sedition against Rome (ironically, the very aspect he had denied). Their charge of blasphemy would satisfy a Jewish court but not a Roman court, since it would be considered a Jewish problem and of no concern to Rome.

R. T. France: While the hearing before the Sanhedrin established Jesus’ guilt in Jewish eyes and called for the death penalty, it is the Roman prefect who must actually implement that verdict, and this scene relates the formal trial and pronouncement of sentence. Yet that formal business takes up only a small part of the pericope, an apparently perfunctory examination by Pilate in **vv. 11–14** and the sentencing in **v. 26**. The intervening verses focus not on the trial of Jesus as such but on Pilate’s abortive attempt to find a convenient way to avoid pronouncing the sentence demanded on a man he has apparently concluded is not guilty from a Roman point of view but who is clearly anathema to the Jewish establishment. The narrative will focus on the primary responsibility of the Jewish leaders and people for Jesus’ death, but Pilate does not come out of it well; first he tries to evade his official responsibility, then, despite his wife’s warning, he cynically gives orders for an admittedly guiltless man to be executed. His theatrical abdication of responsibility (**v. 24**) is not likely to convince anyone but himself. . .

Matthew notes three reasons for this reluctance to convict.

1. First, Pilate is apparently impressed by Jesus’ silence under interrogation: his “surprise” probably indicates a favorable impression (see below).
2. Second, he has correctly assessed that the Jewish leaders’ desire to eliminate Jesus stems not from concern for Roman law and order but from their own religio-political self-interest (**v. 18**).
3. And third, his wife’s dream provides a supposedly supernatural attestation to Jesus’ innocence (**v. 19**).

Ray Fowler: And so today we come to Jesus on trial – part two. We saw that the first trial was marked by illegal proceedings, false witnesses and distorted testimony. Sadly, the second trial doesn't fare much better. There was actually a third trial before Herod as well that we read about in the gospel of Luke (**Luke 23:6-12**), but Matthew doesn't even bother recording that one. The focus here is on Jesus before Pilate.

And if you were hoping that Jesus would receive justice at this second trial, you will be sorely disappointed. The whole purpose of a trial is to clear the innocent and condemn the guilty. But in this particular trial, the innocent party is condemned while the guilty person is set free.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter how the Jewish leaders bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Although they proclaimed Jesus worthy of death at his first trial, they have no authority under Roman law to put him to death, so they bring him to Pilate. Remember, the first trial had a predetermined outcome because they were the ones in charge. But now Pilate's in charge, so this trial will require a little more finesse.

Albert Mohler: Pilate's suggestion that Jesus is the "*king of the Jews*" is an attempt to determine if Jesus is plotting treason and insurrection. Pilate asks Jesus to confirm the charge, but while Jesus' answer affirms the question, it places the responsibility back on Pilate to discern properly what the question implies. The chief priests and elders continue to accuse Jesus, but Jesus has answered Pilate's question. He recognizes that the trial is a sham, so he does not grace the charade with a reply. There is nothing more to say. Pilate has certainly heard of Jesus beforehand, but he is not prepared for the resolute silence Jesus maintains.

David Guzik: History shows us Pontius Pilate was a cruel and ruthless man, unkind to the Jews and contemptuous of almost everything but raw power. Here, he seems out of character in the way he treated Jesus. Jesus seems to have profoundly affected him.

I. (:11) GENERAL CHARGE – QUALIFIED ADMISSION

A. General Charge

“Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’”

B. Qualified Admission

“And Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you say.’”

Donald Hagner: The issue that concerns Pilate is whether Jesus was an insurrectionist who constituted a political threat to the Roman rule of Judea.

R. T. France: From the involvement of the crowd in most of this scene, it seems that the hearing took place in public; the *bēma* (see p. 1046, n. 5) was probably a raised platform in front of the governor's residence. There Jesus stands before the seated governor (**v. 19**), an ironic reversal of the destined position of Jesus as the seated judge of the world (**25:31**). . .

Jesus' reply (which, like the question, is the same in all four gospels, though **John 18:37** adds "*that I am a king*") is **affirmative but qualified**, as in **26:64**. Jesus would not wish to deny his kingly role as Messiah of Israel; his arrival at the city had been designed to assert it. But what Pilate would naturally construe as a political claim is for Jesus a truth at a different level. When

he used the same formula, “*You have said it,*” in response to Caiaphas, he went on to explain how his messianic vision differed from that of the Sanhedrin (26:64). This time, however, “*You say it*” is not followed by any explanation of why his “kingship” is no threat to Rome (for this see **John 18:33–38**). To try to explain the finer points of messianic theology to a pagan administrator would no doubt have been futile (as Paul found later with Festus, **Acts 25:17–20; 26:24**). At any rate, Jesus has clearly decided to let matters take their course; his **enigmatic** “*You say it*” is the last word Pilate will hear him utter.

Ray Fowler: The “*you*” in Pilate’s question is emphatic, perhaps even a little derisive. Pilate looks at this beat-up, bound prisoner before him and asks him, “*Are you the king of the Jews?*” It’s an interesting question that seems to come out of nowhere for us. But obviously it was preceded by the Jewish leaders bringing their accusations against Jesus. You couldn’t bring someone to trial without an accusation.

The gospel of Luke tells us they brought three charges against Jesus. They accused him of subverting the nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar and claiming to be Christ, a king (**Luke 23:2**). Notice these are all new charges! At his first trial they accused him of blasphemy, but they know that Pilate won’t be interested in religious charges, so they bring these more politically oriented charges against him instead. Pilate focuses on the third charge, and so he asks Jesus, “*Are you the king of the Jews?*”

Daniel Doriani: All four Gospels record Pilate’s question and Jesus’ response: “*You say [it]*” (**Matt. 27:11**). “*You*” is emphatic; Pilate is the one who says this. Further, “*you say [it]*” implies that Jesus is not a king in the sense that Pilate thinks. In John, Jesus clarifies, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest*” (**John 18:36**).

D. A. Carson: Matthew’s report, in which Pilate asks, “*Are you the king of the Jews?*” presupposes the background of **Luke 23:2** and **John 18:28–33**. The Sanhedrin’s concern with Jesus’ “*blasphemy*” becomes his claim to kingship, a charge of treason with overtones of Zealot sedition, capped with a claim that Jesus refuses to pay taxes. In Roman trials, the magistrate normally heard the charges first, questioned the defendant and listened to his defense, sometimes permitted several such exchanges, and then retired with his advisers to decide on a verdict, which was then promptly carried out. The first step, the charge by the Jewish leaders, led to this particular formulation of Pilate’s question to Jesus. . .

Verse 11 is important theologically as well as historically. It stands behind the inscription on the cross (**v.37**) and prepares the way for Christianity, which rests on the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth, who rose from the dead, is indeed the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews—basic themes in Matthew even in the prologue. In other words, the vindicated Lord is the crucified Messiah.

II. (:12) SPECIFIC ACCUSATIONS – SURPRISING SILENCE

A. Specific Accusations

“*And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders,*”

B. Surprising Silence

“*He made no answer.*”

Leon Morris: Now we come to the accusation that we would expect. The Jewish leaders **kept accusing him** (the present infinitive points to a continuous process); they could not, of course, hand a man over to the Romans without laying charges against him. Matthew does not bother to say what these charges were; he leaves his readers to reason from such facts as Jesus' admission that he was the Messiah (**26:63-64**) and Pilate's question whether he was a king. There is not much doubt about the nature of the Jewish accusations, and Matthew does not stay to spell them out. All the more so in that Jesus answered nothing. In all the accounts of his trial he remained silent at some stage. Matthew lets us see that he was not in the slightest concerned about the matters the members of the Sanhedrin raised. **The specific allegations did not matter;** they were determined to have him executed, and to refute their accusations was irrelevant. If those charges were shown to be false, they would raise others. They were not concerned with justice but with an execution. In the trial before the Sanhedrin Jesus was silent when a variety of allegations were made, but he spoke when the high priest put to him a question he was perfectly entitled to put by virtue of his office. Similarly, he responded to Pilate when the governor asked the question he was bound to ask because of his office. But when Pilate drew attention to the accusations of these Jewish officials it was another matter; he did not reply to Pilate then.

III. (:13-14) INTENSIFIED INTERROGATION – AMAZING SILENCE

A. (:13) Intensified Interrogation

“Then Pilate said to Him,

‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’”

Homer Kent: Yet this silence was not taken by Pilate as admission of guilt, but as a most unusual composure, causing him to begin a series of attempts to release Jesus without antagonizing the Sanhedrin.

B. (:14) Amazing Silence

“And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed.”

Daniel Doriani: A typical Roman hearing before a procurator included charges, the governor's questions, the prisoner's self-defense, then a verdict. But **Jesus did not defend himself.** He knew he had come to the time appointed for his sacrifice. Besides, it was pointless: his accusers had no interest in the truth in his case. Therefore, *“when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer”* (**Matt. 27:12**). Pilate was astonished; did Jesus not hear the charges? They threatened a death sentence (**27:13**). Still, *“Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor”* (**27:14**). Somehow, Jesus' silence convinced Pilate that he was innocent, not guilty. Pilate saw no fault when Jesus said nothing. Perhaps we should conclude that a vigorous self-defense is not always necessary. Some accusations are simply absurd.

R. T. France: Jesus was not like other defendants, and Pilate was impressed.

David Thompson: What amazed Pilate was that Jesus did not answer one of their charges. The word *“amaze”* is one that means Pilate **marveled**, that is he considered it an amazing wonder that Jesus would listen to all of their charges and not respond. Now of course the real question is why didn't Jesus respond? Why didn't He offer a defense to Pilate? It would seem that Pilate

was looking for any way to get out of condemning Christ. The reason is because **Jesus had to die. He was allowing Himself to be led to the cross like a lamb to the slaughter.**

Donald Hagner: The process whereby Jesus is “tried” continues toward its inexorable conclusion. Jesus now courageously faces the Roman interrogator who has the power of life or death (cf. **John 19:10**) in the settlement of the case. He quietly gives assent to the question whether he is the Jewish king but does not flinch in the face of his accusers’ charges. He keeps silent now, just as he did before the Jewish authorities. The dignity of that silence impresses even Pilate, who could not, however, have known that he was participating in a divine drama of such historical consequences that his own name would thereby be immortalized. Jesus’ commitment to the cross—the will of his Father—is firmly fixed. Nothing, no one, can turn Jesus away from that goal.

Ray Fowler: Pilate is stunned by Jesus’ silence. Pilate has presided over many trials. Most prisoners loudly protest their innocence, but Jesus doesn’t say a word. **Charles Spurgeon** comments: “He might have cleared himself of every accusation that was brought against him, but that would have left the load of guilt upon those whose place he came to take; so he answered never a word. Such silence was sublime.” (**Charles Spurgeon**; *The Gospel of the Kingdom: An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew*)

Jesus stood silent before his accusers at his first trial, and now he does so again. He was innocent of all charges, yet he refused to defend himself. Jesus was willing to stand condemned so that you and I could be set free.

Charles Spurgeon: [Regarding what so amazed Pilate] He had seen in captured Jews the fierce courage of fanaticism; but there was no fanaticism in Christ. He had also seen in many prisoners the meanness which will do or say anything to escape from death; but he saw nothing of that about our Lord. He saw in him unusual gentleness and humility combined with majestic dignity. **He beheld submission blended with innocence.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How did the Sanhedrin manifest their lack of interest in seeking justice in this case against Jesus?
- 2) What lessons do you learn as you trace the theme of the Kingship of Jesus throughout the book of Matthew?
- 3) What impressed Pilate about the demeanor and response of Jesus to these serious charges?
- 4) Why is the way Jesus remained silent before these sham accusations not necessarily a model for how we should respond if unjustly charged?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stu Weber: Jesus the Messiah submitted to unjust conviction because of his love for us. . .

These are the last words of Jesus that Matthew recorded before Jesus' "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (27:46) and his loud cry as he yielded up his spirit (27:50). We know from the other three Gospels that Jesus said more to Pilate and to those who witnessed his suffering. Matthew's purpose was to record the essential facts with little embellishment. Perhaps Matthew was also emphasizing Jesus as the silent **Suffering Servant** of **Isaiah 53:7**.

David Lose: After the narrative detour regarding Judas' tragic end, we are back to the primary story of Jesus' journey to the cross. He is now before Pilate, arguably the most powerful man in all of Palestine, for trial.

Pilate begins with what may seem a straightforward question, but one that has far reaching implications: "*Are you the King of the Jews?*" Jesus' answer will help Pilate discern whether this is primarily a religious squabble or one that has more political overtones. But Jesus refuses to satisfy Pilate's curiosity, employing the same strategy he had earlier: "*You say so.*" At this non-answer, his accusers jump into the fray, but as before Jesus refuses to answer any of them. Pilate, then, prods him further, inviting him to address the charges spoken against him. And **Jesus remains silent**.

All of this may not seem that surprising, as Jesus has retained his rather stoic sense of self and mission ever since his anguish and resolve in Gethsemane. What strikes me, though, is that Pilate is "*amazed.*" Why?

Perhaps because most of those who have been brought before Pilate came as terrified and beaten opponents of the empire, yet this man is unafraid. Or perhaps those Pilate usually speaks to are out for their own political gain, always seeking an advantage, and yet this one seems to desire no favor. Or maybe it's that the normal human reaction when accused of something is to defend oneself vigorously and level counter-charges at one's opponents, and yet this rabbi speaks not a word either in his defense or against his accusers.

Pilate, based on his experience with power and influence and violence, has a whole set of expectations about how Jesus should respond. Yet Jesus, acquainted instead with grace, faith, and trust, defies those expectations, remains silent in the face of his accusers, and entrusts himself to the mercy of God.

Yes, Pilate is amazed. For Jesus abides by the rules of another kingdom altogether, one Pilate cannot image but only wonder at.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus Before Pilate

As you look at the trial of Jesus' proceeding in **verse 11** through **14**, you see something of the **dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ** before His accusers and His judges, and you see something of the **commitment of Christ to die for our sins**. . .

They bring a charge that he's some short of a **political revolutionary**. They call Him the **King of the Jews**. They know that Pilate isn't going to be in the least interested in Jewish doctrinal

disputes and against the God of Israel. They know that Pilate would want a political charge before he is interested in acting on this particular criminal. . .

We notice in **verse 13** the **calmness of Jesus**. The quietness of Jesus. Pilate is stunned by the way this man reacts. He is amazed by his calmness and quietness. Pilate is used to prisoners who come into his courtroom frothing at the mouth for excuses of what they have done, with assertions that they are innocent, with a begging that they are only a part of a greater conspiracy. They were only accomplices and someone else was the chief criminal. Pilate is used to people begging for mercy and making a case for themselves, and this man stands quietly. He will not answer any of the charges that are being brought against Him by the accusers. And in fact, the only people who are frothing at the mouth are His accusers. It is a striking thing to Pilate. Have you ever been to prison before? Have you ever met a guilty man in prison before? I haven't. Everybody's innocent who's in prison. And Pilate is used to that. He's used to every criminal that comes before him has an excuse for why he's done what he's done, or he's pleading that he didn't do what he did. And so Pilate is used to this, and yet Jesus is quiet. That is very significant. . .

Again, we see a glimpse of the **dignity** of our Savior, in His manhood, and His complete and unequivocal commitment to die for us. Jesus' silence in His trial is not a model for how we as Christians ought to respond in a trial when we are unjustly accused. Jesus is not saying, "Now all you Christians, if you are every unjustly accused and you're in a court of criminal law, make sure and not respond to the prosecutors' accusations. Make sure and not have legal counsel. Jesus is not giving us that. Jesus is not showing how we ought to respond in the face of an unjust accusation in criminal court.

Jesus' actions are unique because He is unique. His silence is reflective of His **commitment to die** for you because of His love for you and His love for the Father. The Lord Jesus Christ who does not open His mouth is sending a thunderous message to you that He wanted to bear your sin. And He is sending a thunderous message that there is nothing more in the world that delights Him than doing the will of His Heavenly Father even if it means being condemned unjustly. He loved to do the will of His Heavenly Father, and it was the Father's will that He should die for the sins of His people. And, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ was not willing to do anything that would spare Him from the torture and death which He would have to endure in order to release you from the bondage of the condemnation of sin.

John MacArthur: What Shall I Do with Jesus?

Where is the troublesome revolutionary who is a threat to Rome? Where is the tax-dodging protester who's leading the nation in an insurrection? Where is the king who is a rival to Caesar? Here is a calm serene peaceful man who is literally offering Himself without reason. Pilate knows He's innocent. And Jesus confirms it by saying nothing – absolutely nothing. He is resolute, like a sheep before her shearers, Isaiah said, is dumb. So He opened not His mouth. He would willingly go to the cross.

But **what would Pilate do now?** He knows He doesn't deserve to die and yet he doesn't want to irritate the crowd and create another incident. His life is on the line. His career is on the line. He's got some real problems. You see, **Pilate was in a very dangerous position.** Let me tell you why. When he originally came to power, he made some big mistakes. The first thing he did to make a show of power when he was appointed governor was to ride into Jerusalem with a whole entourage of soldiers to show his power. And in came the soldiers and they had these banners,

these flags. And on top of the flags in brass or some kind of metal was an eagle and on top of the eagle was a molded image of Caesar. Prior governors had had the sense to remove those kinds of things because the Jews believed them to be idols – any graven image. And the Jews had left idolatry since the Babylonian captivity, they didn't tolerate it. And the other governors had been careful about that, but Pilate, wanting to show his power, came in with his whole group of soldiers, all with the image of Caesar, which of course the Romans believed to be a god. And so here was an idol in the city of Jerusalem, the holy city. The Jews rioted and protested and demanded that he take those off his banners. In a power play, he refused to do it.

After accomplishing what he wanted to in his splendorous appearance in Jerusalem, he turned to return the 60 miles to the seacoast in Caesarea where his basic operation was headquartered, and they followed him for five days, screaming and rioting and demanding – sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently – that he remove those graven images. He refused to do it. He called a meeting of all these rioting Jews. He put them in the amphitheater, surrounded them with his soldiers and said if they didn't stop the demands, he would cut off their heads. At which point they bared their necks, pulled their heads to one side and told his soldiers to go ahead and cut off all their heads. And they called his bluff. There was no way he could do it. There was no way he could report back to Rome that he had massacred a whole bunch of defenseless Jews in an amphitheater with their necks bared.

Furthermore, it could have led to a wholesale national revolution. He couldn't have survived that situation because he was sent to keep the peace, not start a war. They called his bluff. He removed all of those images. And they were one up on him. They had him where they wanted him. A little later, he realized the need for a better water supply in Jerusalem. So he decided to build an aqueduct to bring water into the city of Jerusalem. And to do it, he took the money out of the temple treasury, money which was devoted to God. This so greatly irritated the Jews that it fomented another riot which he had to deal with by sending his soldiers into a huge crowd of people with clubs and spears and swords and at a given signal they clubbed and stabbed people to death to break up the riot.

The third and really most devastating thing that happened to Pilate was when he established a residence in the city of Jerusalem and made some shields for his soldiers, and on the shields he had engraved "Tiberius, The Emperor." Which to the Jewish people again was an emblem of a false god and they demanded that the shields be changed. And he refused to do that. And so they sent word to Tiberius. They reported him actually to Caesar that he was doing this. Caesar sent word down to get those shields changed immediately. So they have him right where they want him.

He cannot afford another message sent to Tiberius. He cannot afford another riot. He cannot afford any kind of revolution. He is really in a difficult place. He has enough of a sense of justice as a Roman and as a judge, a governor, to do what's right. But he's a coward because if he does what's right and releases Christ, he's going to have a riot on his hands. And something's going to happen and he knows that it could end up in his losing his job. And it wouldn't be unlike Tiberius to remove a governor and then execute him for his unfaithfulness.

TEXT: Matthew 27:15-26

TITLE: *CRAZY CHOICE OF BARABBAS OVER JESUS –
PICTURE OF SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT*

BIG IDEA:

SPINELESS PILATE YIELDS TO THE DEMANDS OF THE MOB TO RELEASE BARABBAS AND DELIVER JESUS TO BE CRUCIFIED (DESPITE FINDING HIM INNOCENT)

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Finding himself in a precarious political situation, Pilate was seeking some way to free Jesus from the trumped-up charges of the Jewish leaders without breaking either their laws or those of Rome. He knew Jesus was innocent of everything except, perhaps, religious lunacy. Yet his experience with the stubborn rulers of the Jews in Jerusalem told Pilate that they would not be satisfied with a simple dismissal of all charges against Jesus. That could cause a riot or, worse, a report sent to Caesar saying that Pilate was providing a safe haven for treasonous claimants to the throne of Israel.

In the midst of his personal turmoil, Pilate recalled an annual custom that might just provide a way of escape from that political quagmire. Each year at Passover, the governor of Judea would release one convicted prisoner back to the people – an act of unconditional clemency as a sign of benevolence and mercy (**27:15**). One of the men awaiting execution that morning was a man named Barabbas, described as a “*notorious prisoner*” (**27:16**), guilty of insurrection and murder (**Luke 23:25**). Surely, Pilate reasoned, if the crowd was presented with a choice between freeing Barabbas or freeing Jesus, their sense of justice would prevail and Jesus would go free. Pilate also seemed to be aware of Jesus’ popularity with the people, for “*he knew that because of envy [the Jewish leaders] had handed Him over*” (**Matt. 27:17-18**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Barabbas is the only man in the Bible who could ever say in the physical sense alone, Christ died for me. He thus becomes a rather eloquent illustration of the story of the cross. . .

We know from all of the accounts of the Bible that it was the multitude, probably of the supporters of Barabbas, who was a very popular insurgent, evidently, asked Pilate for the freedom for one of the prisoners. They of course hoped that he would opt for the freedom of Barabbas—Pilate was hoping of course that the people would decide for the freedom of Jesus, and thus get him off the horns of a dilemma, because he did not really believe that Jesus was guilty. But he had on the one hand the appeal of his conscience and on the other the political appeal of expediency. And so the multitude asked him that he give them as the custom was a freeing of a prisoner. . .

Rome was very ruthless in persecuting people who sought to rebel against the establishment and in the light of the fact that they were hunted all over the land by men with superior forces, to survive it was necessary for them to do brutal things, and so Barabbas had become a **hardened, brutal criminal**. The Apostle Peter, preaching in **Acts chapter 3** after the resurrection described or says to Israel that they chose a murderer over our Lord Jesus Christ. So we know that it was

the common knowledge of the people at the time that Barabbas was not only a robber he was also a murderer. Death was his only future.

But the most striking thing about him when you put it all together is the fact that Israel preferred him to the Lord Jesus. Now it might seem hard to understand why Israel the nation would prefer a robber – an insurrectionist, a murderer, a notorious criminal – to our Lord Jesus Christ. But I don't think it's really too hard to understand. He was a daring, dashing, captivating, fierce, soul patriot. True he was a criminal, but we tend to glamorize people like that, and we glamorize them in the 20th Century as well. And while they did not have the skills of our present media, the tendency still is to glamorize the man who is the revolutionary and he was that. . .

Now Barabbas was thinking about the Roman judgment of crucifixion, and no doubt his thoughts were concentrated upon that. He was a man who was a sinner. He was guilty, and he stood condemned. A beautiful picture of course of all of us for that is what we are we are sinners. We are guilty before God, and we are therefore condemned. But Barabbas had a release. Now we read in the New Testament in the epistle that Paul wrote to the Galatians, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us.*" I'm sure that it did not take a great deal of thought for Barabbas to have a pretty good theory of the atonement. **C. I. Scofield** once said, "It's easy to see Barabbas need not have been a theologian to form a good working theory of the atonement. He knew from experience what it was to be delivered and to have someone else take his place. For you see, ultimately, the Lord Jesus is the one who hangs upon that middle cross in the place of what Barabbas thought would be his cross." . . .

Now one of the things that we stress in the atonement that our Lord Jesus has accomplished is that in our substitute in the Lord Jesus we have borne our penalty. That's why we shall not have to bear the penalty again. **He has borne the penalty for sinners**, and in the case of those who have believed in him, they have a substitute in whom they have borne the penalty. That's why we cannot bear the penalty. That's why the divine law has no case whatsoever against us, because our penalty has been paid in our substitute. So Barabbas beautifully illustrates that. I don't guess there's anybody who could sing with more gusto, "He breaks the power of canceled sin; he sets the prisoner free."

Now transferring that from the physical to the spiritual sense we have an illustration of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus. He was **our penal substitute**. And then if I may just emphasize one more thing. Barabbas, by virtue of the fact that he had been freed by the authorities and by virtue of the fact that Jesus had died under the judgment of Rome, Barabbas is a man who now **stands righteous before the Roman government**. "O mysterious, wonderful exchange," the ancient fathers used to say, "by which my unrighteousness becomes the unrighteousness of the Savior and the righteousness of the Savior becomes my righteousness. O mysterious, wonderful exchange." He hath made him to be sin for us him who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him, and Barabbas, as he stood looking at the cross, stood looking as a free man – one who had been delivered by the authorities and now stood right before them.

Now the second thing I think that is so important is to notice the **perennial madness of the multitude's choice**. *Which of the two will ye that I release unto you?* They said, Barabbas. And to make it even worse, in a moment after Pilate has sought to free himself from guilt, they've answered and said to Pilate, *His blood be on us and on our children*. Oh, the madness of the choice of the multitude that selects a Barabbas instead of a Jesus.

I. (:15-18) EXPEDIENT ATTEMPT BY PILATE TO ESCAPE CRUCIFYING JESUS

A. (:15-16) Creative Opportunity to Release a Prisoner

1. (:15) The People Get to Decide

“Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the multitude any one prisoner whom they wanted.”

2. (:16) The Prisoner Who Was Obviously Guilty and Dangerous = Barabbas

“And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.”

Daniel Doriani: Barabbas was well known because he “*had committed murder*” during an insurrection in the city of Jerusalem (**Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19**). He and at least two others had been captured. That is probably why three crosses were ready for crucifixions. By tradition, translations typically say Jesus was crucified between two thieves (KJV) or robbers (NIV, ESV), but the Greek term, plus the fact that they were executed, almost certainly means rebels or insurrectionists. The crosses were thus intended for Barabbas and his two cohorts in rebellion (Jesus ultimately took Barabbas’s place). The name Barabbas is also interesting: it means “*son of the father.*” Since “*father*” was a title given to prominent teachers, he may have been the son of a “*father,*” that is, a renowned teacher. This fact, taken with the murder, would account for his **prominence.**

Jeffrey Crabtree: Pilate picked a prisoner who was the extreme opposite of Jesus. His name was Barabbas (v. 16), which means “son of (his) father.” Some older Greek and Syriac manuscripts have “Jesus” Barabbas or “Jesus bar Abba” and some scholarship supports this reading (**Metzger 68**). This would mean that “Jesus” the murderer was set free while Jesus the Messiah was condemned (**Hill 350**). It also helps one understand why Pilate identified Jesus as “*Jesus, which is called Christ*” (vv. 17, 22) and not just “*Jesus.*”

B. (:17-18) Choice Between Barabbas and Jesus

1. (:17) The Presentation of the Choice

“When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’”

Leon Morris: We may conjecture that Barabbas would have had popular appeal, for Mark tells us that this man had been involved in a rebellion in which he had committed murder. It is possible that the reason why the crowd was there was that supporters of Barabbas had come together to ask for Barabbas to be the man released at the customary amnesty at Passover. For whatever reason, a crowd was assembled, and Pilate put to them the choice of Barabbas or Jesus. He may have thought that since Jesus had committed no crime and since he was said by some at least to be the Messiah, the people would want to have him set free. But perhaps he did not give sufficient consideration to the fact that a Jerusalem crowd was unlikely to call for a Galilean to be released when some of their own people were in custody. And it may well be that the Jewish leaders had made sure that some of their supporters were in the crowd urging the people to call for Barabbas. By adding that Jesus was “*called Messiah,*” Pilate was quietly urging a consideration that he might well have thought would weigh heavily with many in the crowd. No answer from the crowd is recorded at this point; it may be that Pilate put the alternatives before the people and allowed them time to think about it.

Bevans Welder: Now before the decision was announced, two things happened that elevate Pilate's apprehension about the people's pick.

1. First, Pilate's wife had a bad dream and sent to Pilate saying, "*Have thou nothing to do with that JUST man,*" (**Matt 27:19**) [compare the dream of Abimelech in **Gen 20:3**, as an example].
2. Second, the chief priests and the elders stirred up the crowd to vote for Barabbas (**Matt 27:20**). This is a typical operation for the Jews (**Acts 17:5, 13**). And as is often the case, the majority was wrong and they paid the price for their error (**Prov 11:21**).

<https://www.my3bc.com/matthew-27-15-26-the-release-of-barabbas/>

2. (:18) The Plan Behind the Choice

Banking on the Popularity of Jesus vs. the Envy of the Religious Leaders

"For he knew that because of envy they had delivered Him up."

Leon Morris: Matthew adds that Pilate was not taken in by what the Jewish leaders were saying. He knew that it was not consideration for the security of Roman rule that had motivated them, but envy. Their envy at the success of Jesus in Jerusalem during the past few days would have reinforced their long-standing hatred of him. It may well be that Pilate knew of this and reasoned that since the leaders were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the crowd, he must have sufficient support among the people for them to ask for his release. Ordinary people would surely side with Jesus rather than with a criminal like Barabbas. So he put the choice before them, thinking that in this way he would be able to release Jesus. If the leaders were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the crowd, then the "*Messiah*" must have sufficient support in the crowd for them to ask for him to be set free.

D. A. Carson: What is certain is that Pilate sized up the real motivation of the Jewish leaders (**v.18**). They had no special loyalty to Rome; so if they were accusing Jesus of being a traitor to Rome, he must have been disturbing them for other reasons, and they were simply using Pilate to eliminate Jesus' challenge to them. Pilate, with his network of spies and informers, would be aware of how much popularity Jesus Christ enjoyed among the people at large. He could hardly have been unaware of the upsurge of acclaim the previous Sunday (**21:1-16**). He thought to administer a reversal to Sanhedrin policy by using the paschal amnesty to encourage the crowd to free Jesus; therefore he offered them a choice: Barabbas or Jesus "*who is called Christ.*" The last clause may be contemptuous.

R. T. France: Pilate's perception is valid: the purpose of Jesus' trial was not to punish a breach of the law but to get rid of a man whose claims threatened the status and authority of the current Jewish leaders.

II. (:19) EXCULPATORY INPUT FROM HIS WIFE

*"And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying,
'Have nothing to do with that righteous Man;
for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.'"*

S. Lewis Johnson: Now there is a sudden interruption. You know, men, there are times when we should listen to our wives. Now I know what you are thinking, is there any time when we do not

have to listen to them? [Laughter] But there are times when we should pay attention to them, and this is one time when Pilate should have paid attention to his wife.

Leon Morris: She gives as the reason that she had *suffered many things* in a dream because of him, but she gives no indication of the nature of her sufferings nor of why she felt that her husband should have no dealings with the man. But since people in antiquity took a good deal of notice of dreams, it is not surprising that Pilate's wife felt that her dream was of some importance. And if it was important, she would believe that she should lose no time in communicating the fact to her husband. She would not have been able to enter the court, but she was able to send a message to the judge. We may well feel that it is astonishing that an aristocratic Roman lady should intercede on behalf of a Galilean peasant. She had clearly been deeply impressed by her dream, and she did what she could.

R. T. France: The intervention of Pilate's wife serves only to deepen the guilt of the Jewish leaders: even a Gentile woman can see that Jesus is innocent. But of course she knew this only because God had told her, in the dream. It is God, rather than just Pilate's wife, who thus testifies to Jesus' righteousness, over against the accusations of the Jewish leaders.

Donald Hagner: The dream serves as a divine vindication of Jesus.

Grant Osborne: "*With a dream*" (κατ' ὄναρ) in the Passion Narrative is found only in Matthew in the NT and elsewhere the expression refers to a divine revelation to Joseph about Mary's pregnancy (1:20), to the Magi about Herod (2:12), or to Joseph about going down to Egypt (2:12–13) and returning (2:19). We are certainly to take the dream as a **message from God**.

Robert Gundry: the accent falls on her description of Jesus as "*righteous*"—not just innocent (guiltless), but righteous (positively good as well as guiltless [compare 23:35]). So Jesus appears as the example par excellence of the righteousness which surpasses that of the scholars and Pharisees and without which no one will enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20).

William Hendriksen: Did this woman become a Jewish proselyte and afterward a Christian? The Coptic church honors her memory; the Greek church includes her name in the calendar of saints. But such honors prove nothing.

III. (:20-23) EXCHANGE WITH THE MULTITUDE REGARDING THEIR DECISION

A. (:20) Persuasive Efforts of the Religious Leaders

"But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and to put Jesus to death."

Leon Morris: The crowd was not left to make up its mind by itself. The crowd never is. There are always people who try to manipulate public opinion, and in this case they were the chief priests and the elders, the Jewish leaders who had brought the accusation against Jesus. There was no doubt which answer they wanted. Matthew gives no indication as to the methods employed to convince the crowds, but tells his readers that they were successful. The crowds were persuaded.

B. (:21) Persistent Response of the Multitude

"But the governor answered and said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?'"

And they said, 'Barabbas.'"

Charles Swindoll: Talk about being impaled on the horns of a dilemma! In one ear he started to hear murmurs of “Crucify Him” from the crowd as the religious leaders stirred them up, while in the other his wife was imploring him to show mercy. Like the corrupt politician he was, Pilate chose neutrality when he should have followed his conscience, the laws of justice, and the advice of his wife by letting Jesus free. Instead, he turned to the riled-up crowd and asked them to answer his question: “*Which of the two do you want me to release for you?*” (27:21).

C. (:22) Punishment of Jesus Unanimously Affirmed

*“Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’
They all said, ‘Let Him be crucified!’”*

Daniel Doriani: The call for crucifixion fit the godless goal of the priests. They wanted to kill Jesus, but a crucifixion would also discredit him. The law says “*anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse*” (Deut. 21:23). The priests will be pleased because such a death implies that Jesus is under God’s curse. More important, the Father will be pleased, because by this dreadful death Jesus fulfilled his purpose and bore sin’s curse for us.

David Turner: Jesus’s popularity with the crowd has evaporated (21:9, 11, 26; 26:5), probably because the crowd’s hope that Jesus was a political-military Messiah was dashed by his arrest. Jesus’s messianic credentials have now been discredited. This crowd may be composed of Jerusalem residents instead of the Passover pilgrims who had praised Jesus when he entered Jerusalem (Blomberg 1992a: 412).

D. (:23) Perplexity of Pilate in Light of Jesus’ Innocence

*“And he said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’
But they kept shouting all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’”*

Stu Weber: Pilate attempted to reason with the crowd. Matthew’s choice of the Greek word *phemi* (“*declare, say*”) implied that Pilate’s questions were more like assertions, defending Jesus’ innocence, than attempts to draw answers from the people: What crime has he committed? But Pilate’s persistent pleas for reason were drowned out by the crowd’s louder and more persistent cries: *Crucify him!* The governor had lost control of the situation. His weakness and the mob tendencies of the crowd were playing into the hands of the Jewish leaders.

Robert Gundry: Asking what crime Jesus had committed shows that the governor has accepted his wife’s description of Jesus as “*righteous.*” The crowds’ repeating “*He’s to be crucified*” rather than answering with the citation of a crime confirms that description. “*Were yelling vehemently*” substitutes decibels and repetition for evidence.

D. Marion Clark: What happened? It seems a stretch that the religious leaders in a short period of time could persuade the crowd to turn against a man that many believed to be a prophet of God. How could these leaders who had tried to keep the crowd from knowing what they were doing, suddenly turn into persuasive salesmen? To ask the question yet another way, how could the crowd go from shouting, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” a few days earlier, to shouting, “*Let him be crucified!*”?

It is not the same crowd. During Passover, Jerusalem's population grows from a few thousand to two or three hundred thousand. As Jesus entered into Jerusalem, he would have been part of a stream of thousands entering into the city. And though he did receive attention by many people, nevertheless, it would be a small number in comparison to the mass of humanity crowded in and about Jerusalem.

This crowd before Pilate is not likely to be large. It would be made up most of the following. There would be those who have business with Pilate. They have favors to ask, complaints to make, business to transact. It is likely that a number of them are seeking release of family members and friends who are prisoners. Perhaps they hope to take advantage of the governor's custom of releasing a prisoner. Maybe even Barabbas has his advocates. He most likely was part of a rebel movement. And then there were those whom the religious leaders had gathered. Remember, during their trial, they had gathered false witnesses. These same people very well could have joined the procession, especially if the leaders needed to call on them for testimony before Pilate.

The result is that the majority of the crowd present are as likely to be against or indifferent to Jesus as being for him. At least his strongest advocates would not be there. Where would they be? Most would be at the temple. That is the focal point of the pilgrims. Others would be at market or in their residences. Few respected Jews would be hanging out in the Roman governor's courtyard. The point of all this is to say that the leaders did not have much persuading to do. What they really needed to do was to coach the crowd, which they do well.

https://thirdmill.org/articles/dm_clark/dm_clark.mat27.15_26.html

IV. (:24-25) ESCAPE FROM ACCOUNTABILITY SOUGHT BY PILATE

A. (:24) Washing His Hands of Personal Accountability

“And when Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves.’”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Pilate could see that a “*tumult*” or uprising or riot was beginning. In order to keep peace he acquiesced and tried to pass off the responsibility for shedding innocent blood. He publicly washed his hands to demonstrate that he wanted no part in Jesus’ death (v. 24). Clearly, he believed Jesus should not be killed, but it is also clear he did not have the courage his position as governor and judge needed. He was responsible to protect the innocent. Instead, he gave official approval of Jesus’ death and then denied responsibility. Pilate’s statement, “*See to it yourselves*” reminds the reader of the chief priests and elders’ words to Judas (v. 4; **Carson**, Matthew 571).

Leon Morris: He clearly regarded Jesus’ death as the crime of murder, and equally clearly he did not wish to be held responsible for it. In this, of course, he was mistaken. He did not have the primary responsibility (that lay with the Jewish leaders). But in the last resort it was Pilate who said “Crucify” or “Release,” and there was no way he could avoid responsibility for that. The picture we get is that of a mob out of control and baying for blood, and in that emotional atmosphere a governor who was not thinking clearly and who was ready to take the easy way out. He tried to evade accountability for a decision that in the last resort was his and his alone. “*You see to it,*” like the hand-washing, is an attempt to evade a responsibility that could not be

shrugged off. The very similar words the Jewish leaders spoke to Judas (v. 4) did not exonerate the chief priests, and these words do not exonerate Pilate.

Richard Gardner: Concluding the trial scene is Pilate's gesture of **washing his hands** to absolve himself of responsibility for killing the innocent. It is a strange twist to the story, since the rite described is based on an **OT practice** rather than Roman judicial custom (cf. **Deut. 21:1-9**). What is strange from a historical perspective, however, creates rich irony from a literary and religious standpoint. The pagan Pilate acts like a good Israelite to separate himself from a deed that violates covenant justice, while the people of the covenant eagerly embrace responsibility for this deed: *His blood be on us and on our children* (v. 25).

B. (:25) Transferring Accountability to the Jewish People

*“And all the people answered and said,
‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”*

Donald Hagner: As for the **responsibility for the death of Jesus**, theologically there is only one possible answer: it is sin, the universal malady of all human beings, that drives Jesus to the cross. The crucifixion is in this sense a piece of the autobiography of every man and woman ever to walk this earth. It is “I” who am guilty of crucifying Jesus.

Leon Morris: This verse has been greatly misused throughout the centuries, being made a proof text to justify all manner of horrific practices against the Jews. But we should bear in mind that this was no more than a thoughtless assumption of responsibility by an unruly mob. They had no authority to commit their nation for the evil thing that they were doing. And even if they could do this, they could not bind God to punish subsequent generations of the chosen people. Evils have been perpetrated against the Jews through the centuries, and in some places they still are. But Scripture gives us no justification for any such thing. It is relevant that all the first Christians were Jews; the writer of this Gospel cannot possibly have meant that punishment for this mob's outrageous behavior would fall on every Jew in every place at every time.

Albert Mohler: The people ignorantly place the responsibility for their own Messiah's crucifixion directly on themselves, but Pilate is just as guilty as they are.

(:26) EPILOGUE – FINAL DISPOSITION OF BARABBAS AND JESUS

A. Final Disposition of Barabbas

“Then he released Barabbas for them;”

B. Final Disposition of Jesus

1. Scourged in Preparation for Crucifixion

“but after having Jesus scourged,”

2. Delivered Up to Be Crucified

“he delivered Him to be crucified.”

D. A. Carson: Among the Jews, scourging was limited to forty lashes (**Dt 25:3**; cf. **2Co 11:24**), but the Romans were restricted by nothing but their strength and whim. The whip was the dreaded **flagellum**, made by plaiting pieces of bone or lead into leather thongs. The victim was stripped and tied to a post. Severe flogging not only reduced the flesh to bloody pulp but could

open up the body until the bones were visible and the entrails exposed (cf. TDNT, 4:510–12; Josephus, J.W. 2.612 [21.5]; 6.304 [5.3]). Flogging as an independent punishment not infrequently ended in death. It was also used to weaken the prisoner before crucifixion. Jesus' flogging took place before the verdict (cf. Lk 23:16, 22; Jn 19:1–5; cf. Blinzler, Trial of Jesus, 222ff.) and so was not repeated after the verdict. Repetition would doubtless have killed him.

Grant Osborne: When Pilate delivered Jesus up to be scourged, he was following the legal code, which demanded that scourging precede capital punishment. The purpose in the case of crucifixion was actually humane, for it weakened the prisoner and helped him die more quickly, lessening the terrible agonies of the cross.

Scourging, however, was a terrible punishment in itself; in fact, as with crucifixion, it could only be inflicted on a Roman citizen by direct edict of Caesar. There were three kinds of beatings: the *fustigatio*, a less severe form for light offenses; the *flagellatio*, a severe beating for hardened criminals; and the *verberatio*, the most severe of them, in which the victim was beaten by a succession of soldiers, often with a scourge, a whip made up of strips of leather onto which were tied pieces of metal or bone. After only a few strokes the person's back was torn apart; and a hard blow could tear out a person's internal organs. With Jesus it was most likely the *verberatio* and thus undoubtedly terrible, but controlled sufficiently that he could go to the cross. He was indeed the suffering Servant of Isa 53:10–12. The phrase “*handed him over to be crucified*” is a further allusion to the righteous suffering Servant, recalling Isa 53:6, 12 LXX (cf. 26:28, 62; 27:12).

Albert Mohler: With the Sabbath approaching, the Romans flog Jesus nearly to death so that he will die quickly and will not be left on the cross after sundown.

Van Parunak: Pilate becomes the third, after Judas and the Jewish leaders, to “betray” the Lord.

1. Judas violated his obligation to the Lord as a disciple.
2. The leaders violated their obligation as the shepherds of Israel to recognize the Messiah.
3. Pilate violates his obligation as a magistrate to offer true judgment (**Deut 25:1**). Though he is not a Jew, according to **Daniel 4**, he holds his office as a trust from God, and is accountable to him for it.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the specific points of evidence that support the innocence and righteousness of Jesus?
- 2) Do we have the fortitude to stand by our convictions when pressured by the multitude?
- 3) In what ways does Barabbas serve as an illustration of substitutionary atonement?
- 4) What type of tension and emotions did Pilate experience as he grappled with the decision of how to handle the case of Jesus?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Scott LaPierre: Jesus took our place on the cross and this is demonstrated beautifully when He died in the place of Barabbas, a notorious sinner (**Matthew 27:15-26**). **Matthew 27:26**, says, “*Then Pilate released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.*” Put yourself in Barabbas’s place. When the guards came to get him, what do you think he thought...and didn’t think? He thought, “This is the time for me to be punished.” He didn’t, “This is the time for me to be released.” What do you think the guards said to him? Maybe something like, “Barabbas, you’re a guilty, evil man. You deserve to be punished, but you’re going to be released b/c Jesus of Nazareth is going to die in your place and receive the punishment you deserve.” The cross Jesus died on was probably the cross intended for Barabbas. <https://www.scottlapierre.org/jesus-took-our-place-on-the-cross/>

Allen Browne: Which Jesus Do You Want?

“Jesus Barabbas? Or Jesus called Christ?” What’s your response to Pilate’s question?

Which Jesus would you follow? The freedom-fighter, or the love-teacher?

The trouble with the one called Christ is that he doesn’t match our expectations of saving us. The Christ standing before the governor does not look like a saviour, *handed over* by his own people (**27:2, 18**), *handed over* by his own disciple (**27:3-4**), about to be *handed over to be crucified* (**27:26**). Love is a lovely ideal, but Jesus Barabbas makes more sense to the crowd.

That’s still the case for many today. For many Jews, Jesus was not a messiah because **he failed to save his people . . .**

Jesus’ approach to saving his people looks hopeless. Barabbas wins. The crowd get their hero, while God’s anointed is handed over to be crucified (**27:26**). Barabbas walks away, a kind of anti-Christ — a killer in Christ’s place. He cannot save his people, of course. Now they have more blood on their hands (**27:25**).

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2022/01/21/which-jesus-do-you-want/>

Matthew McCraw: **Pilate was rattled** and didn’t know what to do. He knew Jesus wasn’t guilty and he even ceremonially washed his hands to signify that he was innocent of Jesus’ blood. Pilate was conflicted yet he lacked the conviction to do the right thing. That ceremonial washing couldn’t help him, but Jesus could have.

Barabbas was released, but he wasn’t released to true freedom. He was still in chains to his sin. Barabbas was gone but still guilty. Pilate couldn’t really help Barabbas, but Jesus could have.

The people were being led astray by their leaders. They thought putting Jesus to death would help them. They were so convinced that the leaders were right in having Jesus killed that they said in **verse 25**, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” The irony is, the blood of Jesus was what they really needed for the cleansing of their sins. Instead, many of the Jewish people of that time would suffer judgment for putting God’s Son and their Messiah to death. The Jewish leaders couldn’t help the people, but Jesus could have.

That takes us to our bottom line:

Bottom Line: The only true *innocent One* provides the only true *escape for the guilty one*.
<https://fbcbartow.org/sermons/the-betrayer-the-governor-and-the-criminal-matthew-271-26/>

John MacArthur: What Shall I Do with Jesus?

Pilate asks the most important question that could ever be asked. . .

Realizing then that Jesus was from the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas in Galilee, and that Herod was in Jerusalem for the Passover, Pilate sent Jesus bound to Herod. And all the Jews went along with Him and they brought Him before Herod hoping -from Pilate's viewpoint – that Herod would take this thing over, condemn Jesus to death or deal with the Jewish people, or do something that he couldn't accomplish. And you remember Herod's response. He thought the idea was ludicrous. This man a king? He laughed. He mocked. He put a robe on Jesus and made a joke out of the whole thing. It was not only ridiculous, it was even funny. And Jesus became a laughing stock, the butt of the jokes of Herod.

And Herod sent Him back – and it's still not even 6:00 in the morning – back to Pilate again robed in this robe supposedly representing a king. And Pilate has Jesus back again. And through it all, it says, when He was in front of Herod, He said nothing – never a word. There was nothing to say. The verdict had been rendered. In fact, you might be interested to know that before this trial before Pilate and Herod is over, the innocence of Jesus will be stated five separate times. The religious world, the pagan world, the demons of hell cannot come up with one accusation that stands. And so, Jesus is silent. . .

Now you remember what I just pointed out in Luke's gospel, that he called together the chief priests and the leaders and the people. Do you remember that? We just read that. Why? Initially, in the first two phases, it was only the chief priests and leaders. Now **he calls the people**, because he has a plan. He knows that Jesus is popular with the people. It's now 6:00 a.m.; the city is moving about; it is the day of the Passover for the residents of Judea, Jerusalem. And so things are moving very fast early in the morning. And he calls the people because his plan is this: Jesus is popular with the people, Jesus is hated by the leaders. What I will do is offer them the alternative of Barabbas or Jesus and **pit the people against the leaders**. That was his plan, feeling that the people who were attracted to Jesus, who – by the way, and surely he was well aware of it – had hailed Jesus as their Messiah King and so forth on Monday when He rode in triumphally to the city. He knew of the popularity of Jesus. He was well aware of that. He also knew that the leaders wanted Jesus dead out of jealousy, **verse 18**. He knew it was a matter of envy. So he knew that this was a plot against Jesus by the leaders and thought he could pit the leaders against the people who felt Jesus to be very popular. . .

Pilate later on was taken out of Palestine, sent to Gaul and there he committed suicide. He committed suicide for the same reason that Judas did, because both of them couldn't deal with the tremendous guilt of having betrayed and dealt unjustly with the only perfectly righteous person that ever lived. As I told you before, the primary cause of suicide psychologically is retribution. It's self-inflicted punishment. And the ultimate crime demands the ultimate punishment. And we have little to wonder about in the suicide of Pilate as in the suicide of Judas. It really was inescapable. . .

What are you going to do with Jesus Christ? That's the question. Hate Him? Mindlessly reject Him because everybody around you does? Or maybe you just laugh at the whole thing. Or maybe you just say, "Well, look, I'm not interested in it. I really don't want to have anything to do with this." Or maybe you just choose what is and sacrifice eternity like Pilate did, and put Jesus away – get rid of Him. You will make a choice and it will be one of those. And it will be an eternal thing.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus Before Pilate

The first thing I want you to see is the **weakness of Pilate in the face of injustice**. That's a negative of justice. That's a negative example for us as Christians if we have an position of influence, whether it be in the legal system or in our society. Pilate was a man of influence and position and status and power who could have done something about this, and he refuses to do it. He acted pragmatically because of his own interests and not on the basis of principle. And I think there is a negative message in that for us in that. As Christians, whenever we have influence in society, God intends for us to act on principle and not merely on expedience.

But more than that, Matthew is showing us here **the innocence of Christ** in this section. He is showing us that Jesus' betrayer has pronounced Him as innocent. Jesus' judge pronounces Him as innocent. Jesus is utterly innocent of what He is being accused of. He is the righteous Lamb of God being led away to slaughter for sins that He has not committed. What is Matthew doing? He is building for you a theology of the death of Christ. He's telling why the death of Christ occurred. Was it an accident? No. Was it out of control of the plan of God? No. Was it something whereby Jesus did something wrong, and He accidentally fell into this situation? No. Matthew is saying over and over this is an innocent man who is going to die. He is preparing you to understand the meaning of the death of Christ. And Matthew is showing you in that very difficult phrase in **verse 25**, he is showing you here that any Jew, or anyone for that matter, but any Jew especially he is speaking of – remember, he's speaking in the context of Jews and Jewish Christians – any Jew who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ is calling down on his own head the curses of God. That's Matthew's point.

But my friends, finally in this passage Matthew is showing us **the wounds which He bore for our transgressions**. You remember **Isaiah 53, verse 5**? He was wounded for our transgressions; and the torture and the beating and the flogging which the Lord Jesus Christ received here, He received because He chose to receive them for you.

Let me just remind you again that if there's ever an indication that Pilate wanted Jesus to talk Himself out of the charges, when Jesus refuses to talk Himself out of these charges, Jesus is as much saying, "I choose to be beaten, I choose to be scourged, I choose to be crucified for that man's bitterness, for that woman's anger, for that man's rebellion against God, for that man's estrangement from his wife and for that child's disobedience. I choose to be scourged, beaten, flogged, crucified, dead and buried, because I wish to stand in the place of all who trust in Me so that they might never receive the just sentence of God. I receive this unjust sentence so that you might receive the sentence of grace.

Ray Pritchard: Barabbas or Jesus?

[Barabbas] was a **cold-blood killer**. As with many terrorists in our day, he may not have looked dangerous. But he was a menace to decent society. When you add the word "*notorious*," it means that everyone knew about Barabbas.

Prison was where he belonged. He was there because of heinous crimes. Why would anyone want him to be set free? . . .

Pilate's problem can be stated this way. *He knew who Jesus was not, but he didn't know who he was.* He wasn't a criminal, a crook, a thief, a bandit, a revolutionary, a murderer, or a lawbreaker. As far as Pilate was concerned, Jesus had done nothing wrong at all, certainly nothing deserving of death. But **he didn't know who he was.** Was he a mystic, a visionary dreamer, an idealistic teacher, or was he something more? Under pressure from the Jews, Pilate had to make a fast decision. . .

When **Thomas Whitelaw** wrote about the crowd's choice of Barabbas over Jesus, he mentioned seven words that summarize that momentous event:

1. It was *popular* but the popular choice is often wrong.
2. It was *frenzied*. "When passion rules, judgment dies."
3. It was *criminal* to prefer a murderer over the Prince of Life.
4. It was *foolish* to choose an enemy and reject a friend like Jesus.
5. It was *fatal* in that it guaranteed judgment to the nation.
6. It was *predicted* in **Isaiah 53:3**.
7. It was *overruled* by God to bring salvation to the world.

In that final point we see the wisdom and greatness of God who could use the evil choice of a foolish mob to bring salvation to the world. It is the ultimate irony that those who so disrespected Jesus could be saved by the death they chose for him.

TEXT: Matthew 27:27-31

TITLE: HAIL KING OF THE JEWS

BIG IDEA:

JESUS SUBMITTED TO HIS HUMILIATING MOCKING CORONATION AS THE KING OF THE JEWS BY HIS ROMAN CAPTORS

INTRODUCTION:

R. T. France: After Jesus was condemned by the Jewish leaders, they abused and mocked him (26:67–68). Now that the Roman trial is finished the governor’s soldiers do the same, but in a suitably cruder and more violent way. To have a supposedly self-proclaimed king in their power offered unusually good sport, and for non-Jewish soldiers to have such an opportunity of abusing a Jewish dignitary with impunity was a chance not to be missed. The whole scene is a **mock enthronement**, with improvised cheap substitutes doing duty for the royal robe, crown and scepter, and physical abuse substituted for loyal homage. After the brutal torture of the Roman flogging Jesus would be in no state to resist even if he had wished, and his already battered physical condition would only add to the pathetic appearance of this Jewish “king.” All this takes place out of the public domain, where there are no Jewish onlookers to take racial offense. By the time Jesus emerges into the open on the way to the cross, the instruments of mockery have been removed and Jesus is back in his normal clothes.

Leon Morris: It is possible that Matthew is mocking these mockers. **Patte** reminds us that “Mockeries, like caricatures, involve portraying a person by selecting a few actual characteristics of that person and excluding his or her other characteristics.” He sees mockery in Matthew’s reference to “*soldiers of the governor*.” “Matthew expects his readers to perceive not only that the soldiers are insensitive and cruel in their treatment of Jesus but also that the soldiers are ridiculous and thus wrong in their assessment of Jesus.... The soldiers, apparently under the political authority of the Roman governor, are actually under the authority of the Jewish people whose orders they will carry out by crucifying Jesus” (**Patte**, pp. 381, 382).

Daniel Doriani: The goal was to mock and to degrade Jesus, and in a way the soldiers succeeded. But they surely degraded themselves even more. It reminds us that whenever we attack someone, we hurt ourselves, not just the target of our wrath.

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus took all of this humiliation and pain without speaking or fighting back (**1 Peter 2:18ff.**). His submission was not a sign of weakness; it was a sign of strength.

David Turner: The Roman soldiers’ mockery at Pilate’s residence fulfills Jesus’s prophecy (**20:19**; cf. **Ps. 22:7**; **Isa. 50:6**). The religious leaders have already mocked Jesus (**Matt. 26:67–68**), and worse taunting is to come (**26:68**; **27:39–44**). The scarlet robe, crown of thorns, and reed (**Pss. 2:9**; **110:2**; **Jer. 48:17**) are intended as a cruel parody of royalty. The Romans’ derision is probably fueled by the fact that Jesus is purported to be king of a people conquered and ruled by Rome. The profound irony is that one day these soldiers will join all humanity, including the Jews, in homage to the conquering Son of Man (**Dan. 7:13–14**; **Phil. 2:9–11**). Those of the cohort who crucify Jesus will soon rethink their mockery (**Matt. 27:54**). After the mocking charade, Jesus is led away to be crucified.

Matthew McCraw: Understanding this experience that Jesus endured should cause us to **reflect** upon the great love that Jesus demonstrated towards us and to **revere** the great majesty of our King. Let this moment cause you to reflect and revere. He who suffered great **humiliation** is worthy of great **exaltation**.

<https://fbcbartow.org/sermons/the-crucifixion-of-the-christ-matthew-2727-44/>

(:27) PROLOGUE

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.”

Craig Blomberg: “*The Praetorium*” in **v. 27** refers to the official residence of the Roman ruler, which also sometimes housed the soldiers' barracks. This could have been located at the Antonium fortress (Pilate's center of activity when in Jerusalem) or Herod's palace (where Antipas of Galilee stayed when visiting). Gathering the whole “company” (literally cohort) would involve six hundred men, one tenth of a legion, if the troops were at complete strength.

Leon Morris: The word referred to the official residence of the governor, but it is not known where Pilate resided when he came to Jerusalem. He lived in Caesarea, where his real praetorium was, but the name was given to whatever residence he used while he was in Jerusalem. Some commentators hold that this would have been Herod's palace, others that it would have been the tower of Antonia. Whichever it was, it would seem that there was attached to it a place where soldiers could be garrisoned, and it was to this part of the palace that Jesus was taken.

Donald Hagner: The statement that ὅλην τὴν σπεῖραν, “*the whole cohort*,” gathered together around Jesus is probably hyperbolic. Technically a “*cohort*” consisted of 600 soldiers, although the number varied. It was, however, apparently a fairly large number of rough men who mocked Jesus with their crass humor.

I. (:28-29) PARODY OF JESUS' ALLEGED KINGSHIP

Craig Blomberg: The scarlet robe they place on him was likely a red soldier's tunic. Together with the crown of thorns (as royal diadem) and reed (as royal scepter), the robe adorns Jesus as a vassal king. Likewise, when the soldiers pay mock homage and utter Hail, King of the Jews, their words mimic “Ave Caesar,” used to hail the emperor.

D. A. Carson: Here we have humanity at its worst—a scene of vicious mockery. The Jews have mocked Jesus as Messiah (**26:67–68**); here the Roman soldiers ridicule him as king. Matthew's readers recognize that the soldiers speak more truly than they know, for Jesus is both King and Suffering Servant.

A. (:28) Pseudo Kingly Garments

“And they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him.”

Leon Morris: Their horseplay centered around the fact that Jesus had been convicted of being a king. Matthew is describing a highly ironical situation; the soldiers went out of their way to produce trappings of royalty as a means of ridiculing one who was to be crucified as a King,

whereas he really was King in a fuller and wider sense than they had any idea of. They decided that his clothing was not suitable for royalty, so they took it off and replaced it with a scarlet cloak (only Matthew has this detail; Mark speaks of their clothing Jesus with purple, the color of royalty, but he does not mention the cloak). Since this kind of cloak was used by military officers, there would have been no great difficulty in getting one, perhaps an old one, discarded by an officer. The point of it was apparently that the color was somewhere near purple, the color of royalty. By getting a cloak of a color not quite that of royalty the soldiers were mocking Jesus' claim to be a king.

B. (:29a) Pseudo Kingly Crown and Scepter

“And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand;”

Leon Morris: A crown was needed for a king, so these funny fellows got some thorny material and plaited a crown out of it. They pressed this on Jesus' head, which would have both mocked his kingship and increased his sufferings. For a scepter they put a reed in his right hand. So they had all the outward trappings of royalty, but every one a piece of cruel mockery.

William Hendriksen: Somewhere in the vicinity of the praetorium the soldiers find some thorny twigs. Whether the plant from which they obtained these twigs was the *Spina Christi* or *Palinrus Shrub*, as some think, is not known. It has been pointed out by botanists that few countries of the size of Palestine have so many varieties of prickly plants. The identity of the species is of little importance. Far more significant is the fact that thorns and thistles are mentioned in **Gen. 3:18** in connection with Adam's fall. Here in **Matt. 27:29a** and its parallels Jesus is pictured as bearing the curse that lies upon nature, in order to deliver nature and us from it.

Jerry Crabtree: The reed (Greek *kalamos*) was the heavy, rigid stalk of a reed plant (**Louw and Nida** I:35).

C. (:29b) Pseudo Acclamation

“and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”

II. (:30) PHYSICAL MOCKERY OF JESUS

“And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.”

Leon Morris: There would have been no serious physical violence about this part of the incident, but there was contemptuous mockery of all that Jesus stood for. The soldiers make it clear that nobody should take seriously the bedraggled figure in their charge (cf. **Isa. 50:6**).

Grant Osborne: The spitting and beating may have started with mock kisses (oriental custom) and salutes of homage but degenerated into pure cruelty. The imperfect in “[they] *hit*” (ἔτυπτον) could be durative (kept on striking Jesus) or ingressive (began to hit him). The former seems more in keeping with the imagery. It may also be that this imagery favors a stick or cane rather than a fragile reed (which would break with repeated hitting).

III. (:31) PREPARATION FOR CRUCIFIXION

“And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.”

Donald Hagner: When they were finished with their cruel play (for ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ, “they mocked him,” cf. v. 29), the soldiers took off the cloak, clothed Jesus with his own garments (an exception to normal practice, probably for the sake of the sensitivities of the Jewish crowds in the city for the Feast of Passover), and they led him off to be crucified.

Craig Blomberg: At last the soldiers tire of their game, reclothe Jesus in his own garments, and lead him away to his death.

Charles Swindoll: After they had had enough “fun” with their condemned but innocent victim, they removed the robe and returned His garments. The time had come. The preparations had been completed. During the seemingly endless ordeal of mocking and beating, two more criminals condemned to die had been retrieved from their cells and given crossbeams to carry. Taking the place of the freed Barabbas, the bloodied Jesus of Nazareth was led into the parade heading to the place of crucifixion (27:31).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could professional soldiers be allowed to act so unprofessionally?
- 2) What do we learn about our own depravity from the wicked conduct of these soldiers?
- 3) How does this passage provide more insight into the earlier texts in Matthew where Jesus set His face in firm resolve to go to Jerusalem to accomplish the work of redemption?
- 4) How will these voices of mockery be reduced to mockery when these soldiers find themselves without excuse at the final judgment before the majestic King of Kings and Lord of Lords/

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

D. A. Carson: vv.28-31 -- Here we have humanity at its worst—a **scene of vicious mockery**. The Jews have mocked Jesus as Messiah (26:67–68); here the Roman soldiers ridicule him as king. Matthew’s readers recognize that the soldiers speak more truly than they know, for Jesus is both King and Suffering Servant. The “robe” (*chlamys*, in the NT only here and in v.31) is probably the short red cloak worn by Roman military and civilian officials (v.28). Mark and John describe it as “purple,” Matthew as “scarlet.” . . .

For a crown (v.29) the soldiers plaited a wreath of thorns from palm spines or acanthus (**Brown**, *Death of the Messiah*, 866–67, lists other possible plants) and crushed it down on Jesus’ head in imitation of the circlet on the coins of Tiberius Caesar (cf. **TDNT**, 7:619–24, 632–33). Whether

this “*crown*” was left on Jesus’ head after this mockery, the text does not say . . . The staff they put in his hand stood for a royal scepter, and the mocking “*Hail, King of the Jews!*” corresponded to the Roman acclamation “*Ave, Caesar!*” and capped the flamboyant kneeling. Not content with the ridicule and the torture of the thorns, they spat on him (v.30) and used the staff, the symbol of his kingly authority, to hit him on the head “*again and again*” (not required by the imperfect tense of the verb but perhaps hinted at).

“*After they had mocked him*” (v.31; the time is established by the flow of the narrative, not by the [aorist] tense . . . they dressed him again in his own clothes and led him off to be crucified. Normally a prisoner went naked to his place of execution and was scourged along the route. That this custom was not followed with Jesus may be because he had already been flogged and more flogging might have killed him. Or it may reflect an attempt not to offend too many Jewish sensibilities during a feast time. Jesus was led away by the execution squad of four soldiers, dragging the crosspiece to which his hands would be nailed (Jn 19:17, 23).

One cannot help but observe that the mocking soldiers meant their cry, “*Hail, king of the Jews!*” to be **mockingly ironic**; the words meant the opposite of what they formally say. But Matthew sees a deeper irony: Jesus is the king of the Jews, a theme the evangelist has emphasized since first introducing it in 1:1.

Robert Gundry: These details of the Gentiles’ mockery of Jesus add thoroughness of fulfillment to its large scale. Here are the indignities done to him:

- (1) his being disrobed;
- (2) his being dressed up in a scarlet cloak, an ordinary soldier’s mantle, as though it were a kingly robe;
- (3) his being crowned with braided thorns, as though they were a woven wreath like Caesar’s;
- (4) his having a reed put in his right hand, as though the reed were a king’s scepter;
- (5) his being knelt before and mockingly greeted as the king of the Jews;
- (6) his being spat on in mockery of his subroyal cloak; and
- (7) his having the reed taken from him and used to beat him on the head in mockery of his subroyal crown. Crowning Jesus with thorns had the purpose of mockery, not of inflicting pain, though presumably it did inflict pain.

Ironically, what the soldiers intended as mockery in kneeling before him is exactly what they should have done seriously. For Jesus is “*God with us*” (1:23). See the comments on 26:49 for irony in the greeting, “*Hail!*” And there’s even further irony in the soldiers’ greeting Jesus as “*the king of the Jews*” (compare 27:11). For though they don’t think so, Jesus really is the king of the Jews (2:2; 21:5). See the comments on 26:67 for his being spat on. A reed would be too flimsy to hurt him; so beating him on the head with it has to do again with mockery more than with inflicting pain. Putting his own clothes back on him prepares for the next episode, which will include soldiers’ dividing the clothes among themselves.

Timothy Shrimpton -- Gloria Dei Lutheran Church: The soldiers found this whole scene hilarious. They had no respect for the Jewish people. In fact, many of them probably resented being stationed in an outpost so far away from the sights and sounds of Rome. And so if here they had a chance to mock the Jewish people even more by ridiculing the one that was supposedly claiming to be their king, well they took full advantage of the opportunity.

They harshly removed his clothing, which would've been suffering in itself. Jesus has been beaten severely earlier at Pilate's command, likely with a whip of many cords that each had little bit of metal on the end. His back would have been raw and bloody, and as the blood began to clot, his clothing would have gotten stuck in there. Just removing his clothes would have reopened fresh and already searing wounds.

That would have been enough, but then there's insult to this injury. After all, even as our chapel conversation bore out, what is a king without his crown and sign of his ruling authority? So a crown made out of harsh thorns is placed on his head and a staff made out of a reed placed in his hand. Hardly the marks of royalty; this is nothing but a grim, disturbing farce. And just in case the crown wasn't uncomfortable enough, and just in case anyone got the wrong idea that the staff this man carried was a sign of any real power and authority, the King's crown is beat into his head as he's struck repeatedly on the head with the staff that had just been given to him. The "homage" paid to him continues with shouts of false praise, "**Hail, King of the Jews!**" after falling before him. Yet the accolades are accompanied by spit in his face.

This whole scene, difficult as it is to stomach, is eventually brought to an end, but only because it's time to go to the cross. The time for mocking and humiliating Jesus while beating him is over; the time for mocking and humiliating Jesus while killing him has come.

What are we supposed to take away from all of this? What are we to make of a king who suffers such horrendous abuse? What are we to make of a king who makes no effort to rescue himself, that calls on no army to save him, that doesn't even lift a finger to make an attempt to stop any of this? Consider what Jesus had said just a few hours before this, while still in the Garden of Gethsemane the previous night: **One of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:51-54).** Let those words echo in your mind for a moment, "**it must be so.**"

Why? Why did this king, *our* King, have to endure this? Because this is not a show of weakness or lack of power—he makes clear that he could in an instant have twelve legions, more than 61,000 angels at his disposal, more than enough to stop his arrest or certainly halt this humiliation he's enduring. No, this is not weakness, but mercy. Our King is on a mission to *save*. A king's primary responsibility is to protect his people. But, it's not often that a leader sacrificing himself to an enemy will result in anything good for those he's trying to protect.

Maybe you've wondered at Jesus' comment that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (**John 10:11**). What good is it to the flock if the shepherd lets himself be killed by the wolves? Won't the wolves then just move onto the defenseless flock? And what good would it be for a nation whose leader allows himself to be killed by the enemy? The people left would be without leadership and utterly defenseless. Our nation's regulations protect the President and those who would follow him in the event of a tragedy for just this reason, so that the nation is never left without a leader.

But this King and this battle is different. God had said that the job of the Savior would be miserable. Right from the first promise of a Messiah, God had said that Satan would "**bruise his**

heel” (Genesis 3:15). That heel striking is what is going on here, that heel striking is what will happen when the hammer blows ring out at the crucifixion. The Messiah’s job was to suffer, was to die. But what did God say the Messiah would do to Satan? **“He will crush your head.”**

Jesus is going in our place. He would suffer this physical torment—and so much more the spiritual disaster of hell itself—because of us. His mission of mercy isn’t so much falling down on the field of battle as he is exchanging his life for the lives of millions of his own people held hostage. We were shackled by our sin to death. There was no escape from it. Hell, for disobeying our God, was our only future, unless someone came in and made an exchange. And that’s what our King did. He took our place and endured the punishment of hell that you and I deserved and now we are free. There is no punishment for sins left because Jesus took it all on himself.

<https://www.gdluth.org/blogs/sermon-archive/2014/11/23/sermon-our-king-is-an-unlikely-ruler-matthew-27:27-31-end-times-4-2014>

Steve Schamber: Hands of Brutality

Christ was brutalized for you as your perfect substitute. If Jesus hadn't endured this shame, if he had avoided the indignity, if he had retreated from the cross or refused to drink even a drop of the suffering -- then there is no forgiveness of sins, and God's wrath toward you is still undiminished. God's wrath is far more severe than any Roman soldier's.

<https://sermons.logos.com/sermons/719125-matthew-27:27-31-hands-of-brutality>

John MacArthur: The Wickedness of the Crucifixion

They see Jesus, no doubt, as a strange and pathetic figure. By the time He gets to this moment, He is a tragedy to look at. His face has been slapped repeatedly. It has been punched until it is swollen and bruised. It has been spit on till His face is covered with spit. His body now is lacerated and He bleeds profusely from the shoulders down. They know that He is supposedly a king, because the people are screaming about His claim to be that. They know the people want Him dead. They see Him as a rather pathetic fake and fraud, perhaps mentally deranged and worthy only of their mockery. And when all through this entire encounter with them, He never says a single thing, they no doubt questioned His intelligence and perhaps even His sanity. They play Him like a clown as they would with an idiot boy in the street. They are cold. They are they indifferent. And they are ignorant. And this mentally deficient faker is nothing more than the butt of their jokes.

And so, under the tutelage of Pilate, they mock Jesus’ claim to be a king, because that is part of Pilate’s plan. Now the soldiers, I do not believe, did this independent of Pilate. I think they did it under his watchful eye. For when John’s gospel tells us that Jesus later was brought out to the crowd, after scourging and in this garb of the king with which they dress Him, it says that when they brought Jesus out, Pilate came out also. So Pilate must have been back in the praetorium aware at least of what was going on and looking on it with some favor and wanting Jesus under the conditions of appearing as mock king to be brought before the Jews so that they would see how foolish, how stupid, how silly their claim was that this man was a threat either to Rome or Israel.

Already bleeding from the scourging which opened up His flesh, blood flowing out all over His body, agony in every nerve, His whole body quivering in tortuous pain, He becomes the object of the soldiers ridicule as they all gather around Him and begin their little game. The first thing they did was strip Him, they stripped Him. They loved to do this. They don’t do this reluctantly. They don’t like the Jews. In fact they hate the Jews. They’ve had a lot of problems with them.

And any way they can mock them, they can enjoy thoroughly. And so there's a certain kind of glee in what they do. And there are, by the way, no Jews in the praetorium. The Bible tells us they wouldn't come in there lest they would be defiled and thus be unable to celebrate the Passover by entering into a defiling Gentile place. . .

But all of this makes Jesus look ridiculous. He is a joke. He is bloody from head to foot. His face is now unrecognizable. He is hardly human. His face is distorted by the pain of emotion. It is distorted by spiritual anguish. It is distorted by the feeling of sin bearing and the very bearing of sin. It is distorted by bruises and swollenness and spittle mixed with blood and the dust and dirt of the day. And He is a scene of ugliness of which the prophet Isaiah says *there is no beauty that we should desire Him*. . .

And so, they carried on their little game further in **verse 30** by taking the reed out of His right hand and – the Greek text says – *repeatedly struck Him on the head*. More blows, slaps already, punches with the fist already, spit, and now hitting Him repeatedly in the head with this reed. Why were they doing that? Not particularly to crush the thorns deeper into His brow, although it certainly had that effect. They did this primarily to show what a joke His authority was. What kind of a king are you? We can rip the very scepter out of your hand and beat on your head with it. Your sovereignty is a laugh. Your kingliness is a joke. Anybody who can spit on a king and hit him in the head with his own scepter and have nothing happen in retaliation is some kind of king. You're a farce. In **John chapter 19 verse 3**, John adds in the same scene, "*They kept punching Him*." It's an unbelievable scene of **human evil**. And it isn't that they have anything against Him. They don't even know Him. It is the depravity of the human heart. Given the opportunity to do whatever it wants, it does this. Inconceivable. It is a brutal amusement.

And though He endures it all, He says nothing. He offers no resistance. He says nothing. He is willing to suffer for sinners, to suffer not only the death on the cross but everything that came along with it. He will fulfill His calling. He endured such contradiction of sinners, it says in **Hebrews 12:3**. He endured it all, and He knew it was going to come. In **chapter 20**, do you remember what He said? In **chapter 20** He told His disciples in **verse 18**, *we go to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed. The chief priests and the scribes, and they'll condemn Him to death. And in verse 19, "And they'll deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify, and the third day He'll rise again."* He was right on schedule. He had been to the Jews, now He was with the Gentiles, and they would mock Him, and then they would crucify Him. He was right on schedule. Silently He endured it all – humiliation, agony, pain beyond belief.

TEXT: Matthew 27:32-37

TITLE: THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE KING

BIG IDEA:

THE KING OF THE JEWS SUBMITTED TO HUMILIATING INDIGNITIES AND PAINFUL SUFFERING IN HIS UNJUST CRUCIFIXION TO ACCOMPLISH OUR REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION:

D. A. Carson: Crucifixion was unspeakably painful and degrading. Whether tied or nailed to the cross, the victim endured countless paroxysms as he pulled with his arms and pushed with his legs to keep his chest cavity open for breathing and then collapsed in exhaustion until the demand for oxygen demanded renewed paroxysms. The scourging, the loss of blood, the shock from the pain all produced agony that could go on for days, ending at last by suffocation, cardiac arrest, or loss of blood. When there was reason to hasten death, the execution squad would smash the victim's legs. Death followed almost immediately, either from shock or from collapse that cut off breathing.

R. T. France: the narrative focus in these verses is rather on the surrounding events and the people involved (Simon, the soldiers, the bandits), together with the ironical placard over Jesus' head which sums up the Roman dismissal of his claims.

John MacArthur: The Bible is not preoccupied with the physical events of the cross. It is preoccupied with the wickedness of men. It never describes the agony of Jesus. Do you know that? It never does. It only describes what men did to Him. It doesn't describe His own feeling. Outside the garden, we know nothing of the agony, and outside the sayings on the cross, which themselves do not express His agony, except in separation from God. The physical agony of Jesus is not the issue.

David Thompson: JESUS CHRIST WENT THROUGH ALL OF THE RIDICULE, HUMILIATION, AND PAIN OF THE CRUCIFIXION BECAUSE THIS IS THE ONLY WAY SINNERS COULD BE SAVED FROM THEIR SIN.

Allen Browne: The Meaning of the Cross

Matthew focuses on four groups who all scorn Jesus for his kingship claims:

1. **Soldiers:** King of the Jews (v. 37)
2. **Compatriots** passing by: Temple demolisher/builder. Son of God (v. 40).
3. Jerusalem **authorities:** King of Israel, son of God (vv. 42-43)
4. Crucified **criminals:** same ridicule (v.44).

Two phrases are repeated: *king of Jews/Israel, son of God*. As we've explained, these two phrases meant the same thing to the Jewish people. Neither the passers-by nor the Jerusalem authorities understood the doctrine of the trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit): that is not what *son of God* meant on their lips.

Son of God was a **kingship term**. The Davidic king was the prince (son of the heavenly sovereign) reigning on earth with the authority of his Father in heaven. That's how God established David's kingship: *I will be his father, and he will be my son* (**2 Samuel 7:14**). As each Davidic king was crowned, God made this decree: *You are my son; today I have become your father* (**Psalms 2:7**).

So, all four groups Matthew describes are focused on **Jesus' kingship**:

1. The **soldiers** have already been mocking Jesus' kingship (**27:27-31**). Now they commit it to writing (**v. 37**).
2. One week earlier, his **compatriots** lauded the Davidic king who would save them (**21:9**). Now they mock the king who cannot even save himself (**v. 40**).
3. The Jerusalem **authorities** condemned him for his claim to be God's anointed king (the Christ, the son), a claim they considered blasphemous (**26:59-66**). Now they deride him for his belief that God would raise him up as king (**vv. 42-43**).
4. The **criminals** were positioned beside him, possibly as mock attendants of the king (**v. 38**). They find his royal status as ludicrous as everyone else (**v. 44**).

Jesus' kingship is the single motif in Matthew's description of the cross. That's the meaning of the cross: the world disposing of its king. United in their rejection of God's anointed ruler are: the Empire's military forces (soldiers), the people of God's nation (his compatriots), the leaders called to represent God (high priests), and the condemned criminals. **The cross is the rejection of divine kingship in his anointed.**

There are many ways to talk about the cross, many theories of the atonement. The New Testament uses a range of these. We can view the cross through the framework of Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies (as **Hebrews** does). We can view it as a place of judgement (justification). We can view it as a penalty Jesus bore on our behalf (penal substitution). We can view it as God making peace between heaven and earth (reconciliation). We can view it as the ultimate expression of sin and rebellion against God (assassinating his Son).

But perhaps we miss the main point if we don't see it as an **expression of divine kingship**.

The kingdom of God was at the heart of everything for Jesus, the core of his theology. Heaven's reign over the earth was his message, his gospel (**Matthew 4:17; 9:35; 24:14**). It was when the disciples recognized him as God's anointed ruler that Jesus began to explain that those in power would put him to death (**16:21; 17:22; 20:18**).

According to Matthew, the cross is the rejection of God's kingship in God's anointed. The entire Gospel is the story of how the anointed son of David (**1:1**) receives all authority (**28:18-20**).

So, is this crucial perspective for understanding the cross? Is it primarily **the human rejection of the divinely appointed king**? Is that what Matthew is telling us?

If so, the cross is the most astounding revelation of the character of God, of how he exercises his **sovereign kingship**. It might be enough to make us rethink our theology of God and his sovereignty.

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2022/02/10/the-meaning-of-the-cross/>

I. (:32) INSIGNIFICANT JEW FORCED TO CARRY CHRIST'S CROSS

“And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.”

Grant Osborne: Normally a prisoner carried his own crosspiece (at times being scourged on the way) to the execution site, where it was fixed to the vertical beam kept there for crucifixions (**Keener**). But Christ's loss of blood made it obvious that he could not bear his cross far, so they requisitioned a civilian (a legal prerogative of the Romans); Simon likely bore it himself rather than helped Jesus, as many old inscriptions hint (Simon with the cross and Jesus holding the bottom end).

Leon Morris: In all three Synoptic accounts it appears that this was a chance meeting; Simon just happened to be there at the time. Mark tells us that this man was “*the father of Alexander and Rufus,*” evidently people known in the church of his day, and probably Christians (would the Evangelists bother naming people like this unless they were Christians? Did what he heard and saw that day lead Simon to become a follower of Jesus?). He and Luke add the information that Simon was coming from the country (or possibly from the field). That he was a man of Cyrene may mean that he was a Gentile, but more probably that he was a Jew of the diaspora, now in Jerusalem for the Passover festival. He may, of course, have been resident in Jerusalem at this time; we have no way of knowing.

Charles Swindoll: The traditional route from the Antonia Fortress to Golgotha is known today as the Via Dolorosa. It winds through a noisy, bustling public marketplace along narrow stone streets sometimes barely wide enough for a donkey pulling a cart. If men and women lined the path two or three deep on both sides, it would be just possible for a person to slip through the center. It's quite likely that in the first century this road was similarly congested and chaotic, especially during the busy time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

II. (:33-34) INDIGNITIES HEAPED ON THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

A. (:33) Delivering Him to Golgotha for Crucifixion

“And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Golgotha is the Aramaic word for “*skull.*” If the name describes the appearance of the hill then what is today known as Gordon's Calvary may be the place where Jesus was crucified. The “Church of the Holy Sepulchre” built by the Roman Emperor Constantine marks the traditional spot and is believed by many scholars to be the more probable spot (**Wilkins** 897-898; **Hagner** 33B:834; **Carson**, Matthew 574).

Donald Hagner: It refers obviously to a place where executions were carried out, perhaps a skull-shaped knoll, although its exact location just outside the city wall has long been debated. It is much more probable, however, that it was located where the present Church of the Holy Sepulcher is located (see Riesner) than in the area where the so-called Garden (Gordon's) Tomb is located. Although inside the city wall (the so-called third wall) since the time of Herod Agrippa I, the former location was **outside the wall** at the time of the crucifixion.

R. T. France: The traditional identification of Golgotha as a rocky mound just outside the then city wall and now enclosed within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is unlikely to be provable, but matches adequately with the biblical data for the place of Jesus' death and burial. If the

Roman trial took place at Herod's palace, the route to this site would be a short one, less than half a mile out through the city gate beside the palace and north along the western wall, rather than the longer Via Dolorosa which tradition has based on the assumption that the trial took place at the Antonia fortress.

Stu Weber: This was beside a well-traveled road where the passersby in and out of Jerusalem could see the execution of criminals.

David Lose: And after the gruesome parade through the city to the execution grounds comes the crucifixion proper. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. The victim, first impaled upon the wood and then hung up as a spectacle, most often died not of the wounds themselves but from asphyxiation or dehydration, possibly several days later. Horrible...by design. This was Rome's way, you see, of making a statement, of warning all who might journey near the condemned of the fate of those who oppose the Empire.

<https://www.davidlose.net/2014/04/matthew-27-32-37/>

B. (:34) Mocking Him with Deceptive Drink

*“they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall;
and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.”*

Leon Morris: When they reached the place of execution, they offered Jesus wine mixed with gall. This appears to be a reference to a custom mentioned in the Talmud: “When one is led out to execution, he is given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense, in order to benumb his senses, for it is written, Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul. And it has also been taught: The noble women in Jerusalem used to donate and bring it” (Sanh. 43a; the passage quoted is in **Prov. 31:6**). The alternative is a reference to the ordinary sour wine used by the soldiers, and Carson suggests that this wine had been made so bitter that Jesus refused to drink it; it would then have been part of the soldiers' mockery of their prisoner (so also **Gundry**, “the offer of the bitter drink is not an act of mercy, but an act of mockery” (Use of the OT, p. 202). That Jesus tasted it but then refused to drink it seems to mean that he preferred to keep his senses undulled as he came to the supreme moment when he would give his life as a ransom for the many (cf. **20:28**).

Albert Mohler: Feigning that they are offering Jesus a cup of refreshment, the soldiers offer Jesus wine mixed with a bitter herb, a drink that could intensify his parched thirst. After tasting it, Jesus refuses to drink the rest.

R. T. France: Jesus' refusal of the laced wine might be simply because it was, as in the psalm, an unpleasant drink offered in spite. But if, as is more likely, it was intended to dull the pain, Matthew may have mentioned Jesus' refusal in order to show his determination to go through the ordeal in full consciousness. He has chosen to drink the cup which his Father has given him (**26:39–42**), and not be deflected by any human potion, however well-meaning.

Robert Gundry: *they gave him wine to drink mixed with gall* [a bitter, yellow-brown or greenish fluid, also called bile and secreted by the liver of an animal and stored in the gall bladder]. The mixture adds insult to injury. *And on tasting [it], he didn't want to drink [it]*. Nor did he, not just because it tasted bitter, but because he'd said he would no more “*drink from this produce of the vine [that is, wine]*” till he drank it “*anew*” with his disciples “*in [his] Father's kingdom*” (**26:29**). Saying that Jesus “*didn't want to drink*” rather than saying that he didn't drink stresses

his **determination to keep the vow of abstinence**. “*Wine . . . mixed with gall*” alludes to **Psalm 69:21a**, fulfilled here, and adds to the **indignities** already done to Jesus.

John Schultz: Matthew reports that the potion Jesus was offered to drink consisted of wine mixed with gall. Mark mentions myrrh, which would work as an anesthetic, somewhat dulling the pain of the crucifixion. The drug was probably not meant to ease the suffering of hanging on the cross but more to help the soldiers drive in the nails without the victim struggling too much. Jesus refused the drug and submitted to being nailed to the cross without struggle.

III. (:35-36) IMAGINED DOMINION EXERCISED BY PAGAN SOLDIERS

A. (:35) Possessing His Garments

“And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots;”

William Hendriksen: Having crucified him, the legionaries divided his garments by casting lots. In all probability by means of the throwing of dice the four pieces – headgear, sandals, belt, and outer garment – are divided among the four (**John 19:23**) soldiers. The seamless tunic, all of one piece, woven all the way from top to bottom, is also put into the lottery, all of this in accordance with the prophecy of **Ps. 22:18** (**LXX Ps. 21:19**), though this reference to fulfillment is not found in Matthew but in **John 19:23, 24**.

Scott Harris: The clothing of the condemned would become the property of the soldiers assigned to perform the crucifixion. It was extra pay for them, but it also fulfilled another prophecy. **Psalm 22:18** said that they would “*divide My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.*” John tells us that Jesus’ outer garments were divided into four parts, but that they did not want to destroy Jesus’ tunic since it was seamless, so they cast lots for it. After this the soldiers sat down to watch and wait.

Crucifixion was designed to be a **cruel method of death**. It would bring its victims to the edge of maximum endurance of physical pain, but short of the point that would bring unconsciousness, and it was extended over a long period of time. It usually took a day or two for the condemned to die, but on occasion there would be those who might last three days, and there would be much **physical agony** the whole time.

There would be the pain from where the spikes had been driven through the feet and hands, actually the wrist area where the bone structure would support the weight. There would be pain from the scourging and the raw flesh from the scraping against the rough wood as well as the splinters that would work their way deeper into the flesh. But there was also pain from thirst, hunger, cramping, dizziness, fever, and sleeplessness.

Crucifixion brings death through suffocation. Breathing is difficult and accomplished by raising oneself up. Soon, the muscles begin to cramp, but as the carbon dioxide builds up the cramps partially subside. A few breaths are taken and the cramping returns. Cycles of partial suffocation and cramping continues until exhaustion takes over and the person can no longer lift himself to breathe. Such is a brief description of the agony of the cross. But Matthew does not dwell on the physical suffering. **He concentrates on how the people responded to Jesus.**

https://www.gracebible.org/crucifixion_jesus_matthew_273256

B. (:36) Preventing Any Rescue of His Body

“and sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.”

Grant Osborne: Some say Matthew added this to counter the later charge that Jesus was taken from the cross before he was actually dead (**Hill, Carson**), but this could also mean they already sensed something unusual and were enthralled, preparing for the centurion’s cry in v. 54 (**France, Hagner**).

IV. (:37) IDENTITY OF JESUS MOCKED AS THE KING OF THE JEWS

*“And they put up above His head the charge against Him which read,
‘THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.’”*

D. A. Carson: The statement of the crime was often written on a white tablet in red or black letters and displayed on the cross. The charge against Jesus, written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (**Jn 19:20**), is highly ironic. Pilate, though desiring to offend the Jews (**Jn 19:19–22**), wrote more of the truth than he knew. Pilate rubs the noses of the Jews in their vassal status. To a Jew, “*king of the Jews*” meant “Messiah”; so the charge on which Jesus was executed was, according to Pilate, that he was a messianic pretender. Matthew’s Christian reader will remember the intertwining strands of royal Son and Suffering Servant and see their climax here.

Charles Swindoll: In crucifixion, a sign called a **titulus** indicating the name of the criminal and the crime was hung above the victim’s head so everybody passing by on the road below could see the price that was paid for serious infractions of Roman law. Signs such as MURDER, PIRACY, INSURRECTION, TREASON, and ROBBERY would have been common. But when passersby saw the sign hanging above Jesus’ head, written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, it undoubtedly would have caught their attention. Combining the information from all four Gospel accounts, Jesus’ sign read: THIS IS JESUS THE NAZAREWNE, THE KING OF THE JEWS (**27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19**). The chief priests were so troubled by this public statement labeling Jesus as King of the Jews that they asked Pilate to clarify that Jesus had claimed that He was King of the Jews. To this request, Pilate simply responded, “*What I have written I have written*” (**John 19:21-22**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of indignities were heaped upon Jesus?
- 2) How fortunate was Simon to have this divine encounter and be conscripted to carry the cross of Jesus?
- 3) Why would the soldiers have even wanted the garments of Christ after they were so torn and bloodstained?
- 4) What is the connection between the motif of the cross and the theme of kingship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Hendriksen: [Regarding **Simon**] The following reconstruction, though not certain, is however probable. Simon, a Jew, has come to Jerusalem to attend one of the great festivals (in this case Passover), as was the custom of many Jews, including those from Cyrene (**Acts 2:10**). There was even a Cyrenian synagogue in Jerusalem (**Acts 6:9**).

Now on this particular Friday, returning to the city from a visit to the country, Simon is pressed into service by the soldiers who are leading Jesus to Calvary, perhaps (but this is by no means certain) along the *Via Dolorosa* (Sorrowful Way), and are just now coming through the gate out of the city. So – reluctantly at first? – Simon carries Christ's cross, arrives at Calvary, and witnesses what happens there. The behavior of Jesus and his words from the cross leave such an impression on Simon that he becomes a Christian. Subsequently he and his family are living in Rome. He may have been living there before, but in any event he was a Cyrenian by birth. (Among the early Christians there were many Cyrenians, **Acts 11:19; 13:1**.)

Mark, writing to the Romans, mentions "*Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus,*" as if to say, "people with whom you, in Rome, are well acquainted." Paul, in his letter to Romans (**16:13**), writes, "*Greet Rufus, outstanding in the Lord, and his mother and mine.*" Evidently the mother of Rufus – hence, the wife of Simon – had rendered some motherly service to Paul.

If this reconstruction is factual, then the service which Simon rendered, through initially "*forced,*" turned out to be a genuine blessing for himself, his family, and many others.,

S. Lewis Johnson: The King Crucified

Our Lord was crucified on a hill north of the city of Jerusalem. That in itself incidentally was probably not without purpose, because in the first of the offerings of the Old Testament, in the burnt offering, it was said that the animal should be sacrificed on the altar northward, and so probably even the direction from the center of the city at which our Lord was crucified is according to Scripture.

The topography of Golgotha may also have some significance, because two roads left from Golgotha. One of them led to Mount Zion, and the other lead to Gehenna. It's almost as if to say, from the place where our Lord was crucified there are two objectives. There are two places to which one may go. One may go to Zion, the place of communion, or one may go to Gehenna, the place of everlasting fire.

Most of the studies of our Lord's sufferings lay great stress upon the human side of his pains. They stress the shame: the spitting, the scourging, all of the physical sufferings that he underwent. There is reason for stressing that, of course, but we have been trying in the exposition in Matthew to stress the hand of God in his sufferings. We've been laying stress upon the statements of the Old Testament: It pleased the Lord to bruise him; Thou has brought me into the dust of death.

And we've been trying to point out the striking irony in the events of our Lord's passion, pointing out that often words had double meanings and in fact, the more important meaning is that second meaning, and that's what we want to try to stress again today as we come to the subject, the King Crucified, and deal really with a number of things that have to do with those sufferings.

J. Ligon Duncan: Then in **verse 37** he's going to point us to something else. He points us to the title, the charge, the criminal charge that is placed above Jesus' head. Jesus is mockingly charged with being a claimant to the Jewish throne. When Pilate first ordered that this be written I have no doubt that part of it was Pilate's own despising of the Jews. He hated the Jewish people. And he thought what better way to mock the Jewish people than to charge this man as being the King of the Jews. That will offend them. And indeed we are told in one of the other gospels that the people came to Pilate, and they said don't say He is the King of the Jews, say He says that He is the King of the Jews. And Pilate says look, I've written what I've written. And so the charge, which hangs above Jesus' head, is that *'This is the King of the Jews.'*

And you see what Matthew is doing there. Matthew is saying that Jesus' mockers have unwittingly but rightly identified Him. He's saying look, even as they mock Him, they are identifying Him as who He is. He is the King of the Jews. As that charge is fastened above His head, the irony of ironies hits you. You suddenly realize that He is paying the penalty on the cross for the crime of being who He is. What's the charge against Him? You're the King of the Jews. Well, you see what's implied is that He claims to be the King of the Jews, but He isn't. But the charge reads this is the King of the Jews, and you suddenly realize, well its true. He's dying because of who He really is. He is the King of the Jews. He is the Messiah.

What is Matthew doing? Matthew is pointing us to the glory of Christ even in the midst of all this gore. Men see a condemned criminal hanging between two condemned criminals. Matthew and the angels and God see the King of Israel. The King of the people of God. The Messiah of God, the Lord of glory.

David Guzik: In 1986, **Dr. William Edwards** wrote a remarkable article in the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association titled "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." Following are some of the observations of Dr. Edwards and his associates. The quotations belong to the article, and much of the other text is paraphrased from the article.

iv. "Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering."

v. The victim's back was first torn open by the scourging, then opened again as the congealing, clotting blood came off with the clothing that was removed at the place of crucifixion. When thrown on the ground to nail the hands to the crossbeam, the wounds were again opened, deepened, and contaminated with dirt. While attached to the upright cross, each breath would cause the painful wounds on the back to scrape against the rough wood of the upright beam and were further aggravated.

vi. Driving the nail through the wrist severed the large median nerve. This stimulated nerve caused bolts of fiery pain in both arms, and often resulted in a claw-like grip in the victim's hands.

vii. Beyond the severe pain, the major effect of crucifixion inhibited normal breathing. The weight of the body, pulling down on the arms and shoulders, tended to lock the respiratory muscles in an inhalation state, thus hindering exhalation. The lack of adequate respiration resulted in severe muscle cramps, which hindered breathing even further. To get a good breath,

one had to push against the feet and flex the elbows, pulling from the shoulders. Putting the weight of the body on the feet produced more pain, and flexing the elbows twisted the hands hanging on the nails. Lifting the body for a breath also painfully scraped the back against the rough wooden post. Each effort to get a proper breath was agonizing, exhausting, and led to a sooner death.

viii. “Not uncommonly, insects would light upon or burrow into the open wounds or the eyes, ears, and nose of the dying and helpless victim, and birds of prey would tear at these sites. Moreover, it was customary to leave the corpse on the cross to be devoured by predatory animals.”

ix. Death from crucifixion could come from many sources: acute shock from blood loss; being too exhausted to breathe any longer; dehydration; stress-induced heart attack; or congestive heart failure leading to a cardiac rupture. If the victim did not die quickly enough, the legs were broken, and the victim was soon unable to breathe.

x. A Roman citizen could not be crucified except by direct order of Caesar; it was reserved for the worst criminals and lowest classes. No wonder that the Roman statesman Cicero said of crucifixion: “It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is an act of wickedness; to execute him is almost murder: What shall I say of crucifying him? An act so abominable it is impossible to find any word adequately to express.” The Roman historian Tacitus called crucifixion “A torture fit only for slaves” – fit only for them because they were seen as sub-human.

xi. How bad was crucifixion? We get our English word **excruciating** from the Roman word “*out of the cross*.” “Consider how heinous sin must be in the sight of God, when it requires such a sacrifice!” (Commentator **Adam Clarke**)

TEXT: Matthew 27:38-44

TITLE: *THE SHAME OF THE CROSS -- JESUS MOCKED BY ALL PARTIES AS HE IS CRUCIFIED*

BIG IDEA:

PARADE OF MOCKERS CAST TAUNTS AND SCORN AT THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

David Turner: The focus turns from the soldiers' actions (27:27–37) to the mockery by other observers of the crucifixion. This section is an **inclusio** framed by references to the two revolutionaries crucified with Jesus (27:38, 44). Jesus is successively mocked by people passing by (27:39–40), by the religious leaders (27:41–43), and by the two revolutionaries (27:44). The taunting drips with sarcasm that leverages the incongruity between Jesus's present plight and his lofty claims into a satirical slander of Jesus that emphatically denies his claims. A paraphrase would go something like this: "Surely someone who could destroy and rebuild the temple, someone who was the Son of God, could come down from the cross and save himself! How sad the one who would save others cannot save himself! If only he would come down from the cross, we would believe in him! Wouldn't God come down now and save his own Son who trusts in him?" . . .

The taunts emphasize the incompatibility between Jesus's purported power and his actual weakness (cf. **Matt. 4:3, 6**). Someone of his supposed stature could surely save his own life. The taunt to demonstrate divine sonship by coming down from the cross (27:40, 42, 44) is especially perverse, since Jesus endures the cross as the obedient Son of God (cf. 26:39, 42, 44). If Jesus comes down from the cross to save himself, he will not save his people from their sins (1:21; 10:38–39; 16:24–26; 20:28; 26:28).

R. T. France: We have already seen Jesus mocked by the Sanhedrin members immediately after they have convicted him of blasphemy (26:67–68). Now, with Jesus duly secured on the cross, they return to the attack, but this time supported by other Jews, the general public (v. 39) and the men on the other crosses. This is then a Jewish counterpart to the mockery by the Gentile soldiers in vv. 27–31; each ethnic group makes fun of Jesus' alleged claims, focusing on the terms to which they more naturally relate, the soldiers on the political claim to kingship, the Jews on the religious issues of temple-building and of being God's son. This combination of representatives of the Jewish people at several different levels (Sanhedrin members, ordinary passers-by and failed insurrectionists) provides a poignant picture of the rejection of Jesus by his own people.

Donald Hagner: The taunting of Jesus on the cross is the last human indignity he must face. In this pericope the motif of sarcastic unbelief continues. Perhaps the taunts and challenges also presented Jesus with his last hour of testing. A line of continuity runs from the testing of Jesus in the wilderness (4:1–11) through the rebuke of Peter (16:22–23) and the experience in Gethsemane (26:36–56) to the present narrative. Jesus could at any moment have refused to go on the path God had predetermined for him. He could have come down from the cross and thus at the last instant avoided his fate. Still, ironically, his opponents have no idea who he really is and that he could have come down from the cross. . .

Throughout this pericope, as in the preceding pericopes, the **underlying paradox** cannot be missed. What these mockers scornfully ridicule, what they regard as impossible, what they look upon as the wild claim of a charlatan is paradoxically the truth. The words with which they so confidently taunt Jesus, “*Son of God*,” “*king of Israel*,” are fully true, as the original readers of Matthew knew well. The key piece of information unknown to the mockers is that Jesus undergoes in his humiliation and crucifixion nothing other than the intended will of God. Their notion of the Son of God, the messianic king of Israel, as a triumphant, self-assertive, and powerful figure was mistaken—or at least partially so since he will ultimately appear as such in his future parousia. They cannot guess that they are speaking the truth about Jesus. In their blind opposition to the truth, they but accomplish the will of God.

Walter Wilson: The three segments of the unit (**27:39–40, 41–43, 44**) are distinguished by three different groups (those passing by, the chief priests and elders, and the two brigands), to which are assigned three different verbs of insult: βλασφημέω (“*to blaspheme*”), ἐμπαίζω (“*to mock*”), and ὀνειδίζω (“*to taunt*”).

Stu Weber: In the midst of this physical torture, the king was immersed in the emotional strain of incessant verbal abuse. Only the sovereign king of the universe could have kept himself on the cross. Truly, he was the Almighty.

(:38) PROLOGUE -- JESUS CRUCIFIED BETWEEN TWO INSURRECTIONISTS

“At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.”

Robert Gundry: The crucifixion of two bandits with Jesus heaps a further indignity on him (compare **26:55**), and the present tense of “*crucify*” underscores this indignity. But “*one on [his] right and one on [his] left*” echoes **20:21**, where the expression was associated with Jesus’ kingdom, so that the present echo may imply that despite appearances to the contrary, the crucifixion of two unnamed bandits on either side of Jesus previews the sitting of two unnamed disciples on either side of him when he comes in glory.

Grant Osborne: Ironically, the right and the left of Jesus is where James and John wished to be (**20:20–23**), but there is no glory or authority in those positions now (**Davies and Allison**).

Donald Hagner: The incongruity of this righteous man crucified between two nefarious criminals is striking.

I. (:39-40) JESUS MOCKED BY JEWS PASSING BY

“And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, 40 and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’”

Grant Osborne: especially those coming by the major road into Jerusalem (see on v. 33).

R. T. France: “*If you are the Son of God*” echoes the preamble to two of the devil’s temptations in **4:3, 6**; here again Jesus must have felt the force of the temptation to exploit his special relationship with God in order to escape physical suffering. But that temptation had already been

faced and overcome in Gethsemane (and cf. **26:53–54**). Indeed it is that very relationship as “*Son of God*” which paradoxically requires Jesus to go through with his Father’s purpose on the cross. In some sense even the Gentile soldiers will see the truth of this in v. **54**.

Leon Morris: The passersby were people who had no business at the place of the crucifixion but who saw what was going on and joined in the general abuse of the man on the central cross. It is possible that Matthew’s choice of the term is reminiscent of **Lamentations 1:12**: “*Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow....*” Probably many of these people had been in the crowds that clamored for Jesus’ death; having done what they could to bring about his crucifixion, it is not likely that they would pass by the spectacle of the execution. . .

It is indeed blasphemy when mortals in this way dictate to the Son of God how he should exercise his divine sonship.

II. (:41-43) JESUS MOCKED BY THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

“In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, 42 ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. 43 He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

D. A. Carson: Matthew understands that, morally speaking, he can’t save himself precisely because he came to do his Father’s will, not because the nails hold him in place—and the Father’s will is that by Jesus’ not saving himself he will save others.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus Mocked (By Gentiles, Jews and Thieves)

They are saying that Jesus’ Father does not delight in Him. Now our Lord Jesus had suffered many things. A disciple had betrayed him. His best friends had deserted him. Roman soldiers had scourged him. He had been unjustly treated by a Roman court and by a Jewish court. He had been led to the cross with hurling of abuse. He had faced the mocking of the multitude. But I want to suggest to you that hearing from the leaders, the spiritual leaders of His own people, the people who were vested with the responsibility to teach the people of God, the way of God, and to teach them the law of God, to hear from their lips the charge that His Father doesn’t delight in Him, you and I have no idea how that impacted the Lord Jesus Christ. We were told by the Lord Jesus Himself that His delight was to do the will of God. That it was His meat to do the will of God. And now He is on a cross dying in excruciating pain, and He hears the religious leaders of His people say, “God does not delight in Him. The Father does not delight in Him.” You and I will never know, even in glory, we’ll never know what that did to our Lord.

Matthew is saying, but look even as these men insult Him and question who He is, they’re actually proving who He is. Because as they question whether He is the Messiah, they are actually proving that He is the Messiah by fulfilling Scripture. Because in **Psalm 22, verse 8**, God said that the enemies of His Messiah would mock Him and would question whether He delighted in Him. And so by their very taunting, they are proving that He is who they say He is not. And so Matthew is saying, oh yes, He is the Messiah and the Savior. And even though these religious men don’t think they need grace, He is the King of grace and the Savior.

David Thompson: The religious leadership of Israel was all there at Calvary—the chief priest, the scribes and the elders were all there and they, too, were mocking Him.

- 1) They mocked Him as our Savior. **27:42a** They challenge His ability to save others by His apparent inability to save Himself. Truth is had He saved Himself, He could not have saved others.
- 2) They mocked Him as Israel's King. **27:42b** Their thinking was Israel's King could not be put to death by Roman power. The leaders say if He will come down off that cross and save Himself, they would believe in Him.
- 3) They mocked Him as God's Son. **27:43** You are always saying you are the Son of God. Let's see God your Father get you out of this dilemma. The truth is it was God the Father who orchestrated this dilemma. In all reality, the fact that He stayed on that cross proves His Sonship.

III. (:44) JESUS MOCKED BY THE TWO REVOLUTIONARIES ON EITHER SIDE

“And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him.”

David Thompson: Why did Jesus allow these terrible things happen to Him?

- **I Pet. 2:24** says this: *“and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by His wounds you were healed.”*
- John said, *“He laid down His life for us”* (**I John 3:16**).
- Paul said, *“He was made sin for us”* (**II Cor. 5:21**)
- and *“He was made a curse for us”* (**Gal. 3:13**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How painful must it have been for a person of perfect integrity and sinless perfection to be associated with vile sinners in His death?
- 2) How was Christ able to focus on completing His work of redemption rather than responding to these wicked taunts?
- 3) How do we respond when people revile us and insult us for our allegiance to Jesus Christ?
- 4) Do we respond with contempt towards these mockers or with a heart of compassion that desires they would come to experience the same grace of God that has granted us forgiveness of our sins and spiritual illumination?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Doriani: The soldiers may be indifferent, but most Jewish witnesses mock Jesus as they watch or pass by. There is a certain **logic** to their position. If Jesus were the Messiah, he would hardly be on a cross between two criminals (27:38). No Messiah, no true king, could die this way! As they see it, Jesus' crucifixion proves he is an imposter. Therefore, *"those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God'"* (27:39–40). . .

This mockery he heard was a fist in God's face. His honor was at stake and Jesus had a perfect answer. Yet with perfect self-mastery, Jesus remained silent. He refused to trade insult for insult: *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly"* (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus' silence announced his reply: "I will not come down from the cross!" He chose to save others, so he did not save himself. Jesus loved his people too much to defend himself. So he did nothing to vindicate himself. When he finally spoke, he called out to God.

Stanley Saunders: Now that Jesus is crucified, the **parade of mockers** comes to him. They *"shake their heads"* (Ps. 22:7) and resume their lampoons based on the themes of his trials. The new element in their taunts is a persistent invitation to Jesus to *"save himself"* and *"come down from the cross"* (27:40, 42). They presume that salvation lies in escape from the cross. If Jesus has the power to destroy and rebuild the temple (cf. 26:61), why can he not save himself? If he is God's Son (echoing the temptation, 4:6), why not come down from the cross? The chief priests, scribes, and elders also reappear to mock Jesus' saving power (27:41–42): *"If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross."* They claim that if he did so, they would then believe him. They misunderstand his mission and the meaning of the cross. Twice in the Gospel Jesus has offered the Jewish authorities the sign of Jonah (12:38–42; 16:1–4), but they have not understood it. The real king of Israel will not flee death, but defeat it. The cross and resurrection are the sign of power the authorities seek, but not in the terms they would accept. They also taunt Jesus, who has claimed to be God's Son, for *"trusting God."* They invite God to *"deliver him now"* (i.e., from the cross), if God wants to. But Jesus' identity as Israel's king and God's Son is expressed perfectly in the conquest of death, not in escape from it, which would leave its power intact. The leaders of Israel, it turns out, trust the power of death more than they trust God. Finally, the bandit terrorists being crucified to his right and left add their taunts (27:44). They join the disciples, the leaders, and the crowds in stumbling over the cross. . .

The chief priests' and elders' string of taunts places in ironic relief Matthew's understanding of the cross and salvation:

- (1) the destruction and rebuilding of the temple concerns his death and resurrection (and, secondarily, the destruction of the temple a generation later);
- (2) Jesus has not come to save himself, but to save others;
- (3) Jesus displays the divine character of his power as King and Son of God, especially in the defeat of death; and
- (4) the cross makes a public display of the conquest of death. There is truly no salvation outside the cross, and no transformation of the world that leaves death's power still intact.

The mocking and torture of Jesus shows humanity at its worst, but also reveals that the promise of God's salvation is drawing near.

John MacArthur: The Wickedness of the Crucifixion

To help us see the wickedness of the scene, I want to draw to your attention four different groups that appear in the scene. Let's call them the ignorant wicked, the knowing wicked, the fickle wicked, and the religious wicked. And I want to suggest to you that every person in the world who does not come to faith in Jesus Christ, every Christ-rejecting person fits into these groups. They are constant. They were there at the cross. They're around today. And everybody fits somewhere in these four groups.

Now last time we looked at the **ignorant wicked** who were illustrated to us by the callous soldiers in **verse 27 through 37**. . .

But there's a more wicked group than that group and that's the one we come to in **verse 38**. Let's call these the **knowing wicked**. They're not ignorant. They know. Now they don't know everything but they do know something. "*Then were there two robbers crucified with Him, one on the right hand and another on the left.*" Now of course, this is another way to dishonor Christ, to defame Him, to put Him in the middle of a couple of robbers, a couple of, as Luke calls them, malefactors, which means evil doers, criminals. Put Him up there and thus dishonor Him and shame Him by His association with them. So He is with the wicked in His death. . .

But even they are not the severest of rejecters because there's another group. We see them in **verses 39 and 40**. I like to call those **the fickle wicked**. I suppose there are a lot of different terms we could use, but they are illustrated by the careless passersby. The ignorant wicked – the callous soldiers. The knowing wicked are illustrated by what we saw in **verse 38**, the thieves who I guess we could say are the crass thieves. They're just into the world and that's the sphere of their concern. And now we find the careless crowd who represent to us the people who for a while hear about Christ, understand about Christ, and even make some kind of overture to Christ, even invite Christ to be a part of their life to some extent, but eventually turn apostate or turn away from Him. . .

They are reminiscent of evil people today – the fickle people. So many people that you know have been to church, they've attended the church, maybe they've been raised in the church, they know the message. Maybe they had Christian parents. Maybe they've had Christian training. They maybe have made a profession of faith at some point along the line. They've been baptized. They've gone to the church. But that's all in the past. They're not interested in that anymore. They've gone on to other things. Jesus didn't fulfill their expectation. In fact, when Jesus rode in, they thought He would attack the Romans. He came back into town and attacked the Jews by wiping out the temple buying and selling. And that was not in His favor. They thought He ought to attack Rome, not them. And now how could this be the Messiah? All week long and He's done nothing. He's been here all week and now look at Him, He's hanging on a cross, put there by the Romans. He is a victim. This is not our Messiah. . .

The world is full of people like that even today. People whose only interest in Jesus is an immediate satisfaction, and an immediate self-indulgence. And if He doesn't deliver what they want when they want it, it's over with. . .

But they're not the worse group. The worse group is yet to come in **verses 41 to 43**, **the religious wicked**. They are illustrated to us by the canting – and that word basically means insincere and hypocritical – the canting leaders, insincere, hypocritical, the lowest level of

blasphemers, **religious hypocrites** who parade their piosity, who want to appear to represent God and know the truth and be pure and godly and virtuous and represent the Word of God. And the truth of it is, they're filled with hate and vilification toward the very Christ of God Himself. In **verse 41** we meet them. It wasn't just a fickle crowd, likewise also the chief priests. All those various orders of priests that operated within the temple ministries were mocking Him along with the scribes, who were the authorities on the law, and the elders, who were supposed to be the revered and renowned men of maturity and wisdom in the land. They constitute the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel.

So all of these leaders who are supposedly the religious elite, are supposed to know everything there is to know about the truth of God and the Word of God and the mind of God and the heart of God, who pretend to love God and revere His Word and hold up His name, they come along and what did they say? And notice, please, that the crowd talked to Jesus. The leaders don't talk to Christ. They hate Him. He is so despised by them they will not talk to Him, they only talk about Him. So they talk to each other about Him. **Verse 42**, "*He saved others.*" And they mean by that His healing ministry, His deliverance from demons. "*He did it for others. Himself He cannot save.*" They never denied, ever in the New Testament, the miracles of Jesus – never. It was impossible to do that. There is never an indication that the religious leaders of Israel denied His miracles. They said they were by Satan done, by Satan accomplished, but they never denied them. They said He does what He does by the power of Beelzebub, but they never denied them.

Steve Brandon: The Crucifixion of Christ – The Shame of the Cross

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to fix "*our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (**Heb. 12:2**). As terrible as the sufferings were, I remember coming to realize that the Bible speaks of the shame hurled at Jesus as being the most hurtful part of the crucifixion. Jesus Christ endured the pain of the cross, all the while knowing the shame of the cross. There is more to the cross than the mere physical sufferings of Jesus. While Jesus was upon the cross, He was shamed by many. In fact, in **verses 35-44**, we see one person after another ridiculing and hurling verbal abuses at Jesus. **Psalm 22:7** says, "*All who see me sneer at me. They separate with the lip. They wag the head.*"

When the day comes that you are dying, I guarantee you that you don't want to hear a bunch of different people coming to your bedside telling you of what a fool you have been. You don't want to hear of all of your past failures. You don't want to be reminded of the promises that you never kept. No, when you come to die, you will want to be encouraged by the truth of God's word. When you can no longer open your eyes, and when you struggle to breathe, you want people reading Scripture in your ear. You want people singing the hymns of the faith around you. You want people encouraging you to continue on believing in Jesus.

[**Illustration:** Cf. the way people gathered around the bedside of Mr. Nic as he was passing away to thank him for his faithful youth sports ministry in Catonsville.] . . .

Never underestimate how difficult this was for Christ to accept. We have this saying, "Sticks and stones break my bones, but names will never hurt me." It may be a nice saying, but it isn't true. Words can do much harm. . .

All of this sort of mocking was intended to bring shame upon Jesus Christ. Lest you think that such mocking only took place in the days of Jesus, please realize that such mockings are a bit

similar to the one who tries to prove that God doesn't exist by making some preposterous claim. I've heard a few people in my lifetime mock God by saying, "If God is really God, let Him strike me dead with lightening in the next five seconds." And five seconds later they proclaim, "See! He didn't strike me dead. He surely is not real." Certainly, Jesus could have come down from the cross. Jesus had said that He had the authority to summon twelve legions of angels (**Matt. 26:53**) to help Him. Certainly, God, the Father, could have delivered Him. Certainly, God can strike people dead in the next five seconds (and He has done it before!). But, in His mercy, God remains silently patient.

But, for the greater good, God refused to allow any of these things to happen. Should Jesus have saved Himself, we could not be saved. There would be no atonement for our sin! And yet, Jesus was mocked upon the cross as if He was a weak and impotent impostor. This was the shame of the cross.

<https://sermons.rvbc.cc/sermons/2005-036>

J. Ligon Duncan: What's Matthew telling you there? He's saying that **everybody needs a Savior**. Religious men need a Savior. Passersby need a Savior. Condemned criminals, of course they need a Savior. We all need a Savior. **We all need grace**. But you know the sad thing is that people who don't have grace don't think they need it. And so they sit there, and they revile the Lord Jesus Christ. And its only when God in His mercy shows you that you need grace, that you suddenly realize that everything you need is already there in Christ. May God show you your need of grace, because the minute you see your need of grace, He will show you who provides it.

TEXT: Matthew 27:45-56

TITLE: *COSMIC TESTIMONY TO JESUS' IDENTITY AT HIS DEATH*

BIG IDEA:

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS WAS AN EARTH-SHAKING EVENT

INTRODUCTION:

Walter Wilson: In keeping with the magnitude of the event, Jesus's final moments of life are depicted in a manner that is both solemn and dramatic. The scene opens with the supernatural onset of darkness over the land, the absence of light corresponding to the sense of abandonment conveyed by Jesus's final words. Continuing their derision of Jesus, some of the bystanders misinterpret his prayer as a call for Elijah to rescue him. At the moment of his death, the sense of abandonment gives way to a sense of vindication, as the veil of the temple is split in two and many holy ones are raised from their tombs, signifying how Jesus's death brings life to many. These extraordinary events prompt the soldiers to acclaim Jesus as God's Son, while the scene concludes with a note about the witnessing presence of many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee.

Stanley Saunders: Matthew's story of Jesus' death is riddled with apocalyptic images and references. This moment marks the **decisive turn of the ages**. Jesus has been announcing and embodying the empire of God, but now, with his death, the good news is realized with definitive power and clarity. Matthew fuses the death of Jesus with the release of the Spirit and other apocalyptic signs. All that is solid now shakes. Even death itself, the primary power by which Rome and the Jerusalem elites have sought to suppress the power of God revealed in Jesus, is swept aside. The eschatological floodgates now open wide.

David Turner: The narrative can be analyzed as containing two similar cycles that bracket Jesus's death:

Cosmic sign: Darkness at noon (27:45; cf. **Amos 8:9**)
Jesus's cry of abandonment (27:46; cf. **Ps. 22:1**)
Observers (27:47-49)
Jesus dies (27:50)
Cosmic signs (27:51-53; cf. **Ezek. 37:12**)
Soldiers' cry of amazement (27:54)
Observers (27:55-56)

Jesus's death is bracketed by darkness (27:45) and an earthquake (27:51), showing that nature itself testifies to the **epochal significance of the event**.

Donald Hagner: The death of Jesus is not only the climax of the passion narrative but also the climax of Jesus' earthly work. The Gospels are books of "good news" primarily because of what is accomplished through the death of Jesus. Here we come to the gospel. At the heart of the story is Jesus' death in fulfillment of God's will and for the salvation of the world. But the death of God's Son involves impenetrable mystery. It is attended by a supernatural darkness and followed

by remarkable events. Matthew's account of the death itself is nevertheless simple, sober, and restrained in character.

R. T. France: But alongside the human drama at the cross Matthew records a series of physical events, the darkness, the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake and the resurrection of dead people, which add a powerful sense of the far-reaching significance of the death of Jesus, and contribute to the climactic exclamation of the soldiers in v. 54. The last of these events, the raising of the dead, is described at some length; the problems which arise in understanding its status as literal history must not be allowed to distract attention from its clear symbolic significance for Matthew, who is the only evangelist to record this particular phenomenon. **J. P. Meier** summarizes the impact of these verses as follows: "Here, with the full panoply of apocalyptic imagery, Mt portrays the death of Christ as the end of the Old Testament cult, as the earth-shaking beginning of the new aeon (bringing about the resurrection of the dead), and as the moment when the Gentiles first come to full faith in the Son of God."

(:45) PROLOGUE – DARKNESS ON THE LAND

"Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour."

Walter Wilson: As elsewhere in Scripture, the phenomenon of total darkness is presented as a form of divine intervention in human affairs. The intertextual connections suggest that in **27:45** it functions both as a portent of divine judgment and as an expression of the Father's mourning for his "beloved" (cf. **3:17; 12:18; 17:5**). Darkness reigns over the earth from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth, the three hours of gloom corresponding to the three days Jesus remains in the grave (cf. **12:40; 26:61; 27:40, 63**). Alternatively, perhaps we are supposed to see the event as an inversion of **Exod 10:21–23**, in which darkness covers the land of Egypt for three days while the Israelites have light. The sign of judgment that fell on the land of Israel's enemies now falls on the land of Israel itself.

In **Exod 10:23**, divine darkness imposes a cessation of normal activities ("*they did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place*"), a scenario that may apply to our story as well, since nothing else is reported as taking place during the three-hour span. In any event, **27:45** creates a dramatic prelude to **27:46**, the cry of dereliction.

Michael Wilkins: This was not an eclipse, for the Passover was at the full moon, but was some unknown act of God indicating his judgment on the sins of the world.

Grant Osborne: This darkness is a harbinger of the coming final judgment (as in Amos, Joel, Zephaniah), and the judgment is vicariously on Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sin. This will be reflected next in his cry of agony on the cross.

Robert Gundry: The phraseology concerning the onset of darkness echoes **Exodus 10:22** and **Amos 8:9–10**. In both of those passages supernatural darkness expresses **God's displeasure**, so that here too the darkness expresses God's displeasure at the killing of his Son. (Astronomically, a natural eclipse of the sun wouldn't have occurred during the Passover, a time of full moon, or lasted for three hours.) Emphasizing this displeasure are the onset of darkness at noon, when the sun is at its zenith, its covering "*all the land*," and its lasting till midafternoon. Since the passion of Jesus previews the persecution of his disciples, God's displeasure at Jesus' crucifixion carries over to their persecution and thus provides them encouragement.

I. (:46-50) CRY OF THE LAMB OF GOD

A. (:46) Cry of Dereliction

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’”

Walter Wilson: It is significant that Jesus’s first and only words from the cross are addressed not to any human characters in the story but to God, thus taking the form of a prayer. It is probably also significant that the time at which he “*cried with a loud voice*” is given as the ninth hour, that is, the ritual time of Jews for the afternoon prayer (**Acts 3:1**; cf. **10:3**). Even in his final moments, abandoned and rejected by all, Jesus joins his people in prayer. . . The darkness that can be heard in Jesus’s words corresponds to the darkness that can be seen encompassing the land. As **Brown** observes, the portrayal of Jesus “resorting to his mother tongue” at this point adds further to the pathos of the scene.

Michael Wilkins: Once again the crucifixion scene is reminiscent of **Psalm 22**. Jesus is experiencing the separation from the Father that must accompany bearing the sin of his people (**1:21**; **20:28**; **26:28**). He now bears the divine retribution and punishment for sin, as the Father’s cup of wrath is poured out on him in divine judgment of sin. In the apostle Paul’s words, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (**2 Cor. 5:21**), and, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’*” (**Gal. 3:13**).

Grant Osborne: most theological reflections center on Jesus’ realization of his vicarious sacrifice. He has become the sin offering, and at this dark moment God must turn away from sin. As in Gethsemane Jesus is experiencing the depths of pain in his very soul, but this in no way mitigates his victory there, and **Ps 22** is a perfect source for his expression of agony. Beneath his real pain there is still a trust in God, and he knows his deliverance is coming.

D. A. Carson: Many suggest that Jesus quoted **Psalm 22:1** in Hebrew, reverting to the ancient language of Scripture in his hour of utmost agony. Only this, it is argued, accounts for the confusion with “*Elijah*” in v.47 and provides a plausible explanation for the rendering “*my power*” (*hē dynamis mou*, presupposing Semitic *hēlî*) in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter. In this view Mark, or an early copyist of Mark, has turned Jesus’ words into Aramaic, recognizing that Jesus more commonly spoke Aramaic than Hebrew.

However, though Jesus was probably at least trilingual (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek—with perhaps some Latin), the overwhelming textual evidence for the rest of the cry supports an **Aramaic original**. Even Matthew’s Hebraic-sounding *Eli* may in fact support an Aramaic original, because the Targum (written in Aramaic) to **Psalm 22:1** has *’ēlî*. Apparently some Aramaic speakers preserved the Hebrew name for God in the same way some English speakers sometimes refer to him as Yahweh.

Leon Morris: Abandonment is not the whole story. We must bear in mind that Jesus cried out, “*My God, my God.*” The human Jesus felt and gave expression to the abandonment, but he also retained his trust. “*My*” points to a continuing relationship; according to **Bengel**, he “adds ‘*My*’ with confidence, patience, and self-resignation.” **E. Stauffer** has further pointed out that there can be a crying out after God as well as a crying to God for help. In the anguish of godforsakenness

Jesus still cries out in trust. The human Jesus might still be puzzled (“Why...?”). But he trusts, and we should not miss this aspect of the cry of dereliction.

B. (:47-49) Cry Misinterpreted as Directed to Elijah

1. (:47) Misunderstanding of Jesus’ Cry

“And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’”

Grant Osborne: Many bystanders standing some distance away heard his cry of “Eli” and thought he was calling for “Elijah,” who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire in **2 Kgs 2:1–12** and became a messianic figure (**Mal 4:5–6**). Here this reflects the belief by many Jews that Elijah was ready to appear from heaven in time of need.

Leon Morris: This does not mean that any of the bystanders held that Elijah would come to help Jesus, but only that they thought that Jesus might have hoped for help from the prophet. They were convinced that Jesus was in a situation from which he could not have escaped and could not escape; therefore it was only logical that he should appeal to some heavenly being to help him. So far were they still from understanding what was happening before their very eyes.

2. (:48) Ministry of Drink

“And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.”

3. (:49) Mystery Regarding Role of Elijah

“But the rest of them said, ‘Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.’”

C. (:50) Cry of Yielding Up His Life

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.”

D. A. Carson: This loud cry reminds us once more of Jesus’ hideous agony. Matthew’s “*he gave up his spirit*” (“spirit” here is equivalent to “life”) suggests Jesus’ sovereignty over the exact time of his own death. It was at this moment, when he was experiencing the abyss of his alienation from the Father and was being cruelly mocked by those he came to serve, that he chose to yield his life as a “*ransom for many*”.

R. T. France: The verb used here for “cry” is not the same as the “*shout*” of **v. 46**; it is used three times in the LXX of **Ps 22 (vv. 2, 5, 24)** for the sufferer’s appeals to God, and its use here might be a further echo of that psalm. Matthew does not tell us the nature of this second loud cry. It is tempting to identify it as the triumphant “*It is finished*” which Jesus utters at this point in **John 19:30**, or with Luke’s “*Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit*,” and thus to find here the reversal of the sense of desolation in **v. 46**; the conviction of the watching soldiers that Jesus really was God’s son (**v. 54**) would also follow more naturally from a noble or peaceful death than from one of despair. But Matthew does not tell us its content, and he links this cry with that of **v. 46** by using the same phrase, “*with a loud voice*.” The loudness of the cry at the time of death again indicates that Jesus is not just fading away, but dying while in full possession of his senses.

“*He let go his spirit/breath*” (*aphēken* to *pneuma*) is an unusual way to describe death. The ambiguity of the Greek *pneuma*, “*breath*” or “*spirit*,” leaves some uncertainty as to why

Matthew chose this phrase. At least it means, like the verb *exepneusen* used by Mark and Luke, that he “*stopped breathing*” (so **Hagner** here), and perhaps that is all it means, but the unexpected phrase with its active verb may suggest a sense of Jesus voluntarily relinquishing his life (for the idea cf. **John 10:17–18**). Cf. John’s phrase *paredōken* to *pneuma*, which perhaps means he handed his spirit over to God (and cf. **Acts 7:59**); this would agree with the last words of Jesus in Luke, “*Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit,*” quoting **Ps 31:6**. “*Spirit*” here means “that which animates or gives life to the body;” there is no reason to see any reference to the Holy Spirit.

II. (:51-53) COSMIC IMPACT OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST – 3 DRAMATIC EVENTS

David Thompson: JESUS CHRIST WAS THE DIVINE KING IN HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS AND THE SPECIFIC EVENTS THAT OCCURRED AT HIS DEATH PROVE IT.

A. (:51a) Temple Veil Event – New Access to God

“And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom,”

Walter Wilson: The fact that the curtain is rent “*in two*” suggests an act of violence, while the fact that it is split from the “*top*” suggests an act of heavenly origin. In light of Jesus’s prediction in **24:2** (“*not one stone will be left upon another*”) as well as the temple logion in **26:61** (“*I am able to destroy the temple*”), of which we have just had a reminder (**27:40**), the act is best understood as a portent of the temple’s destruction.

Michael Wilkins: The word for curtain (*katapetasma*) is used in the LXX sometimes of the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, and sometimes of the curtain over the entrance to the Holy Place. The former is more likely meant here. The curtain was an elaborately woven fabric of seventy-two twisted plaits of twenty-four threads each and the veil was sixty feet long and thirty wide (cf. m. *Seqal*. 8:5). Being split from top to bottom is a sign that God has done this, signifying that **the new and living way is now open into the presence of God through the sacrifice of Christ.**

Stanley Saunders: The torn veil marks the effective end of the sacrificial system and the temple, as well as the movement of God’s presence and power into the world. The turn of the ages has begun.

Grant Osborne: There are two interpretations (both are probably in Matthew—so **Carson, France, Hagner, Nolland**):

- (1) a new access to God, signifying the end of the sacrificial system and a direct relationship with God—connected with the Isaianic Servant imagery;
- (2) a portent of the coming destruction of the temple (so interpreted by the early church fathers)—connected with the Olivet Discourse.

The imagery of the “splitting” of the veil suggests violence and fits the developing theme of divine judgment on temple and people. At the same time, it brings about the results of Jesus’ death, namely, a new openness of relationship with God, signifying direct access as a result of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. As **France** says, “access to God will no longer be through the old, discredited cultic system but through Jesus himself, and more specifically through his death as a ransom for many.”

D. A. Carson: If the death of Jesus opened up a fresh access to God that made the OT sacrificial system and the Levitical high priesthood obsolete, then an entire change in the Mosaic covenant must follow. It is impossible to grapple with Matthew's fulfillment themes and see how even the law points prophetically to Messiah and hear Jesus' promise of a new covenant grounded in his death (26:26–29) without seeing that the tearing of the veil signifies the obsolescence of the temple ritual and the law governing it. Jesus himself is the New Temple, the meeting place of God and man; the old is obsolete. The rent veil does indeed serve as a sign of the temple's impending destruction—a destruction conceived not as a brute fact but as a theological necessity.

B. (:51b) Earthquake Event – Fierce Judgment

“and the earth shook; and the rocks were split,”

Stanley Saunders: The shaking of the earth and the splitting of rocks (27:51b; cf. 24:7, 29; again, the passive voice suggests divine agency) are classic images associated with judgment (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:11–12; Isa. 2:19; 29:6; Ezek. 38:19; Pss. 68:8; 104:32; 114:7) and, in apocalyptic literature, with the end of one age and the beginning of another (cf. 4 Ezra 6:13–16; 9:2–3; 2 Bar. 27:7; 70:8; Zech. 14:4–5; Ezek. 37:1–14, esp. 37:12). Again the transformation is spatial: what was solid is no longer so. God is shaking the whole creation (cf. Heb. 12:26; Hag. 2:6, 21–22, where the shaking of earth and heaven accompanies the overthrow of earthly empires).

Van Parunak: Usually the opening of the veil is understood as enabling us to come into the presence of God. This is a valid image, developed extensively in **Hebrews** (e.g., 4:16), but the association with an earthquake suggests another twist to the imagery. The veil was torn, not only to let us in, but to show that God was coming out.

and the earth did quake,--This association calls to mind a passage in the Psalms that envisions God being aroused in wrath by the sufferings of his saint David. Note the reference to God in his temple, and his exit from it.

Ps 18:4 *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. 5 The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. 7 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wrath. 8 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. 9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet.*

Note the conjunction of God coming out of his temple with the earthquake (**Matt 27:51**) and darkness (**27:45**). Not only did the torn veil let us come into the presence of God, but perhaps more importantly, it marks **God's coming forth in wrath against his enemies**. The first effect of the death of Christ is to set loose the wrath of God against those who slew him.

and the rocks rent;--Only one other passage talks about rocks *πετραί* being torn *σχιζω*, and it refers to the rock that the Lord opened in the wilderness to give water to the people of God.

Isa 48:21 *And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.*

Paul later identifies the rock with Christ

1Co 10:4 *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.*

So the second effect of the death of Christ is to **make provision for his people**.

C. (:52-53) Resurrection Event – Eschatological Hope

“and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.”

D. A. Carson: The resurrection of the *hagioi* (“saints,” i.e., “holy people,” v.52) remains extraordinarily difficult for two reasons. First, its extreme brevity and lack of parallels raise many unanswered questions: What kind of bodies do these “holy people” have? Do they die again? How many people saw them? How public were these appearances? Second, a quick reading of the text gives the impression that though the holy people were raised when Jesus died, they did not leave the tombs and appear to the citizens of the “holy city” until after Jesus’ resurrection (v.53). What were they doing in between?

Stanley Saunders: The resurrection of the dead, the restoration of Israel, the pouring out of the Spirit, and the expectation of divine judgment were pillars in popular Jewish eschatological expectation. By recording the resurrection of the saints here, Matthew links the resurrection integrally with the death of Jesus. He also effectively democratizes the resurrection: not only will Jesus be raised, but the more general resurrection has begun. But Matthew also creates a problem, which must be resolved by literary/temporal sleight of hand. Jesus himself has not yet been raised, so the resurrection of the saints is out of sequence. Matthew addresses the problem with the clarification in **27:53** that the saints really didn’t appear until after Jesus was raised, even though the account suggests that their resurrection coincides with his death. Neither God nor the evangelist is bound to our modern, linear conceptions of time. Matthew’s literary tactic serves to indicate the true nature and significance of Jesus’ death.

Grant Osborne: There are many questions about this; for example, how many were raised (probably just a few)? And was this a resuscitation like Lazarus, so that they lived out a life on earth and died, or a resurrection into their glorified bodies, so that they were taken up with Christ to heaven (most prefer the latter)?

Charles Swindoll: One plausible interpretation pertaining to who was raised suggests that it was not *all* the dead saints who were raised, but just *some* who had died recently. The text implies that these “saints” were recognizable to many in Jerusalem, which suggests that they were not ancient ancestors whose identities were long forgotten. In line with this understanding, they may have been followers of Jesus who had died during His earthly ministry. Presumably, they would have been raised in restored mortal bodies, like Lazarus (**John 11:43-44**). As such, they would have eventually died again, with hopes of their future, glorious resurrection.

Another possible view is that with Jesus’ resurrection, some (or all) of the Old Testament saints (perhaps along with those people who had recently died during Jesus’ ministry) were raised in glorious resurrection bodies just like Jesus’. Jesus was, indeed, the “*first fruits*” (**1 Cor. 15:23**), meaning that He was the first to be raised in such a glorified body – immortal, incorruptible, and

fit for eternal, heavenly existence. If this is the case, then Christ brought with Him to heaven a select group of saints in their glorious bodies to be the first to participate in the resurrection harvest that will occur for others at the Second Coming. A few of these were permitted to appear to people in Jerusalem as a sign of Jesus' resurrection power.

R. T. France: His word order allows us to understand either that they did not come out of the opened tombs until after Jesus' resurrection, or (rather less naturally) that they emerged immediately but remained outside the city until then. Either way there is some **narrative awkwardness**, but this makes it the more likely that we are meant to notice the sequence, "*after Jesus' resurrection.*" His resurrection is the first, theirs the consequence (cf. **1 Cor 15:20–23; 1 Thes 4:14**). In order to make this point, however, Matthew might more appropriately have linked this occurrence with the second earthquake which will reveal Jesus' empty tomb in **28:2**. That he nonetheless records it here, despite the difficulty of postponing their resurrection and/or appearance for two days after the earthquake, suggests that **he sees Jesus' death, not just his resurrection, as the key to the new life which is now made available to God's people.**

III. (:54-56) CRUCIFIXION WITNESSES

John MacArthur: As we examine these three verses, I want you to see in them and in corollary verses to them, four responses to the death of Christ that are here given to us. They demonstrate for us the kind of responses we can see even today. There is the response, first of all, of **saving faith**; the response of **shallow conviction**; the response of **sympathetic loyalty**; and the response of **selfish fear**. And each of those four responses, two of them responses of unbelievers, two of them responses of believers, are parallel to responses today that men and women have to the cross of Christ. So it is not just an historical narrative. It is an historical narrative with strong and practical application to our own time. And I believe that becomes manifest as we examine the text.

First of all, let's look at the best response that an unbeliever could ever have and that's the response of **saving faith**. We find that illustrated to us by the centurion and certain of the soldiers mentioned in verse 54. . .

There's a second response. That's the response I like to think of as **shallow conviction** – the response of shallow conviction. And would you indulge me for a moment to draw you over to the twenty-third chapter of Luke? We have to look there to see this. Matthew doesn't comment on it. Luke does. Luke, looking at the very same scene, reporting the very same attitude of the centurion, in verse 47 the centurion saw what was done, glorified God, said certainly this was a righteous man – just after he heard, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And then verse 48 – and the shallow conviction is illustrated by the crowd – "And all the people that came together to that sight," in other words, all the mob and the crowd that were there, "beholding the things which were done," they saw the same things, the darkness, the earthquake, the rocks splitting, the graves opening, the veil of the temple ripped. I mean, they knew things were happening there that couldn't be explained humanly. They knew something very wrong was going on and they knew it was them. Believe me. I mean, they would see that phenomena and they would hear the words of Christ and see the marvel of His personhood as He's on the cross, and they would begin to remember that He raised Lazarus from the dead, and they would remember that He banished disease from Palestine during His ministry, and they would remember His powerful cleansing of the temple and His profound teaching while He was there.

They would remember all there was about Jesus that led them on Monday to hail Him as Messiah. It would all come back and they would see all of this going around, and their understanding of the Old Testament would tell them that God was judging, and they would feel guilt and they would feel sin, and they know something is wrong. We know that because it says, “Beholding the things which were done, they beat on their chests.”

Now what is this? This is a sign combining terror, remorse, and guilt. They begin to pound on their chests uncontrollably. “Oh, woe is us.” I mean, they are overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and responsibility. The conduct of Jesus, His obvious innocence, the fact that they could never pin anything on Him, that He did claim to be the Son of God; but after all, He raised the dead and healed the sick, His cries on the cross, all of it along with the phenomena drew them to a place of absolutely overwhelming guilt. And they pounded on their breasts. That was a sign of their grief, a sign of their guilt and remorse and self-accusation and despair. And it still goes on today. There are people who see the cross and they understand that Jesus is there because of their sins, He’s bearing their sins. They feel bad about that. They feel sad about that. The cross can be overwhelmingly penetrating, even to an unbelieving heart. . .

Now the first of the second two, or the third response, is called **sympathetic loyalty**. We’ll just call that sympathetic loyalty because it’s really a good descriptive phrase of what we see. And it is characteristic of these women. They are the illustration. **Verse 55**, “*Many women were there*” .

Now here are these women, loving, sympathetic, though their hopes are crushed and their dreams are dead, and they can’t see beyond tomorrow and Jesus is gone. And they have been watching their Master die. Their loyalties are so deep. Their hearts are so filled with love and sympathy that they are not all led to leave, to flee, to run. They have no fear of the Jews. They have no fear of the Romans. Nothing can overpower their love and their sympathy for Christ. May I be so bold as to suggest to you that this is one of the most beautiful characteristics of a godly women, sympathetic loyalty? You show me a virtuous godly woman and I’ll show you in that woman’s life a sympathy and a loyalty that extends beyond that which can be produced in the life of a man, in most cases. Women have a capacity for incredible loyalty and sympathy that men don’t have. And we see this in the beauty of these women. They’re fearless. They don’t even mind the identification with the crucified Christ who has been mocked and scorned and ridiculed. And this by their own people in the society in which they must exist. They are lovely. Their sympathy is magnificent. Their courage is beautiful. . .

There is, though, and that’s the final point – **selfish fear**. You say, well you’ve exhausted all the verses, what verse is this in?” It isn’t in any verse. But you want to know something? It speaks so loudly I have to include it.

You say, but it doesn’t say anything about selfish fear. Who’s the illustration? **The disciples**. But it doesn’t say anything about them. I know, that’s what’s so amazing. It doesn’t say anything about them there because they weren’t there. But that says a lot. So somewhere between **verse 56 and verse 57** in the white spaces you can put this point. Selfish fear – you can’t ignore it – where were these guys?

A. (:54) Confession of the Centurion

“Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

Walter Wilson: The content of the confession prompted by these sights, in which the soldiers refer to Jesus as God’s Son, effectively reverses the taunts of **27:40** and **27:43**, even as it provides an affirmative answer to the question of the high priest at Jesus’s trial in **26:63**. Jesus had responded in part to that question by predicting how the Sanhedrists would “see” his vindication. Now, instead, it is the centurion and the guards who “see” the truth, the group of gentiles accepting the title for Jesus that the Jewish authorities had rejected.

Donald Hagner: From the centurion’s perspective, on the other hand, Jesus was probably perceived as possessing divine power, and thus the centurion’s confession amounts to an admission of both Jesus’ innocence and Roman guilt (thus **Pobee**). There is both irony and tragedy in the fact that the statement is made by Roman soldiers (cf. **8:10–11**) and not the Jews to whom Jesus had come—just as in **2:2, 11** it is Gentiles who acknowledge the truth and not the Jews, anticipating the salvation-historical shift that will be articulated in **28:19**. The soldiers in their fear mouth words whose real significance they could hardly have known. What they had seen was enough to make them receptive to Jesus’ claim (which they would have heard from the Jewish authorities [see **27:43**]), and ultimately their confession does not differ greatly from that of Matthew’s church. On the other hand, the very claim made here was largely responsible for the Jewish rejection of Jesus (cf. **26:63; 27:40, 43**).

R. T. France: This declaration thus represents a sharp *volte-face*: they recognize now that their own earlier mocking of the “*king of the Jews*” (**vv. 27–31**) was out of place.

Whatever the soldiers themselves meant by it, for Matthew’s readers this declaration is a **climactic theological moment**. God has twice declared that Jesus is his son (**3:17; 17:5**); demons have recognized him as such (**4:3, 6; 8:29**); Jesus has said so himself (**11:25–27**; cf. **24:36**), has frequently referred to God as his “*Father*,” and has even on two occasions hinted publicly that he is God’s “*Son*” (**21:37–39; 22:42–45**); the disciples have hailed him as “*God’s son*” in a moment of crisis (**14:33** a declaration very similar to this one), and Peter has included this title in his considered estimate of Jesus (**16:16**). But right up to the time of Jesus’ trial no human observer outside the disciple group has used such language of Jesus, and at the Sanhedrin hearing it has formed part of the basis of his condemnation (**26:63**), subsequently providing the ammunition for Jewish mockery of this preposterous claim (**27:40, 43**). Now, however, people right outside the community of faith have recognized and declared the truth, and so reversed that mockery, and the fact that they are not even Jews reinforces Matthew’s message that the new *ekklēsia* is not to be restricted to the children of Abraham. Like the other centurion we met earlier in the gospel, this officer and his men have displayed faith beyond that of “*anyone in Israel*” (**8:10**), and so they too represent the many who will come from east and west to join the Jewish patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven (**8:11–12**).

B. (:55-56) Faithfulness of Female Disciples

“And many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, 56 among whom was Mary Magdalene, along with Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.”

Grant Osborne: The language of discipleship (“*follow*” [ἀκολουθέω], “*serve*” [διακονέω]) emphasizes them as **faithful disciples**. This is unusual, for women were marginalized in the ancient world and were not allowed to be disciples of rabbis (remember the Barbara Streisand

movie on that theme, called Yentl). Yet the fact that they were patrons of the group shows that Jesus went beyond custom here. . .

Mary of Magdala, a Galilean town south of Capernaum on the shore of the lake, is always first in the lists of women and was likely a leader of the group. **Luke 8:2** tells us that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her, and she then became a devoted disciple. She is most important as a witness of Jesus' death and resurrection, and Jesus appeared to her and made her the first official witness of the resurrection (**John 20:11–18**, probably as one of the group of women named in **Matt 28:9–10**). . .

So there were at least four women present at the cross: the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas and mother of one of the Twelve, and Salome, probably Mary's sister and mother of James and John.

Van Parunak: as late as **Acts 1:14**, that Mary is still called "*the mother of Jesus*." More likely this woman is to be identified with the wife of Cleophas, who is probably the brother of Joseph, foster-father of our Lord.

It may seem strange that Matthew omits the Lord's mother. But **John 19:25** apparently describes a moment earlier in the crucifixion, when Mary and John approached the cross and the Lord committed Mary into John's care. As the women moved away from the cross to the location where they are mentioned in Matthew, John has probably led Mary away, so that she and he are no longer at Golgotha.

Donald Hagner: At the very end it is the women, and not the disciples, who are there at the cross. They thus reflect a greater loyalty to their master. As they had faithfully supported him during his ministry, so now it is they who remain with him, even if at a distance, to the bitter end. They therefore deserve this special note of recognition as witnesses of his crucifixion and death. And it is they who will soon convey the message concerning the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples, for it is to the women that he first appeared.

D. A. Carson: Along with the soldiers, certain women, generally not highly regarded in Jewish society, watched to the bitter end. They kept their distance, whether through timidity or modesty. Though last at the cross, they were first at the tomb (**28:1**). Not only do they provide continuity to the narrative, but they prove that God has chosen the lowly and despised things of the world to shame the wise and strong (cf. **1Co 1:27–31**). These women were Galileans who often traveled with the disciples to care for Jesus' needs out of their own resources (cf. **Lk 8:2–3**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How amazing is the messianic prophecy of Psalm 22 in light of the fulfilment seen in this passage?
- 2) Why does Matthew focus more on the spiritual abandonment of the Son due to His being judged for our sin as opposed to the details of His physical suffering?

3) What is the significance of the veil in the temple being torn in two from the top to the bottom?

4) Why does Matthew focus attention on the reaction of the centurion (and his confession) and the onlooking women?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Wilson: A noteworthy rhetorical feature of **27:45–56** concerns the significant number of **verbal inclusions** it creates with the opening sections of the gospel. For example,

- the astrological phenomenon attending Jesus’s death (**27:45**) recalls the astrological phenomenon attending his birth (**2:2, 9**).
- The report in **27:46** that Jesus “*cried out with a loud voice*” (ἀνεβόησεν ... φωνῆ μεγάλης) recalls the one “*crying out* [φωνῆ βοῶντος] *in the wilderness*” (**3:3**), that is, John the Baptist (**3:1**), who is identified with Elijah (11:14; cf. **17:11–12**), who is mentioned by name in **27:47**.
- The opening of the earth (i.e., the tombs) in **27:52** corresponds to the opening of the heavens in **3:16** (also with ἀνοίγω) when Jesus is baptized by John,
- while the confessional statement in **27:54** recalls the voice that speaks from the heavens in **3:17** (both with υἱός).
- Finally, the group of gentile confessors in **27:54** matches the group of gentile worshippers (i.e., the magi) in **2:11**.

Together these features give the impression that with this story, we have reached a **culminating moment** in the life and ministry of Jesus. The fact that extraordinary events occur at both his birth and his death also has the rhetorical force of enhancing the divine dimensions of his life more generally, especially given that such events occur in heaven as well as on the earth.

Grant Osborne: Matthew and Mark center on the **horror of putting to death the Son of God**. The negative aspects are front and center in contrast to the more positive aspects highlighted in Luke’s and John’s crucifixion narratives. As **Davies and Allison** say, “**Vv. 32–50** do not encourage or inspire but rather depict human sin and its frightening freedom in the unfathomable divine silence. **There is terror in this text**. The mocking and torture of the innocent and righteous Son of God are not intended to make but to shatter sense, to portray the depths of irrational human depravity.” The mockery deserves judgment, and the judgment of God is depicted in the three hours of darkness seen as a reenactment of the Egyptian plague of **Exod 10:21–23** and a harbinger of the final judgment (see on v. 45).

Michael Wilkins: One direct result of Jesus’ ministry has been the restoration and affirmation of women that God intended from the beginning of creation, which we can see demonstrated in the following ways.

- Women were equally worthy of Jesus’ saving activity (e.g., **John 4:1–42**).
- Women were called to be Jesus’ disciples (**Matt. 12:48–50**).
- Women received instruction and nurture as Jesus’ disciples (**Luke 10:38–42**).
- Women were part of his ministry team (**Luke 8:1–3**).

- Because of their courageous presence at the cross and the empty tomb, women were designated as the first to testify to the reality of Jesus' resurrection (**Matt. 28:10; Mark 16:7; John 20:17**).

For women to be disciples of a great master was certainly an unusual circumstance in Palestine in the first century. Yet here we find another instance of the unique form of discipleship Jesus instituted. While women were not part of the Twelve, several women disciples traveled with Jesus and had a significant part in his earthly ministry. Jesus restores and reaffirms to women their dignity and worth as persons fully equal to men as humans created in the image of God. He also preserves the male-female distinction of humans, so that they are restored and affirmed in the different roles that God intended from the beginning. Distinctions among Jesus' disciples relate to function, not spiritual standing or commitment or essential personal worth. Jesus restores and affirms to women the status of being coworkers with men in God's plan for working out his will on earth.

John MacArthur: God's Miraculous Commentary on the Cross

In fact, attending the death of Jesus Christ in this particular portion of Scripture are six miracles. Six miracles occur simultaneous to the death of Christ which become **God the Father's own commentary on the meaning of the cross**. This is God's own testimony as to what the death of Christ means. It's all right here. And frankly, you could read it over and over again and not see it if you didn't stop to contemplate deeply its truth. The meaning of the cross is nowhere more clearly delineated than right in the event itself described by Matthew in these few verses as Matthew gives us God's own commentary on the meaning of the death of His Son.

Let's look at these six miracles and hear what God says about the meaning of the cross through these miracles. The first one we'll call **supernatural darkness** – supernatural darkness. . .

The sun went out. It became as dark as midnight in the middle of the day.

But what is the point? Well, the rabbis used to teach, and it's recorded in the Talmud that they taught this, that if the sun goes dark it will be a judgment of God on the world for committing a great crime. And indeed we could say the world had committed a great crime in crucifying Jesus Christ. Others have suggested to us that it went dark because nature was throwing a veil over the sufferings of Christ. And still others have suggested that it was dark because this is an act of sympathy on the part of God to cover the nakedness and the dishonor of His Son. And other suggest to us that this is a divine protest. And so it goes.

Now what is the meaning of the darkness? What is God saying about the darkness? No one, no Bible writer, no New Testament or Old Testament writer comments on the darkness at the cross of Christ. They really need not comment, it's very obvious what it means. If you were to dig into the Old Testament text, you would find that darkness is used in Scripture as a **symbol of divine judgment**. . .

Here's the second miracle. I call it the miracle of **sovereign departure**. It is a miracle, you see. It's a miracle in reverse, in a sense. It's a strange kind of miracle, but it's a miracle in the sense that it is a supernatural inexplicable event that is beyond the capacity of human understanding, for God is separated from God. **God the Father turns His back on God the Son**. It is said that **Martin Luther** went into seclusion to try to understand this mystery and came out more confused than when he began. I understand that. God is separated from God. And Jesus in the climax of

the sin bearing, at the close of the three hours of the fury of God being poured out at its maximum capacity, cries out about the fact that **He is separated from God**. . .

After all, didn't **Isaiah 53** say He would be *delivered for our transgressions*? Doesn't **Romans 25** say He's delivered – **4:25** say *He's delivered for our offenses*? Doesn't **1 Corinthians 15:3** say *He died for our sins*? **First Peter 2:24**, "*Who in His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree?*" **First Peter 3:18**, *who offered Himself suffering for sin, the just for the unjust*? I mean, doesn't the Scripture clearly tell us in **1 John 4:10** that God sent His Son to be the *atonement for our sins*? Doesn't **Galatians 3:13** say *He was made a curse for us*? And **2 Corinthians 5:21**, *He was made sin for us who knew no sin*? Christ didn't just bear sin, He became sin. He was its personification. But that's why He came. He said that in **Matthew 20:28**, "*I'm come not to be served by to serve and to give My life a ransom for many.*" And that's why God turned His back because **God can't look on sin**. When Jesus screamed, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,*" the answer is because **God cannot look upon sin**.

Now you say, well, **what kind of a separation is this**? Well it isn't a separation as to nature. He didn't cease to be God or He would have ceased to exist because He can only be who He is. He was not separated from the nature of God. He was not separated from the Trinity. He was not separated in essence or nature or substance. He was separated in terms of intimate fellowship and communion. Like a child who sins severely against its own father does not cease to become that father's child but does cease to know the intimacy of a loving communion, because the father cannot tolerate the sin, so God turns His back on Christ.

Now when Christ first came into the world, there was a certain separation because He said to be equal with God, **Philippians 2**, is not something to hold on to. Which means that when He became incarnate, He let go of some of that equality. So there was some separation in His incarnation and He also prayed, "*Lord, restore Me to the glory I had with You before the world began,*" **John 17:5**, which means there was something missing. And now there is an even more profound separation, not just the separation of incarnation but the **separation of utter sinfulness**. And the fact that God turns His back on Jesus Christ and He cries out those words that David said He would cry in **Psalms 22:1**, "*My God, My God, why have You abandon Me,*" indicates that this is a sin situation and God is turning His back on what He will always turn His back on and that is sin. . .

And herein is the great third miracle of the cross. That is this: Jesus' life was not taken from Him. **He voluntarily gave it up**. And that is demonstrated to us by the fact that He died so very soon, when victims normally lingered for days on the cross. In fact, according to **Mark 15** verses **44 and 45**, when the word was given to Pilate that Jesus was dead, he couldn't believe it and sent somebody to check on it, because it was so abnormal for one to die that soon. And the reason the Scripture says He cried with a loud voice or screamed or yelled is to demonstrate to us that even at the time when He gave up His life, He had the strength to live if He had willed to live. Jesus not only had the power to take His life back out of the grave, He had the power to give His life whenever He wanted. . .

So we see the wrath of God. We see the holiness of God. And we see the love and grace and mercy of God in the miracles of Calvary. At the very moment of His death, three instantaneous miracles occurred. Look at **verse 51**. This is the fourth of these miracles in this section. We'll call this one **sanctuary devastation**. The last one was **self-giving death**. The one before that, **sovereign departure** and then **supernatural darkness**. Sanctuary devastation – look what

happened in **verse 51** to the temple. *“And behold”* – and that’s a startled word. Behold, amazingly, shockingly, startlingly – *“the curtain”* – or veil – *“of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom.”* . . .

In the death of Jesus Christ there is **total access into My holy presence**. Why? Because He paid for what? For sin. I mean, this is the Father’s own commentary on the meaning of the cross. God throws wide open His arms and says, as the writer of **Hebrews** in **chapter 4 verse 16** says it so beautifully, *“Let us come boldly to the throne to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.”* We now can rush into the presence of God for the separation is removed in the death of Jesus Christ who has paid for sin and removed it. It’s no longer a barrier. What a glorious truth. . .

I want you to notice a fifth miracle. **Verse 51**, *“The earth did quake and the rocks were split.”* Instantaneously at the death of Jesus Christ, the Father had something else to say and without an audible voice from heaven, He said it in a physical way. He brought to the city of Jerusalem and the area around Jerusalem a devastating earthquake which split rocks open, created fissures in the ground. No doubt those fissures to this day still exist. This was a real earthquake. What was He saying? What was the point of this? . . .

That earth is beautifully described in the epistle of the Hebrews – to the **Hebrews** in **chapter 12 verse 26**. *“Yet once more I shake not the earth only but also heaven.”* He did it once at Sinai. He says I’ll do it again. *“Yet once more signifies the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made.”* In other words, God’s going to shake out of existence the earth that is, *“that those things which cannot be shaken may remain, a kingdom which cannot be moved.”* So God is going to shake this one out of existence and redo a brand new one, a new earth and a new heaven in which Christ will reign supreme as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. . .

When God shook the earth at the death of Christ, I think He was giving the world a taste of what He’s going to do in the future when He shakes the earth in the time of the coming of the King Himself. I believe when Jesus died on that cross, He so perfectly accomplished the Father’s will, He so earned the right to be the King of the earth, He so earned the right to take the title deed to the earth out of the hand of God, as it’s seen there in the book of **Revelation chapter 5**, as He takes the title deed out of the hand of God and begins to unroll that title deed and take over the earth from **Revelation 6 to 19**. I believe He earned the right to do that on the cross. I believe because of His perfect bearing of sin in His own body, because He finished the work of redemption, the Father said, You will be the King of the earth. I will give You the nations for Your footstool. I will give You the earth to rule. All people will bow the knee to You. You will rule the universe, on the earth, under the earth, above the earth, it says in **Philippians 2**. And I believe shaking the earth at the death of Christ was God’s way of guarantying the promise of a renewed world and a renewed universe. Christ had earned that and it would come – it would come.

And closely connected to that and one reason why I believe that’s the proper interpretation is that it tells us about the last miracle, the sixth one. And this is a marvelous miracle – **subduing death**. *“And the graves were opened.”* That obviously could have happened from the earthquake. But the next part couldn’t have happened just from the earthquake. *“And many bodies of the saints that slept were raised and came out of the graves.”* And you should put a period there. That’s the way the text should read. There was a resurrection, folks. There was a resurrection. Did you get that? You say, what came out of the graves?” *Sōmata* – bodies. Bodies, not spirits. This isn’t some ethereal thing. These aren’t ghosts. Bodies. **This is a real resurrection**. What

bodies? Many bodies. Not all of them. It was a very discriminating one. Only select ones. Who were they? Saints. What are saints? Holy ones from out of the Old Testament era who were waiting for their resurrection, who had been waiting perhaps a long time. When Jesus died, their spirits came from the abode where righteous spirits dwell and were joined with glorified bodies that came out of those graves. . .

The Father was saying the cross is the point of greatest hope for resurrection. Why? Because if your sin is dealt with and your sin is carried away by Christ and the penalty is paid and the wrath of God is all spent and He has drunk the poison, as it were, to the last drop, then you are free from death and free to live. And if access to God is wide open and if He's going to create a Kingdom that will never be shaken, then you have a right to that access and a right to that kingdom and you'll live in a glorified form to possess it. This is the meaning of the cross. This is the testimony of God the Father.

Charles Swindoll: The group of men and women hovering around Golgotha would not have known that the veil in the temple had torn. But they would have experienced the chilling, thick darkness that had blanketed the heavens for several hours and the sudden earthquake that rocked the land as if on cue the moment Jesus died. All these events announced, as a sort of wordless sermon, that the One who was crucified as King of the Jews was no charlatan or madman. Anybody with an eye to see or an ear to hear would have recognized that something extremely significant had just happened.

TEXT: Matthew 27:57-66

TITLE: BURYING JESUS AND SECURING HIS GRAVE

BIG IDEA:

**THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD BODY OF JESUS AND SECURING HIS GRAVE
FULFIL MESSIANIC PROPHECY AND SUPPORT THE VALIDITY OF HIS
RESURRECTION**

INTRODUCTION:

Donald Hagner: In the kerygma of the early church it is not only the death of Jesus that is important but also his burial (see **1 Cor 15:3–4; Acts 13:29**). The burial is further confirmation of the reality of Jesus' death; together they provide the necessary prelude to the resurrection itself. As with the death and resurrection, the burial of Jesus is applied spiritually to the life of the Christian in the Pauline letters (**Rom 6:4; Col 2:12**).

Grant Osborne: This is a transition story that both concludes the crucifixion and prepares for the resurrection. The emphasis is on the reality of Jesus' death and its significance as the death of the royal Messiah.

David Thompson: The book of Matthew is designed to teach that Jesus Christ was Israel's Messiah, King and Savior. The book begins with Jesus' kingly lineage. It develops with Jesus' kingly life. In the **27th chapter** we see Jesus' kingly death and, as we near the end of the chapter, we see Jesus' kingly burial.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS CHRIST'S BODY IS A FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY, WHICH CLEARLY PROVES JESUS CHRIST IS THE GOD / KING / SAVIOR.

Approximately 700 years before these events occurred, Isaiah, God's prophet, predicted this: *"His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth."* Isaiah predicts that somehow Jesus' death and grave will be connected to a rich man. Here in Matthew is the literal fulfillment of that prediction.

Thomas Constable: Matthew emphasized two things about Jesus' burial:

1. the fulfillment of prophecy,
2. and the impossibility of the theory that someone stole Jesus' body.

Stu Weber: Jesus the Messiah died and was buried, proving that he paid for our sin and that his resurrection was the miracle the Bible claims it to be. Matthew's description of Jesus' burial is brief and to the point. But it is also critical. The fact that Jesus was dead and buried is the foundation on which the validity of the Resurrection is based. . .

Despite Pilate's provision of a well-trained Roman guard and the seal of the Roman Empire on Jesus' tomb, the king would prove that he was still in control. Nothing – not even the long arm of Rome's "sovereign" power – would be able to prevent his victorious return to life.

Leon Morris: Matthew prepares us for the resurrection narrative by recounting the way Jesus' burial was carried out and the precautions that were taken to ensure that nobody stole the body out of the tomb. We might have expected family members to arrange for the burial, or if not, then some of his close followers, but Matthew brings into the narrative Joseph of Arimathea, who went to see Pilate to get permission to bury Jesus and then placed him in his own tomb. This was an action of some generosity, for a rock tomb was expensive, and it was not permitted to bury a criminal in a family grave (Sanh. 6:5; cf. Daube, pp. 310-11); the tomb could probably not be used afterward for anyone else. Matthew goes on to tell us that the Jewish leaders recalled Jesus' prophecy that he would rise from the dead and persuaded Pilate to secure the tomb until the third day after the crucifixion.

I. (:57-61) BURYING JESUS IN A RICH MAN'S NEW TOMB

A. (:57-58) The Initiative of Joseph of Arimathea

1. (:57) Coming Out as a Disciple of Jesus

“And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.”

Donald Hagner: i.e., Friday but before the beginning of the sabbath, the dead body of Jesus still hung on the cross. . . .

Matthew uses the word “*rich*” to indicate the kind of power and influence Joseph had to make his request of Pilate and to have it granted.

Charles Swindoll: Perhaps emboldened by Joseph's willingness to reveal his devotion to Jesus before his fellow Jerusalem elites, Nicodemus – a Pharisee and also a member of the Sanhedrin – who had encountered Jesus earlier in His ministry (**John 3:1-21**), also stepped out of the shadows and assisted in what had to be a very hasty and incomplete burial before sundown (**John 19:39-40**).

Leon Morris: It is not without its interest that the crucifixion that sent most of Jesus' followers into hiding had the opposite effect on Joseph and brought him out into the open. . . That he was able to speak to the governor gives us some indication of his importance.

2. (:58) Calling upon Pilate to Release to Him the Body of Jesus

*“This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him.”*

David Turner: The bodies of those who had died by crucifixion were often not given a proper burial, but left on the crosses to disintegrate or thrown on the ground to be disposed of by scavengers and natural decay. But Jewish piety objected to any body being left unburied (**Deut 21:22-23**), and so there was provision there for the burial of those executed (**Josephus**, War 4.317) in a common burial plot rather than in a family tomb. To provide proper burial for someone otherwise unprovided for was a valued act of charity (Tob 1:16-18); cf. the provision for the burial of “*strangers*” in **27:7**. But the provision of a new, rock-cut tomb for Jesus was quite exceptional, and indicates that Joseph was motivated by more than conventional piety. It is, like the act of the woman who anointed Jesus in **26:6-13**, a quite extravagant act of devotion.

John Schultz: Late in the afternoon, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body so it could be buried before the beginning of the Sabbath. The **Pulpit Commentary** comments: "It was the Roman custom to leave criminals hanging on the cross for days, till their bodies were devoured by birds and wild animals; the Jewish Law enacted that when bodies were penally suspended, they should be taken down and buried before night (... **Deuteronomy 21:22, 23**), that the land might not be defiled. Tomorrow (beginning at sunset), being a specially solemn day, as combining the sabbath and the Passover celebration, the Jews were particularly anxious that the crucified bodies of our Lord and the two robbers should be taken away and put out of sight before the sabbath began."

Commenting on Joseph's actions, The **Pulpit Commentary** states: "We must remember that this act of Joseph and his friends was not only a bold proceeding, but an act of great self-denial. Contact with a corpse caused ceremonial defilement of seven days' duration, and thus they would be debarred from taking their part in the great Paschal solemnity, with its solemn and joyful observances. But the love of Jesus and the unselfish desire to render him honor enabled them to rise superior to religious prejudices, and willingly to make the required sacrifice."

B. (:59-60) The Internment of the Body of Jesus

1. (:59) Preparation of the Body

"And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,"

2. (:60a) Placement of the Body

"and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock;"

David Turner: There are many rock-cut tombs of the period in and around Jerusalem. Many are large family vaults with spaces for a considerable number of bodies, and Joseph, as a rich man, is likely to have had such a tomb quarried out for his own family. That he should be prepared to use it for Jesus is a mark of considerable loyalty, especially when it was "new," which both Luke and John explain as meaning that no one had yet been buried there. The point is significant for apologetics, in that it makes it more difficult to explain the women's discovery as due to mistaken identity: **there was only one body in the tomb.**

D. A. Carson: Tombs were of various kinds. Many were sealed with some sort of boulder wedged into place to discourage wild animals and grave robbers. But an expensive tomb consisted of an antechamber hewn out of the rock face, with a low passage (cf. "*bent over*," **Jn 20:5, 11**) leading into the burial chamber, which was sealed with a cut disk-shaped stone that rolled in a slot cut into the rock. The slot was on an incline, making the grave easy to seal but difficult to open. Several men might be needed to roll the stone back up the incline. This sort of tomb is presupposed in the gospel records.

3. (:60b) Protection of the Body

"and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away."

C. (:61) The Identity of Two Women Witnesses to the Location of the Tomb

"And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave."

Donald Hagner: The body of Jesus is taken and buried by an influential man who was a disciple of Jesus. The **location of the tomb** in which the body of Jesus was placed is thus directly known

to a disciple of Jesus. And a further guarantee of the location of the tomb is the note that the two Marys were also there opposite the tomb.

D. A. Carson: No mourning was permitted for those executed under Roman law. The women followed with broken but silent grief and watched the burial.

II. (:62-66) SEALING AND SECURING THE GRAVE

Donald Hagner: There is a twofold miscalculation here.

- First, the Jewish authorities underestimate Jesus by failing to realize God's purpose in and through him. That Jesus could rise from the dead they wrongly rule out a priori. And when they have no explanation for what happened to the body of Jesus, ironically they invent the very lie they attempted to protect against (**28:13**).
- Second, they overestimate the disciples, who were not thinking of Jesus' words about rising from the dead and whose psychological condition hardly made it possible for them to perpetrate such a hoax as the Jewish authorities feared.

The incongruous, ironical result is that the opponents took Jesus' words about rising from the dead more seriously than did the disciples. A vague fear in this case was a greater motivation than the hope of the disciples. Calling attention to the irony in the passage, **Gnilka** aptly concludes: "The laughter of God roars through the pericope" (2:489). Such must be said also of the pericope that completes this one (**28:11-15**).

Charles Swindoll: The last five verses in this chapter are unique to Matthew's account. In a sort of addendum to the description of the burial, Matthew cuts to the chief priests and Pharisees again trying to manipulate things behind the scenes by plotting and conniving. Matthew points out that they did all of this "*on the next day, the day after the preparation*" (**27:62**). That is, they were doing all this work on the Sabbath, which was forbidden by Jewish Law. Those hypocrites who had condemned Jesus and His disciples for "*working*" on the Sabbath were now hard at work against the so-called deceiver they had condemned!

Grant Osborne: Nearly all commentaries and studies of the Resurrection Narrative begin the resurrection narrative with **28:1**, viewing the posting of the guard at the tomb (27:62-66) as the final event of the transition from the Passion Narrative to the Resurrection Narrative. While viable, this is not the best way to view Matthew's structure. While **vv. 51-61** relate to the crucifixion, **vv. 62-66** contain material that connect it more closely to the resurrection (Jesus' promise to "*rise again*" after three days, the guards, and the sealing of the tomb).

The Matthean account is structured beautifully, showing the contrast between Jesus/God and his opponents. It is structured in three episodes, each with two parts contrasting the efforts of Jesus' enemies with the victory of the Risen Lord/God over them (as in the infancy narratives):

Preparation: The setting of the guard (**27:62-63**) vs. the going forth of the women (**28:1**)

Reaction: The fear of the guard (**28:2-4**) vs. the joy of the women (**vv. 5-10**)

Results: The spreading of lies (**vv. 11-15**) vs. the proclamation of truth (**vv. 18-20**).

In this way Matthew shows the exaltation and glory of the enthroned Lord whose enemies are “*a footstool for [his] feet*” (Ps 110:1). Also there is a contrast between the figures involved in the action, between the guards and the women and between the leaders and the supernatural actions of God (see Luz).

A. (:62-63) Concern of the Jewish Religious Leaders

1. (:62) Meeting with Pilate on the Sabbath

“Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate,”

2. (:63) Mention of Jesus’ Resurrection Prophecy

“and said, ‘Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I am to rise again.’”

Thomas Constable: Jesus was in the tomb only about 36 hours, but because these hours included parts of three days the Jews viewed the period as three days long (cf. Matthew 12:40). The fact that Jesus’ prediction of His resurrection had reached the ears of these men reflects badly on the disciples’ lack of faith. They should have understood and believed that Jesus would arise since knowledge of His prediction of this event was so widespread. These Sanhedrin members did not believe Jesus would rise. They wanted to guard against any plot that His disciples might concoct alleging that He arose. The Jews needed Pilate’s approval for any military action.

Jesus’ first “deception” from their viewpoint was His messiahship, and His last (second) was His claim that He would rise from the dead. The chief priests and Pharisees wanted to protect the people from deception. Matthew viewed their action as self-deception designed to deceive others. They had formerly accused Jesus of being a deceiver (Matthew 26:4).

B. (:64-65) Command to Secure the Grave

1. (:64) Rationale for the Command

Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”

David Turner: The authorities’ fears focus (explicitly at least) not on the possibility that Jesus might actually rise from death, but on the opportunity for his disciples to cash in on such language to stage a fake resurrection (an explanation which they will continue to uphold even after the event, 28:13–15). A Messiah allegedly returned to life after being officially executed for blasphemy, will, they rightly perceive, be far more dangerous to their religious authority than Jesus had been while alive.

D. A. Carson: The disciples disbelieved Jesus’ words about rising again, not because they could not understand the plain words, but because they had no frame of reference capable of integrating a dying and rising Messiah into their own messianic expectations. Shattered by the demoralizing turn of events, they cowered in fear (Jn 20:19), unable and even unwilling to trust their judgment and understanding on anything except the terrible fact that their Messiah had been crucified.

Leon Morris: They were probably uneasy that the body had been given to friends of Jesus for burial, so they wanted to make sure that no one removed the body from the tomb where it had

been placed. Accordingly they asked Pilate to take steps to ensure that the body was not stolen. “*Command*,” they say, for it was only the governor who could order troops to be stationed at the tomb. There was, of course, no reason why they should not have put some of the temple police there, but evidently they felt that some Roman soldiers would be preferable. In any case, once they had handed Jesus over to the Romans he would have been removed from their control and they might not have any rights at the sepulchre. *Therefore* looks to Jesus’ prophecies. They are not saying that there was a danger that the ordinary kind of grave robber would remove Jesus’ body (and they probably would not have been greatly concerned had this taken place). But because of the prophecies they wanted a guard. They wanted the tomb to be *made secure*; they did not specify that they wanted soldiers to be there, but security demanded no less. They wanted help *until the third day*, for that was the time specified in the prophecies, and if the disciples stole the body after that time they could point out that Jesus’ words had not been fulfilled. But if the body was stolen within that time, the disciples could claim that he was raised from the dead. It is, of course, true that the disciples would have had a difficult time claiming a resurrection when all they had was a dead body, but the leaders did not want to give them the opportunity. If such a claim were made, they thought, “*the last error will be greater than the first.*” Presumably they saw Jesus’ claim to messiahship as the first error and a claim to resurrection as a possible last. They were castigating his teaching and specifically they called his prophecy of his resurrection an error and held that a claim to resurrection would be an even greater error. They did not consider for a moment that there was any element of truth in what Jesus had said.

2. (:65) Receptivity to Issuing the Command

“*Pilate said to them,*

‘*You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.*’”

.Robert Gundry: The chief priests had temple guards at their disposal. But to use them the chief priests wouldn’t have had to make a request to Pilate; nor would they later need to shield them from Pilate’s anger for failure at guard duty, for their own guards weren’t answerable to him (28:14). So “*Have a guardsquad*” means that **Pilate is providing them with guards.**

Van Parunak: It is sometimes suggested (France, Carson) that he is cynically sending them off to use their own temple guard. But the use of a Latin loan word here, the term “*soldiers*” in 28:12, and the fact that the guard is afraid that Pilate will care what became of the body, all show that **these are Romans.** We know that the group that arrested the Lord included a Roman cohort (John 18:3) as well as the temple guard (Luke 22:52), and Pilate is likely referring to this previously assigned body of soldiers. “Take the same men I gave you for the arrest.”

[Alternative View] **David Turner:** The Jewish leaders want Pilate to deploy his own troops, but he prefers to leave the responsibility to them; “*you have a guard*” refers to the Jewish temple guards (see on 26:47). It is their problem; let them take care of it with their own resources. The less natural alternative translation, “*Take a guard*”, would probably indicate that Pilate made a detachment of his own soldiers available, and the fear of punishment by the governor (v. 14) has led some to assume that this was so. But the fact that the guard will subsequently report back not to Pilate but to the priests (28:11), and that the governor’s hearing of their failure is mentioned only as a possibility (28:14), makes it more probable that it was the temple guards that were used. The sealing of the tomb is an additional precaution along with the presence of a guard who were supposed to maintain constant watch.

Grant Osborne: Thus, Pilate does the same as he did at the trial, seeking to please the leaders and avoiding controversy during the volatile period of the Passover. Even though he is filled with contempt for them, he does not want any further trouble from these Jewish diehards.

C. (:66) Commitment to Secure the Grave

*“And they went and made the grave secure,
and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.”*

David Thompson: The grave is made secure three ways:

- 1) large stone;
- 2) stationed guard;
- 3) sealed tomb.

The only way that body would get out of that tomb would be through a miraculous resurrection.

John Schultz: According to **Edersheim**, in his book about Israel in the days of Jesus, the large stone that closed the grave was held in place by smaller stones and the seal was placed between those little stones and the large one. The leaders of the nation felt more threatened by Jesus in His death than they did during His life! Their fear about what a dead Jesus could do to them must have evoked the ridicule of *“the One enthroned in heaven. David wrote: “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.”*

There must have been something frightening in Jesus’ own announcement of His resurrection. It meant that He had foretold His own death. It meant that death had not come to Him as an unpleasant surprise. Everything had gone so far according to plan, Jesus’ plan. The strange phenomenon is that those who hated Him paid more attention to what He had said than those who loved Him.

We must think of the similarity between the sealing of Jesus’ tomb and the seal placed on the lions’ den in which Daniel was supposed to find death. Human initiative tries to seal stones in an effort to prevent what God had promised to do on the basis of the blood of an eternal covenant. No power in heaven or hell would have been able to prevent the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you think motivated Joseph to step forward at this important point in time when previously had had been a secret disciple because of fear of repercussions?
- 2) How does God’s providential ordering of all of the details of Jesus’ death and burial (in fulfilment of OT messianic prophecy) encourage you regarding God’s control of all the circumstances of your life?
- 3) What is the apologetic value of the guarding and sealing of the tomb?
- 4) Why was it so important that these women witness the location of the burial of Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Gundry: Jesus' burial in the tomb of "a rich man" fulfills **Isaiah 53:9**, where we read concerning the suffering Servant of the Lord, "His grave was assigned [to be] . . . with a rich [man] in his death." "Also" makes Joseph "a disciple of Jesus" alongside the just-mentioned women. "Himself" underlines Joseph's discipleship. The resumption of Joseph by "this [man]" puts him forward as a good example of devotion to Jesus. Pilate's commanding Jesus' body to be given Joseph, and doing so "then"—that is, on the spot, without investigation—agrees with Pilate's having declared Jesus righteous and himself innocent of Jesus' blood (**27:24**); and "to be given back" indicates a return of the body to someone to whom it rightfully belongs, that is, to a disciple who'll treat the body respectfully. The taking of Jesus' body avoids the indignity of its hanging on a cross overnight and throughout the Sabbath. So too do its being wrapped in a linen cloth and placed in a tomb. For Romans normally forbade a proper burial of those executed like Jesus under a charge of high treason (in his case as "king of the Jews" in opposition to Caesar). Matthew describes the linen cloth as "clean," and the tomb as "new." Thus the ritual purity of the shroud and tomb displays Joseph's respect for the body of Jesus. Adding devotion to respect is Matthew's saying that Joseph himself hewed the tomb in rock, or had it hewn in rock on his behalf. "The rock" associates the tomb with the tombs in the rocks where earlier righteous people had been buried (**27:51b–53**). This association helps the application of Joseph's burying Jesus to the devotion of Christians toward their fellows victimized by persecution (compare **14:12; 25:34–40**) and also presages the resurrection of Jesus after the pattern of those earlier ones' resurrection. Tombs hewn in rock had shelves on which wrapped corpses were laid. Matthew's description of the entrance-blocking stone as "large" enhances Joseph's effort to make sure the tomb containing Jesus' body wouldn't be violated. Joseph's going away provides a foil for the vigil of the two Marys, who sit opposite the tomb. "There" emphasizes that they stay for a vigil, which like Joseph's treatment of Jesus' body exemplifies ministerial devotion to the persecuted, a devotion that true discipleship requires (compare **10:41–42; 25:41–46**).

John MacArthur: The Amazing Burial of Jesus

The burial of Jesus Christ is as supernatural and as miraculous in many ways as was His death and as will be His resurrection. It is a marvelous and thrilling account of supernatural intervention in every detail in the life of Christ. From His birth to His burial to His resurrection, everything is controlled by God the Father for the fulfillment of divine purpose and prophecy. And we shall see that as we look at this text. Even His burial then becomes a testimony to His kingliness, a testimony to His deity. Even His burial is proof in fact that He is none other than the Son of God who He claimed to be. It is a marvelous and thrilling thing to see God giving evidence as to the deity of Christ even in His being buried.

Now it comes to us in three particular features in **verses 57 through 66**.

1. The first testimony really comes through Joseph of Arimathea,
2. the second through Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in **verse 61**,
3. and the third, strangely enough, through the chief priests and Pharisees from **verse 62 to 66**.

Joseph and the two Marys and then the group of scribes and – or the group rather of chief priests and Pharisees each play a very important role in the burial of Jesus, which role ultimately speaks to the truthfulness of Christ's claim to be the Son of God. And so God is giving testimony to His Son even in this. . .

So there are two major prophecies very explicit, very easily recognized that must relate to the burial of Christ. He must be buried with the rich and He must be buried for a period of three days. Now God uses Joseph of Arimathea to fulfill these prophecies as the human instrument. So Joseph then gives testimony to the deity of Christ through being used in fulfilled prophecy – fulfilled prophecy. . .

It was imperative that Christ be dead by 3:00 so that He could be in the grave on some part of Friday so that that day could be included in the three days He had to be in the earth. He had to be buried on Friday so that Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, at least a portion of each of those days, He would spend in the earth as He had prophesied that He would. . .

Now we don't know what [Joseph's] involvement is in the past. We have no information except one statement given by John in his gospel. **Chapter 19 verse 38** John says this, "*He was a disciple of Jesus*" – listen – "*secretly for fear of the Jews.*" Up to this point he had been a secretive disciple because he was afraid of what it would cost him. He was afraid of the leaders. I mean if he was a member of the Sanhedrin and they found out he was following Jesus, it would be the end of his Sanhedrin rights. It would be the end of his wealth, because he wouldn't be able to do business with anybody. It would be the end of his social status. He and his family would be alienated and ostracized. It would be the end of everything. The price would be very, very high. And this man was not going to take a step of boldness and identify with Jesus until he was certain that Jesus was in fact worth the effort. . .

In other words, if you take the view that He had to be there three days and three nights, He can't rise till the fourth day. But everything in the text says on the third day. So that eliminates the need for interpreting that particular three days and three nights as if it meant three actual 24-hour periods. It is simply a Jewish colloquial expression for any part of a day. . .

Listen, the amazing burial of Jesus Christ attended to by this secret disciple who now becomes public for the whole world to know throughout all history, Joseph of Arimathea, the whole thing is orchestrated to fulfill specific prophecy that Jesus would be three days and that He would be with the rich in His death. He is buried in a wealthy man's grave which the wealthy man made for himself. Now I don't know what got Joseph of Arimathea from being secret to being public. Maybe it was the earthquake and the darkness and the rocks splitting and the graves opening and the temple veil ripping from top to bottom. I don't know whether it was the heart of love. I don't know whether it was the agonizing sympathy he felt when he watched Jesus going through the things He went through. Whatever it was, humanly speaking, I don't know. What I do know is it was God working on his heart. And God was bringing to pass the fulfillment of prophecy. So Jesus was with the rich in His death and He was in the grave for three days. . .

And only two ladies were left, **Mary of Magdala and Mary this mother of James and Joseph and wife of Cleophas**. And they are sitting – and the Greek says – opposite the sepulcher. And they're just sitting there in deep sorrow, in deep agony. And if Joseph of Arimathea is used by God to confirm the deity of Christ through fulfilled prophecy, these two are used to confirm the deity of Christ through first-hand testimony – first-hand testimony. . .

And then finally, and we come to **verse 62**. The third group that God providentially orders in the scene to bring about the amazing burial of Jesus Christ are the **chief priests and the Pharisees**. And they provide in this testimony to the deity of Christ what I think to be as forceful as any proof of His resurrection anywhere in the Scripture. . .

Do you know what would have happened if there was no guard and no seal? Nobody was watching the tomb and all of a sudden we were trying to preach a message that Jesus rose from the dead. And somebody would say, “Don’t give me that, it never happened. They just took His body and somebody took on His identity and somebody who looked like Him made a few appearances,” and so forth and so forth and so forth. But the unbelieving world itself made sure that there’s no other explanation for the absent body of Jesus Christ except a resurrection. If no seal and no guard, the resurrection could have been explained as a grave robbery. But not after this. And the wrath of these Christ haters has led them to secure that grave to the extent that there’s no other explanation than a resurrection. And later on, by the way, we’ll see in chapter 28 the soldiers were bribed to deny the resurrection, which is another testimony to its reality.

Do you see how God is working in everything? He used Joseph of Arimathea providentially to fulfill prophecy. He used the two Marys providentially to give first-hand testimony to the resurrection. And He used the chief priests and the Pharisees providentially to give forceful proof that Jesus indeed rose from the dead. . .

Now listen carefully. How does this relate to you and me? Do you know this verse? “*For we know that all things work together for*” – what? – “*good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*” Does that come to you with new meaning now? Do you understand what that says? All things are controlled by God to work together to fulfill His eternal purpose for His own beloved children which is their good. I mean, that is a marvelous thing. This idea of God’s sovereignty and God’s providence is not some distant doctrine only for theologians. I mean, this is where the rubber meets the road, folks. It’s when you can’t explain the trouble you’re going through that you need to understand the providential power of a sovereign God who takes every bit of the diverse data of the universe and controls it all for your good and His glory and eternal purpose. Is that comforting? It doesn’t matter what it is. It doesn’t matter what it is. And He demonstrated His ability to do it in the death and burial of Jesus Christ – glorious thing.

S. Lewis Johnson: The Burial of Christ

It’s an amazing thing, but it’s an illustration of the providence of God that he has so arranged the affairs of men that they should kill the Passover lamb, the Passover lamb, sit down and feed upon an animal, when they could have been, if enlightened by the Holy Spirit, rejoicing in the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament promises concerning the lamb of God. The explanation, of course, is that they had no life in them. They were accustomed to strain out the net and swallow the camel, and so they carefully fulfilled all of the Mosaic ritual and their tradition and in fulfilling them they forget the great fulfillment of our Lord’s sufferings.

The burial and its humiliation is reflected in the Apostle’s Creed which many of us have recited many times in the churches in which we have grown up. I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only begotten son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified **dead and buried**. There it is in the apostle’s creed.

The burial account in which we now turn is stranger than fiction, and that itself is a fact that argues for its authenticity. Who in the wildest flight of his imagination would ever have guessed that the Lord Jesus would be interred in the tomb of one of the rich men who belonged to the Sanhedrin, one of the council that put him to death? Who would have ever thought that two men

from that council should meet together and should bury the Lord Jesus as a king should be buried? But that is what happened. If we had been writing this account, we would have said that Peter came forward, finally, but Peter had run off and had been in hiding like a wounded animal. . .

But now John tells us something else about him. Joseph was a man who had a flaw in his faith. He waited for the kingdom of God. He had the hope of the Jews. He had become a disciple of the Lord Jesus, so he was deep down within his heart a true believer. But the flaw in his faith was that he had the fear of men. His faith was still not strong enough to stand the stresses and strains of the public eye. The fear of the Jews gripped his heart, and the joy of the Lord therefore was stifled in his breast. . .

What's the meaning of the burial? I suggest to you that there are three things that is meant by this burial. In the first place from the theological standpoint it is the **completion of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus**. It is one of the neglected facets of the study of our Lord that no one or almost no one has made much of a study of the burial of our Lord and its theological significance. What does it mean? What's its place in the redemptive work? . . .

Never has the discrepancy between the majesty of the eternal God and the humiliation of our Lord Jesus in just being a man been more beautifully portrayed than when his body was lying in the grave. There is the Son of man who is the majestic second person of the Trinity. That discrepancy between the majesty of God and the body of the man Jesus is the real significance of the humiliation of our Lord in his burial. . .

It was also the **inception of his exaltation**, because God does not permit, there is a limit to the indignities that he permits men to do to the Son of God, and so we read that he was buried in a new tomb, just as the Jewish men were ready to look forward to the time when his body is taken down from the cross and thrown on the pile of bodies at the potter's field to be buried by someone who would dig a hole in the ground and throw the body in, these two men come forward and one who's had a special tomb hewn out, absolutely new, the kind of thing that would be a tomb for a king. . .

The Bible says specifically he came in as a king, and it was specifically stated here that he was placed in this new tomb in which no one had ever yet been placed, so men wanted to bury him like a common criminal, but God had him **buried like a king**. . .

Furthermore, he was **buried in a garden**. Well after all, all of our troubles began in a garden, in the Garden of Eden. There the first Adam sinned and died spiritually. It is in a second garden that the Son of man is placed, and from which on Sunday morning there shall come forth the new man, the Lord Jesus, the last Adam and the whole story ultimately finds its conclusion in the garden of God in paradise in which there is a new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem. The garden. A new tomb. God was transforming the activities of men by sovereign providence so that they would ultimately glorify the son.

J. Ligon Duncan: Jesus' Burial

There are many points of interest in this section that grab and vie for our attention, but it seems to me that the overarching theme of this section as we have seen frankly in the past in Matthew is the providence of God even in Jesus burial. Everything that occurs in this passage serves as an unwitting preparation for God to vindicate His Son in the resurrection. It seems to me that none

of the main actors, none of the main characters in this story realize just how they are being used in order to confirm, explain and vindicate the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ as we await the days of His resurrection. I'd like you to look at the passage in two parts today.

First of all, in **verses 57 through 61**. And then secondly, in **verses 62 through 66**. In **verses 57 through 61** you see Jesus buried, but he's buried in a surprising way. He's buried by a man that we've never heard of before. This heretofore unheard of disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, comes. Instead of the eleven, instead of Jesus' closest associates, this man that we've never heard of before come to bury the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I want you to see a very important truth in that. Now immediately you're thinking well, why didn't His own disciples come? John's disciples had had the character enough, the loyalty enough, the devotion enough and frankly, the courage enough to go and ask for John's body so it could be buried. Why surely the Lord Jesus' disciples would show similar bravery, but they don't. And so your mind immediately begins to meditate on that. But God has a bigger picture, a bigger story that He has in mind for us here, and that is that God in His providence is laying the groundwork here for both the event and the doctrine of the resurrection.

I. God, in His providence, lays the groundwork for the event and doctrine of the resurrection

God is in His loving providence laying the groundwork for His Son's vindication. He is setting up a scenario whereby there are numerous witnesses to the fact that He was indeed dead, and He was indeed buried, and that He was not in that tomb when they came back to check. . .

And this is a passage which gives us a grand reminder of the important of believing in God's word and trusting in His providence. In His overruling providence here, God ordered things so that the death and burial of Jesus were placed beyond all doubt. Think of it. Think of it. These Gentiles and Jews, government officials, religious leaders were in fact conspiring to make sure that no fake resurrection could be claimed. That was their goal. But they were being used by God to confirm Jesus' resurrection. Listen to what **J.C. Ryle** says: "They little thought what they were doing. They little thought that unwittingly they were providing the most complete evidence of the truth of Christ's coming resurrection. They were actually making it impossible to prove that any deception or imposition had occurred. Their seal, their guard, their precautions were all to become witnesses. In just a few hours that Christ has risen, their own devices became instruments to show forth God's glory." . . .

II. God, in His providence, lays the groundwork for defending His Son's truthfulness and His persecutor's deceitfulness.

So once again God's providence deploys the insults and the schemes of Jesus avowed enemies in order to vindicate Him, to confirm His teaching and to bring Him glory. See, their words were shown to be false and their deceitfulness was revealed while Christ truthfulness was doubly vindicated and confirmed. All the extra measures that they took to secure Jesus' burial ended up drawing attention to His resurrection. And friends, you wouldn't make up a story like this. You'd never make up a story about the disciples not caring enough about the Lord Jesus to take His body down and give it a decent burial. You'd never make up a story about a member of the Sanhedrin coming to bury the Lord Jesus Christ. And Matthew will later on mention the story that was being spread by the Jewish leaders that Jesus had been stolen by His disciples. That very fact lets you know that that was the main way of explaining what had happened to the Lord Jesus

Christ. And that fact lets you know that the tomb was indisputably empty. The Jewish leaders would not have made up a story that the tomb was empty if they could have proved it in any other way that it was not. And so the very fact that Matthew includes the story lets you know that the Jewish leaders admitted the emptiness of the tomb, but everything they had done precluded the disciples being the ones who had rescued Jesus. Matthew is showing you the irony of God's providence here. That all the designs of men are used for the glory of Christ.

TEXT: Matthew 28:1-15

TITLE: REACTIONS TO THE EMPTY TOMB

BIG IDEA:

PEOPLE RESPOND IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO THE EMPTY TOMB OF RESURRECTED KING JESUS

INTRODUCTION:

After all of the studies in the Book of Matthew, in this text we come to the victorious climax = **the Resurrection of Jesus Christ** that proves His identity as Messiah-King and shows that the Father has accepted Him as the propitiation for our sins.

Grant Osborne: The antithesis between the actions of God and those of human beings continues, as the guards and the women react to the reality of the resurrection. Both are **filled with fear**, but here the similarities cease. The guards faint, while the women become official witnesses to the disciples of the turning point of the ages.

Donald Hagner: None of the alternative explanations of the resurrection of Jesus—whether a stolen body, a Jesus who only “swooned,” or a mistaken tomb—is adequate to explain the total range of phenomena that must be explained. Although outside the range of the historian, the best explanation historically—i.e., that provides a comprehensive account of what happened—is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. . .

The empty tomb, for all of its impressiveness and importance, is not sufficient evidence in itself for the resurrection of Jesus. What alone can be decisive is **reliable eyewitness testimony** that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The women, the two Marys, are not only given the first responsibility to convey the message that Jesus had risen from the dead but are also given the privilege of being the first to see the risen Jesus himself. When they encounter him, they respond with unalloyed worship (contrast v. 17). They worship him not so much because he had come back to life but because his resurrection vindicates all that he had said and done during his ministry. And now it must have become exceedingly clear that this was not a special man among fellow humans but the **unique manifestation of God’s grace and wisdom**, who now reflected the new order of life that would be the portion of all his followers in the consummation of the eschatological age.

Jeffrey Crabtree: Matthew summarized the resurrection day events around **witnesses** and **testimonies**. The women told the Eleven and other disciples that they had seen Jesus alive and He would meet them in Galilee. The guards told that a glorious angel had descended from heaven, rolled back the stone, and that now the body of Jesus was gone. A bribe was enough to get them to change their story and tell that Jesus’ disciples stole His body while they all slept.

R. T. France: We are not told at what point between the burial on Friday evening and the opening of the tomb on Sunday morning Jesus actually left the tomb, though the repeated “third day/three days” language (and even more the “*three days and three nights*” of **12:40**) presuppose that he was in the tomb for most of that period. What matters to the narrators is not when or how he left, but the simple fact that now, early on Sunday morning, “*he is not here.*” (v. 6)

David Turner: There are **multiple witnesses to the resurrection** in this passage. The Father is the ultimate witness because his power is the presupposition of everything that happens here. The Father's agency is implied by all the passive verbs that describe Jesus's resurrection and exaltation (28:6–7, 18; cf. 16:21; 17:2, 9, 23; 20:19; 26:32). The glorious angel announces the resurrection as the Father's agent (28:6a). The empty tomb itself says nothing but signifies everything about the resurrection (28:6b). The faithful women hurry to announce the resurrection to the disciples (28:8). Jesus himself meets the women on their way and reiterates that he will meet the disciples in Galilee (28:9–10). Even the guards are unintentional evangelists; their announcement to the leading priests confirms their worst fears (28:11). Beyond these direct witnesses to the resurrection, there are two additional factors. The earthquake that rolls away the stone is a portent of an epochal event (28:2). Even the religious leaders' conspiracy to deny the resurrection bears indirect and ironic witness that it is true (28:11–15).

Michael Wilkins: Matthew's concluding chapter climaxes the amazing story of Jesus Messiah. He was conceived in a miraculous manner as the Savior of his people. He lived a sensational life in the power of the Spirit, announcing the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. But he was tragically betrayed by his own people and crucified by the Roman government. Will that be the end of the story? Indeed not! On the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus Messiah is found missing from his grave! Various explanations have been set forth, but Matthew tells in convincing fashion that the only explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus has been raised, just as he predicted. The angels announce the resurrection, his women followers are the first to witness both the empty tomb and the risen Jesus, and all of his followers now have the commission to proclaim the invitation to enter into a relationship with the risen Jesus as his disciples.

I. (:1-4) THE SURPRISE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

A. (:1) Arrival at the Tomb

1. Timing of the Arrival

“Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,”

2. Two Women Featured

“Mary Magdalene and the other Mary”

3. Their Expectation

“came to look at the grave.”

They did not come expecting to find an empty tomb. They were discussing how they would be able to roll the stone away to access the dead body of Jesus.

William Hendriksen: Although it was still dark when the women started out, the sun had risen when they arrived at the tomb.

Warren Wiersbe: The women who had lingered at the cross came early to the tomb, bringing spices that they might anoint His body. They thought He was dead. In fact, they wondered how they would move the huge stone that blocked the entrance to the tomb (**Mark 16:3**). It is remarkable that they did not believe in His resurrection when He had taught this truth repeatedly (**Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32**).

B. (:2-3) Angelic Presence at the Tomb

1. (:2) Mighty Earthquake Event

“And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.”

Stu Weber: The stone did not need to be moved for Jesus to emerge. We know from the other Gospels that his resurrection body was capable of traveling through walls and closed doors. Rather, the stone was rolled away so others could look in and witness the empty tomb.

Leon Morris: Matthew’s characteristic *And look* introduces a note of vividness; he wants his readers to see the scene at the tomb. He says that there was a great earthquake (for “*earthquakes*” in Palestine see the note on **27:51**; only Matthew has this reference). For introduces a reason for this one: an angel of the Lord came down from heaven. It is not easy to be clear on just what happened when the women came to the tomb. Matthew has one angel, Mark speaks of a young man sitting on the right-hand side (**Stendahl** thinks that he is the angel in Matthew, for “angels had no wings in the 1st cent.”), Luke has two men in dazzling clothes, while John refers to two angels in white. It seems clear that all these are references to angels; the small differences should not disconcert us unduly. Each of the Evangelists is saying in his own way that when the women came to the tomb they encountered an **angelic visitation**. It is not surprising that they speak of what happened in slightly different ways, for different people may well have had different perceptions. The important thing is that there were unusual angelic visitations and what the angels said concerned Jesus’ rising from the dead. . .

Mark tells us that as they came to the place they discussed the problem of rolling the stone away, as well they might, for it was *a great stone* (**27:60**). But when they arrived, they found their problem solved; the angel had done it for them, and having rolled the stone away he sat on it. What had been an insuperable obstacle for the women was no more than a place to sit for the angel.

Robert Gundry: The present quaking reprises the recent earthquake that split open the rocky tombs at the resurrection of sacred people from the past (**27:51b–53**). But this time not only is the quaking “*great*,” but also an angel of the Lord opens the tomb where Jesus has been lying. The angel’s rolling away the stone, previously described as “*large*” (**27:60**), causes the earthquake. As in **1:20, 24; 2:13, 19–20**, the angel gives both an explanation and instructions. “*Out of heaven*” points to their divine origin. “*Rolled away the stone*” exposes the tomb’s emptiness. And “*was sitting on it* [the stone]” indicates there’s nothing more for the angel to do except for giving the explanation and instructions.

2. (:3) Majestic Appearance – Brilliant and Pure

a. Like Lightning

“And his appearance was like lightning,”

b. White as Snow

“and his garment as white as snow;”

Jeffrey Crabtree: Glorious angels celebrated Jesus’ birth (**Lk. 2:9-14**), and they celebrated His resurrection.

Grant Osborne: The appearance of the angel draws on apocalyptic descriptions in **Dan 10:6** (the man dressed in linen had “*his face like lightning*”) and **7:9** (the clothing of “*the Ancient of Days*” was “*as white as light*” (**17:2**). Since the transfiguration was a harbinger of the resurrection, this makes sense.

C. (:4) **Angst of the Guards at the Tomb**

“and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.”

“**Angst**” – feeling of deep anxiety or dread

Donald Hagner: The irony is not to be missed: the ones assigned to guard the dead themselves appear dead while the dead now have been made alive.

Leon Morris: That they became like dead men points to the paralysis that overtook them when they were face to face with an angel. They had probably been prepared to face human opposition of some sort; why else would they have been assigned their task? But a striking heavenly visitant who manipulated the great stone with ease and whose appearance was like nothing they had ever seen was something else altogether.

II. (:5-7) **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB**

A. (:5) **Reassurance to Calm Their Fears**

“And the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.’”

Stu Weber: Jesus will forever be known as **the crucified one** (cf. **1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1**). The salvation he wrought through his death, the victory he won, and the obedience he displayed will stand for eternity.

Daniel Doriani: God designed angels to **deliver messages**, and Matthew shows that they are skilled at their duty. The Father is pleased when angels do what he made them to do (see **1:20–24; 2:13–19**), just as he is pleased when we do what he made us to do. Their announcement has three parts.

First, the angel **calls attention to Jesus’ prophecy**: Jesus “*is not here; he has risen, just as he said*” (**28:6**). The resurrection proves that Jesus is all that he had said he is. Through the course of his life, he had claimed the roles of prophet, priest, and king. As king, he reigned from the cross, by defeating our greatest enemy. As priest, he offered the final sacrifice for our sin. As prophet, he foretold that he would die and rise. With the little phrase “*just as he said*” the angels invite us to meditate on all this (see **16:21; 17:23; 20:19**; with **12:40**).

Second, the angels **call attention to the evidence**: “*Come and see the place where he lay*” (**28:6**). These messengers are no purveyors of blind faith.

Third, the angels **commission the women, so joyful, to announce the resurrection**: “*Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you*” (**28:7**). The soldiers were three times afraid: they feared the earthquake, the angel, the punishment. But the women are four times joyful: Jesus’ tomb is empty. He lives. Every word he said is true. Then, crowning all their joys, they see Jesus

with their own eyes (28:8–10). The angels were wise to commission the women. Even if their culture said they were invalid witnesses, the angels knew better.

B. (:6) Reality of His Promised Resurrection

*“He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said.
Come, see the place where He was lying.”*

Stu Weber: Matthew used the Greek imperfect tense to show that he had been lying there for some time. In Matthew's abbreviated account, he did not record whether the women actually looked into the tomb, but we can be sure they did. This strengthened their faith and prepared them to serve as eyewitnesses to the disciples.

Leon Morris: The angel goes on, *“as he said,”* which should remind them of the predictions that Jesus had made and that apparently none of his followers had taken as they were meant. But the predictions were important, and the angel draws their attention to them. They were not facing a situation in which Jesus had undergone a totally unexpected fate and had then experienced an unanticipated deliverance. He had prophesied both his death and his resurrection, and it was important that his followers should come to understand that the wonderful happening that had just taken place was in fact no more than what Jesus had prophesied during his lifetime.

C. (:7) Reporting Mission

1. Call to Bear Urgent Witness to the Disciples Regarding the Resurrection

“And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead;”

Grant Osborne: This is certainly one of the proofs for the historicity of the resurrection; no one would ever make up a story with women as the official witnesses, since women were not allowed to be witnesses in a legal sense.

Donald Hagner: Note the structural device of the five parallel imperatives spoken by the angelic messenger: *do not fear, come, see, go* (an imperatival participle), and *tell*.

2. Context for Seeing the Risen King Jesus in Person

*“and behold, He is going before you into Galilee,
there you will see Him;”*

Grant Osborne: Galilee is the place where Jesus developed and trained his disciples, so Jesus has stressed that as the meeting place where the disciples will be reinstated.

3. Confirmation by Authoritative Proclamation

“behold, I have told you.”

Donald Hagner: The added words *ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν*, *“look, I have told you,”* function to call attention once again to the angelic, and thus heavenly, source for this revelation, thereby emphasizing the **authority of the words**.

R. T. France: The angel's final words to the women, literally *“Look, I have told you,”* are reminiscent of the frequent OT formula, *“The Lord has spoken”* (Isa 1:2; 25:8; Joel 3:8 etc.) or *“I, the Lord, have spoken”* (Num 14:35; Ezek 5:15, 17, etc.). The formula marks an **authoritative pronouncement** (perhaps even that the angel speaks for God), and also functions

now as a **call to action**. The message has been delivered, and now it is up to the women to act on it.

III. (:8-10) THE SUBJECT OF THE EMPTY TOMB APPEARS TO THE WOMEN

Richard Gardner: Brief as it is, the report of Jesus' appearance to the women makes several important points (cf. **Meier**, 1980:364).

1. First, the resurrection of Jesus has a **bodily dimension**. The women are able to take hold of Jesus' feet.
2. Second, the resurrection renews the **family relationship** of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus speaks of a reunion with my brothers.
3. Third, **Galilee** is named again as the place where this reunion will occur. The reason Jesus chooses Galilee will become apparent shortly (cf. 28:16-20; 26:32).
4. Finally, the One who names us his sisters and brothers is also our Lord. He is One whom the women **worship** when he meets and greets them.

A. (:8) Emotions of Fear and Great Joy

“And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.”

Leon Morris: The women made haste to do what they were told. *They went away from the tomb quickly*; the place of death no longer had any meaning for them. That they went *with fear* indicates that they were in the grip of the awe that had been aroused in them by their contact with the visitant from another world. But they were not simply scared; they went with *great joy*. They had come to that place mourning the death of their great leader and dear friend; they went away knowing that he was dead no longer. Well might their emotion be great joy. They had been told to go quickly and tell the disciples, and they took the injunction literally. They ran to tell his disciples. Such good news should be spread abroad quickly, so they certainly made haste.

Stanley Saunders: Fear and great joy here go together as differing dimensions of a singular and wholly appropriate response.

B. (:9) Encounter with Jesus and Response of Worship

*“And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.
And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.”*

Grant Osborne: Throughout Matthew Jesus is to be “*worshiped*” as Lord (**2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25**), an act that centers on his divine glory as Son of God. Jesus is not a spirit but has been raised bodily – but with new meaning. Before there were resuscitations, but those raised had to die again. Jesus is raised for eternity.

Leon Morris: They had been last at the cross and first at the tomb, and now they are the first of whom Matthew writes that they had the joy of seeing their Lord. From what the angel had told them they would have expected that no one would see Jesus until the appointment in Galilee. But now as they went on their way to do as the angel said, *look* (the word makes it vivid), there was Jesus before them. Matthew says little about the manner of the meeting, simply that Jesus met them. It is not easy to convey the force of his greeting in English. I have tried with “*Greetings*,” but this is not a usual way of greeting someone we meet, though it was quite a normal thing to

say in the first century. The Basic English translation renders it literally, “*Be glad*”; GNB reads “*Peace be with you,*” which was a normal Jewish greeting and may convey something of the meaning. But it was not what Matthew wrote. However, we should not engage in a lengthy discussion of this word as though it were important. The women clearly were not concerned with such matters. They were simply filled with joy at seeing Jesus himself, so *they came to him*.

R. T. France: The women’s touch, like the invitation to touch him and the eating of food in **Luke 24:39–43**, demonstrates to the reader the physical reality of Jesus’ risen body: he is not a ghost.

C. (:10) Encouragement and Reminder of Their Reporting Mission

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me.’”

Grant Osborne: “*My brethren*” – This expression connotes acceptance and fellowship (cf. **12:48-50; 25:40**), and in light of their desertion of him it connotes forgiveness and restoration. Jesus restores them before they have even repented!

Craig Blomberg: He now calls the disciples his “*brothers,*” the only such place in the Gospels (but cf. **Rom 8:29** and **Heb 2:11**), disclosing keen psychological insight. Not only does he show himself as still loving and accepting those who had abandoned him, but he even treats them as equals! In other words, they remain **laborers with him in the work of the Father**. Jesus is neither denying his uniqueness nor deifying the disciples. But he is portraying the church as a **brotherhood** that manifests more equality than hierarchy, even if some functional differentiation between leaders and followers is clear from other Scriptures (e.g., **1 Pet 5:1-5; Heb 13:17**).

IV. (:11-15) THE SPIN REGARDING THE EMPTY TOMB BY THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Albert Mohler: As the women (who are the first to see the risen Jesus) report to the disciples, guards from the tomb report to the chief priests. The religious leaders conspire together once again, fearing the potential threat to their power base if the truth of Jesus’ resurrection becomes public. They pay the guards to circulate a false story among the Jews that negatively casts Jesus’ disciples as conspirators deceiving the people with the news of Jesus’ resurrection.

A. (:11) Confession by the Guards to the Chief Priests

“Now while they were on their way, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened.”

Leon Morris: They might have been expected to go to their own officers, but Pilate had placed the guard at the disposal of the Jewish authorities (**27:65**) and accordingly it was to them that they reported. In any case, they may well have hesitated to go to their own officers because they would have to confess that they had not prevented the removal of the body from the tomb. It is true that the body had not been stolen, but it might have been difficult to convey the truth of what had happened to skeptical Roman officers. Perhaps it was better to postpone facing certain military punishment as long as possible and to try any other course that seemed open. In any case, the Jewish authorities had been the ones who had understood the necessity of the guard, and some of the guard accordingly thought that the first approach should be made to the **chief priests**.

Charles Swindoll: Matthew pauses his account of the miraculous, bodily resurrection of Jesus in order to turn attention to the lie that gave birth to a counternarrative. Having walked us through the eyewitness accounts of the women at the tomb and their encounter with angels as well as with Jesus Himself, the scene suddenly cuts away to drop in on Jesus' opponents as they tried to turn the good news into fake news. To the critics and enemies of Jesus, what really happened to the soldiers at the tomb was beside the point.

R. T. France: It is in Jerusalem that Jesus has been rejected and killed, as he had predicted, but with his resurrection that part of his story is now over. It will be far to the north in Galilee that the final phase of the story will begin in **v. 16**. But before the scene transfers to Galilee, we are given a last glimpse of the discredited Jerusalem régime, as the guards report back in "*the city*." The chief priests and elders who have seemed to hold all the cards and who have so smugly celebrated their triumph over the northern prophet (**27:41–43**) are now in total disarray. Their careful plans to get rid of the new Galilean movement have unraveled, and they are left with an embarrassing failure to explain. The best thing they can do is to concoct a cover-up story, backed by bribes to the guards and, if necessary, also to the governor. So the **last view we have of Jerusalem** is of its leaders engaged in a sordid face-saving exercise, while the women are summoning Jesus' disciples to meet their risen Lord back in the home territory of Galilee. Jerusalem, which has throughout the gospel been a symbol of opposition to God's purpose and of judgment to come, can be left to wallow in its own discomfiture, while the reader turns with relief to Galilee, the place where once again light is dawning (**4:14–16**).

B. (:12-15a) Counsel of the Jewish Religious Leaders

1. (:12) **Bribing the Soldiers to Coopt Their Testimony**

"And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,"

Robert Gundry: The chief priests and elders have **no excuse for their unbelief**. From unprejudiced eyewitnesses (some of the guardsquad) they now know that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead, that the sign of Jonah, which he promised to give the scholars and Pharisees (**12:38–40**), has now been given. Furthermore, the soldiers' report included "*all the things that had happened*." So the chief priests' and elders' unbelief runs counter to full information as well as unprejudiced eyewitness. . . The bribery of the soldiers exposes the Jewish authorities' lack of honesty, and the large size of the sum it took to silence the soldiers argues for the truth of Jesus' resurrection and the falsity of the rumor concocted by those authorities and about to be circulated by the soldiers. Moreover, "*the considerable sum of silver coins*" given the soldiers contrasts with the paltry sum of thirty silver coins given Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. By paying more to the soldiers than they did to Judas, the Jewish authorities show greater concern to squelch the news of Jesus' resurrection than they did to get him killed.

John MacArthur: So, those were the three resolutions.

- Bribe the soldiers,
- tell them to preach that the disciples stole the body
- and cover the soldiers if they get in trouble with Pilate.

Now, that is a planned resolution voted on and passed in the Sanhedrin. And what it tells us and what Matthew intends it to tell us is that the apostasy of the nation of Israel was final. Here their Messiah has risen from the dead and they are not the least bit interested in affirming whether or

not it is true. They know a supernatural event occurred because an angel was there and an earthquake was there and the phenomena that occurred communicates that. They are not interested in investigating that. They don't want to know anything about that. They are obstinate in their apostasy and they willfully reject Christ no matter what the evidence is. . .

What Matthew is showing us is anything but the resurrection is an **absurdity**. It offends our reason. It offends our logic. It offends the facts. And thus does Matthew prove the resurrection by the lie. Men had to be paid to say the disciples stole the body. It's a lie for which bribery was necessary. They had to say an absurdity. We know the disciples came and stole the body while we were asleep which is an absolute contradiction - makes no sense.

The simple testimony of Scripture and the complex testimony of Scripture is that Jesus rose from the dead and Matthew is telling us here that you can take the testimony of His friends or you can take the testimony of His enemies and you're going to come up with the very same conclusion. And he includes the testimony of His enemies, as I said, for two reasons. Reason number one, it shows us the depth and the totality of the apostasy of Israel. And secondly, it is the most convincing evidence. **Simon Greenleaf**, a Harvard professor of law, some years ago wrote, "All that Christianity asks of men is that they would be consistent with themselves, that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things and that they would try to judge its actors and witnesses as they deal with their fellow men when testifying to human affairs and actions in human tribunals. The result would be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability and truth."

And as I said last time, it is the assessment of those who study the resurrection that there is no other historical event that is as truly and thoroughly attested to as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Lord arose. The folly of this hopeless explanation only demonstrates the reality of the resurrection. And because He lives, He gives life to all who believe in Him.

2. (:13) Fabricating an Explanation for the Empty Tomb

"and said, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'"

Charles Swindoll: Just as His opponents and critics wanted Him dead when He was alive, they still wanted Him dead after he rose. They concocted fake news in an attempt to countermand the great news of the Resurrection. Then they paid a bribe to promote their story.

Donald Hagner: There is a comical aspect to these final two words since it simultaneously shows them to be irresponsible (some soldiers of the guard were supposed to have been awake through the night; the penalty for failure could amount to capital punishment) and raises the awkward question of how they knew what happened if they were sleeping, not to mention the fact that they would have had to be sleeping extremely soundly if they were not able to hear the large stone being rolled away from the door of the tomb.

3. (:14) Promising Protection from Political Reprisal

"And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble."

Stu Weber: The guards were reluctant to agree to this solution. "What if the governor hears our false report? He will have us all killed!" So the Jewish leaders, the masters of deception, assured

the guards that if Pilate heard the false rumor and sought to execute the guards, the Jewish leaders would intervene on their behalf: We will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.

Leon Morris: The guards must have taken some persuading to say that they had slept on the job. That was a **serious offense** and could bring down on them the heaviest of penalties. Moreover, they were to say that their slumbers had enabled the followers of Jesus to steal his body, though if they were asleep when the nefarious deed was done it is not easy to understand how they would know what had happened. The guards were thus placing themselves in a hazardous position by putting out the story the chief priests had concocted. But they were also in a hazardous position if they did not do this. There was no denying that they had been put on guard to prevent the theft of a body. There was no denying that the body had been in the tomb when the stone was sealed. There was no denying that the body was no longer there. So on any showing they had failed as guards. They could, of course, have told of the coming of the angel and of what he had done. But who would believe them? Angels are not often seen by mortals, and this could well sound like a story concocted to cover up their failure. So they ran a risk. But they may well have thought that if they did as the chief priests suggested, at least they would have some people in high place who had an interest in making sure that their story was accepted. If they refused, they were on their own.

C. (:15a) Compliance of the Soldiers to This Scheme

“And they took the money and did as they had been instructed;”

D. (:15b) Communication of This Fabricated Story

“and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.”

Charles Swindoll: The story’s effectiveness as propaganda is proven by the fact that when Matthew published his Gospel around AD 65, the story was still being spread among the unbelieving Jews (**28:15**).

William Barclay: It is interesting to note the means that the Jewish authorities used in their desperate attempts to eliminate Jesus.

- They used **treachery** to lay hold of him.
- They used **illegality** to try him.
- They used **slander** to charge him before Pilate.
- And now they were using **bribery** to silence the truth about him.

And they failed. *Magna est Veritas et praevalabit*, ran the Roman proverb; *great is the truth and it will prevail*. It is a fact of history that not all the evil machinations devised can in the end stop the truth. The gospel of goodness is greater than the plots of wickedness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What lengths did Satan go to try to keep Christ from the Cross . . . and then to try to keep Him in the grave?
- 2) Are we being faithful to the urgency of the commission we have received to spread the report of the resurrection of Jesus to others?

- 3) Do we take time to respond in worship in gratitude for the new life we have in Christ?
- 4) Why should we be surprised when unbelievers reject the testimony of the Scriptures to the person and work of Christ and persist in their wicked rebellion?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: What is the significance of the resurrection?

- It proves that Jesus is God's Son.
- It verifies the truth of Scripture.
- It assures our own future resurrection.
- It is the proof of a future judgment.
- It is the basis for Christ's heavenly priesthood.
- It gives power for Christian living.
- It assures our future inheritance.

Whenever God's people gather on the Lord's Day, they bear witness that Jesus is alive and that the church has received spiritual blessings. When the followers of the Lord gathered that first Lord's Day, they were discouraged and defeated.

David Turner: The resurrection of Jesus is the sine qua non of several themes in Matthew's theology.

Without the resurrection, Jesus's crucial and climactic redemptive act of dying for sinners would go without divine endorsement. The resurrection amounts to the Father's signaling that Jesus's death was victorious and affirming that Jesus's blood of the new covenant will effectively save his people from their sins (cf. **Rom. 4:25**).

If Jesus did not rise from the dead after promising several times that he would do so (**12:40; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32**), he would be pitied or scorned, not believed and obeyed (cf. **1 Cor. 15:16–19**). As is commonly said, he would have been a lunatic or a liar, not the Lord of heaven and earth (**Rom. 1:4**).

Without the resurrection, Jesus's people could not be saved from their sins (**1:21**) because his mission would have ended with the ignominy of a cursed person who hung upon a tree (**Deut. 21:22–23; Gal. 3:13**).

Without the resurrection, Jesus would never drink the new wine, representing the blood of the new covenant, in his Father's kingdom with his disciples (**26:27–29**).

Without the resurrection, there would be no apostolic foundation for the church (16:18), since Jesus's resurrection turned the deserters back into disciples (**26:31–32**). Nothing but the astonishing yet true resurrection message delivered to them by the two women and then by Jesus himself could have brought the scattered disciples back into the fold (**28:7, 10, 16–20**).

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no complete model of sacrificial living. Jesus taught the oxymoron of the crucified life, that genuinely abundant living occurs only when one dies to self-interest and that the self-oriented life is misery. But the model is truncated if Jesus's suffering does not lead to ultimate exaltation, if the crown never replaces the cross (10:38–39; 16:24–26; 20:26–28; 23:12; cf. Rom. 6:1–11).

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no eschatological shalom to rectify all earthly wrongs and renew the world (19:28). The martyrs whose blood cries out from the ground would not be vindicated (23:35; Rev. 6:9–11). Those who do violence to their fellow humans would not be held accountable. There would be no ultimate reckoning (Matt. 13:37–42; cf. Dan. 12:2). Satan would win the cosmic battle. But the resurrection guarantees the final judgment of all humanity (Matt. 13:37–42; 16:27; 25:31; cf. Dan. 12:2; Acts 17:31).

Without the resurrection of Jesus, his people could not hope for their own resurrection and reward (13:43; 16:27; 25:31–40; 27:51–53). Jesus's ethical teaching includes the prospect of judgment and reward in the coming kingdom (4:17; 5:12; 6:4; 7:1–2, 21). The disciples' hope and values focus on the kingdom (6:10, 33), but the kingdom could never come to earth if the king had remained in the grave. With Jesus's throne unoccupied, what would become of the twelve thrones of his apostles, and of the rewards Jesus promised to all his disciples (6:19–21; 13:43; 19:27–29; cf. Dan. 12:3; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21)?

Without the resurrection, Jesus's climactic saving act of dying for sinners by crucifixion would lack interpretation and proof of divine acceptance. Granted, the apostolic proclamation centered on the cross (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 1:18–25; 1 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 2:9, 14; 9:12–14; Rev. 5:6, 9). But the significance of the cross would be unclear apart from the resurrection. Therefore any presentation of the good news of Jesus the Messiah must stress his resurrection as the essential explanation of the meaning of his death. The gospel must be communicated with culturally appropriate methods and language, but the methods and language must expound the resurrection as proof of the saving power of the crucifixion. Any "gospel" that does not place Jesus's resurrection alongside Jesus's death is not the authentic message of Jesus and the apostles.

Grant Osborne: Victory and vindication are only two of the terms that describe the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. Death is indeed the "*last enemy*," but in Jesus as the firstfruits death has been proleptically defeated for every follower of Christ. . . . We have been lifted out of the depths of despair that the reality of this life must produce apart from the Jesus event. In his resurrection we enter a new potential and a new reality that replaces defeat with victory, despair with joy, the decay of death with life for eternity.

There will still be discipleship failure, but in the Risen Lord there is victory. . . .

Stanley Saunders: Modern audiences often come to the resurrection looking for historical evidence and detailed information subject to corroboration or denial. None of the Gospels describes the resurrection itself, however, which by its nature stands always beyond the realm of human verification. What we see, instead, are the **expanding circles of its ripples and traces**: first the empty tomb, then the fear, stupor, and joy of its first witnesses, then the growth of a community of witnesses. The only meaningful argument for the reality of the resurrection is embodied in the community of the baptized, who have declared their allegiance to the crucified one and together constitute his body re-membered at Table. The community of disciples is

commissioned to watch for and name the ripples that become waves of transformation. These waves move most powerfully in the presence of suffering and death.

The resurrection is a **new beginning** for Israel, the disciples, and for humankind, but Matthew also carefully presents it as the **continuation of the passion story**. The same women witness both events. The same Jewish leaders play their role. Most important, the Jesus who is crucified now speaks encouragement, can be touched, and makes preparations for the continuation of his mission. The resurrection does not set right a divine plan that was sidetracked by the crucifixion. It completes God's conquest of death and imperial power by vanquishing them at the point of their most powerful expression. Only the resurrection of this one—Israel's rejected Messiah, God's faithful Son, the one condemned by Israel's leaders and people, and the one crucified by the Romans—demonstrates the full extent of God's mercy, forgiveness, and power over all human dominions and death itself. The promise of resurrection is not that we will be rescued from death or transported to another, heavenly world, but that God's heavenly rule has reclaimed and now is transforming the whole of creation. We face death, bearing our crosses for his sake (**16:24**), with the certainty that it has no real power over us. Only in realization that Jesus has conquered death is true life possible.

William Barclay: As we read this story of the first two people in the world to be confronted with the fact of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, three imperatives seem to spring out of it.

(1) They are urged to **believe**. The thing is so staggering that it might seem beyond belief, too good to be true. The angel reminds them of the promise of Jesus, and confronts them with the empty tomb; his every word is a summons to believe. It is still a fact that there are many who feel that the promises of Christ are too good to be true. That hesitation can be dispelled only by taking him at his word.

(2) They are urged to **share**. When they themselves have discovered the fact of the risen Christ, their first duty is to proclaim it to and to share it with others. '*Go, tell!*' is the first command which comes to all who have discovered the wonder of Jesus Christ for themselves.

(3) They are urged to **rejoice**. The word with which the risen Christ meets them is *Chairete*; that is the normal word of greeting; but its literal meaning is '*Rejoice!*' Those who have met the risen Lord must live forever in the joy of his presence from which nothing can part them any more.

John MacArthur: Matthew approaches [the Resurrection] so interestingly. He approaches the resurrection through the **emotions of a group of women**. . . Their first emotion is the emotion of **sympathy**. This is the first thing we see. And we can identify with that. These women love the Lord Jesus Christ more than they love anyone. And women, as you know, have a tremendous capacity to love. And I can only imagine how it would be when women could love as fully as women are able to love and love one who was without imperfection. These women loved uniquely.

They had ministered with Jesus in Galilee. They had attended to His needs. They had provided food and hospitality and even money and resources for Him and His traveling disciples as they carried on the Galilean ministry. They had descended the journey to Jerusalem for Passover with Jesus and His group. They had been there at the cross. They were there when He was buried. We saw them in **chapter 27 verse 56** gathered at the cross. We saw them in **verse 61** sitting opposite

the tomb. And now they're back again the morning of the third day. They are loyal. They are devoted. They are loving and they are sympathetic. . .

And Mark tells us in **chapter 16** that as they were walking along in the darkness, anticipating the imminent dawn, they were having a discussion about how they were going to get the stone out of the way so they could do what they had come to do. They had no idea it was being guarded by Romans. They didn't know that it was sealed and couldn't be opened. They were anticipating coming into the empty garden and they would need some man or men to help them move that huge massive stone that had been rolled in front of the door. And so they were discussing the fact that they would have to face that large stone. So their emotion was sympathy. And what they lacked in faith they made up for in **compassion**. And what they lacked in understanding they made up for in courage to identify themselves so continually with Christ. And before we think too little of the women who came without faith, we have to ask ourselves where the disciples are. At least the women were there, whatever the motive. It is one final act of love.

But no sooner do they approach the grave than the emotion of sympathy is transformed into the **emotion of terror**. And that's the second one I want us to see. The emotion of terror. **Verse 2** says, "*And behold*" – and that's a word to startle us, to shock us, to pull us up short, to make us realize that something dramatic has happened – "*there was a great earthquake.*" . . .

You want to know the truth? You know why those women were the first to see the angel and the living Christ? **Because they were there**. That's right. Isn't that profound? I mean, if you're not there, you're not going to see it. I mean, they were there and so they saw it. If anybody else would have been there, they'd have seen it. I mean, you don't have to get too profound in some of this. You know what that says to me? And I don't want to extrapolate too much on this, but it's nice if you're there when the Lord does wonderful things. There's a great spiritual truth in that somewhere and that is that the closer you stay to the Lord and what He's doing, the more you're going to enjoy what it is He's doing. I don't know about you, but I'd rather be there and experience it than hear it from somebody else. Wouldn't you? I praise God for people who are there. I mean they're there when the Lord is working. They're there when His people gather together. They're there when His Word is taught. They're there when it's time to come to your knees before Him. They're there when it's time to call on His power in ministry. And they're the ones that experience firsthand the moving of the power of God. No, they saw it because they were there. . .

I trust that you will be the kind of person like those women. What you may lack in faith, you make up for in devotion. What you may lack in understanding, you make up for in loyalty. And God will confirm your weakness and turn it into strength, because you're faithful enough and loyal enough to be where He is and where He's moving and where He's working. . .

And so the women had come to the tomb with an emotion of sympathy. That had been turned into an emotion of terror and now the emotion of terror began to give way to a third emotion and that's noted in **verse 8** and that is the **emotion of joy**. **Verse 8**, "*And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy.*" Now their fear is tempered by tremendous joy, "*And they did run to bring His disciples the message.*" *Did run* is the main verb. The angel said go, they spun around on their heels and took off down the path. And they're running into the city to find the disciples to tell them that the message from the angel is that Jesus was raised from the dead. And their terror is mingled now with great joy – the thrill that it might be true, that it might be true, that it might be true, and we're going to see Him in Galilee. . .

In **verse 9** – and this takes us to their fourth emotion. They're filled with joy and their joy will turn to **worship**. “*And as they went to tell His disciples, behold Jesus met them.*” Having already revealed Himself first to Mary, as it says in **Mark 16**, and now He goes ahead of them supernaturally transporting Himself, and comes back approaching them and He meets them. And I just love this. “*Jesus met them saying, chairete*” – is the Greek word – *chairete*. There He was in resurrection glory, in physical form, right on the road, alive from the dead and He says to them, “*Chairete.*” You know what that is? *Hi. Good Morning. Hello.* Well, you'd think maybe you'd get something more profound than that out of the resurrected Son of God. There's something so beautiful about that. That was the ordinary salutation of the marketplace. That was the ordinary greeting that everybody gave as they passed on the roads. That was what you said when you spoke to the people in your own house every day. Here is Christ in resurrection glory, here is the Son of God in His kingly majesty having conquered death, and in a very simple and warm and human way He simply stops some women that He loves and with human tenderness and very natural human sympathy He says, “*Good morning. Hi.*”

Cooper P Abrams III: Resurrection Responses

I. FEAR AND FAINTING - **Matt. 28:2-4**

II. FEAR AND FABRICATION – **Matt. 28:11-15**

III. FEAR AND FAITH – **Matt. 28:1, 5-10**

<https://bible-truth.org/msg94.html>

Scott Harris: The Resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of the Jesus Christ from the dead is central to God's message of salvation for it is the basis of our faith and hope in God for eternal life. With that in mind, we might think that Matthew would give us every possible detail about it and every post-resurrection appearance Jesus made, yet Matthew approaches it very simply from the perspective of the women who first discovered the wonderful news and then proves the fact of the resurrection by the action of Jesus' enemies. . .

These women come to the garden to look at the grave, and according to Luke, they had also come with more burial spices that they had prepared. Mark's account records that as they had walked to the sepulcher they had been wondering who would roll the stone away that blocked the entrance to the tomb. This was an act of love and devotion, but it was also an act that shows their unbelief. It is possible that the disciples had never related anything to them about what Jesus had said about being raised from the dead on the third day, but that seems improbable. They did not go the grave of Jesus to see if He was resurrected, but to anoint His body with more burial spices as a beautiful act of their devotion to Him. . .

The soldiers that were present were struck with divine fear. The earthquake would have been scary enough, and they would have been somewhat jittery about that anyway since there had been a strong earthquake only three days before, but their fear was of the angel. The word shake here is the same root word as “earthquake.” In a sense the earth had been shaken when the angel did his work and now the guards were shaken because they could see the angel. The fear was so great that they fainted and fell unconscious like dead men. . .

Notice that it is only some of the guard. There are several reasons for this. First, the guard had been frightened out of its wits by the earthquake and seeing the angel. It is doubtful that all of them were still together, and some may have even fled. It is also true that if they had stayed

together, they would have attracted Pilate's attention as they came into Jerusalem, and that was something they wanted to avoid as demonstrated by their reporting to the chief priests instead of Pilate. That is the third point to note. . .

What is **your response to the resurrected savior**? Do you hold to some bribe from the world – fame, fortune, pleasure – to keep you from believing the truth? Or do you believe and fall at His feet to worship – as did the women on that glorious morning?

https://www.gracebibleny.org/resurrection_christ_matthew_28115

TEXT: Matthew 28:16-20

TITLE: THE GREAT COMMISSION

BIG IDEA:

THE GREAT COMMISSION FOCUSES ON MAKING DISCIPLES WORLDWIDE BASED ON THE AUTHORITY AND ABIDING PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Doriani: The commission has a sandwich structure. At the top and at the bottom, Jesus gives **reasons for accepting the commission**. To start the commission, Jesus says, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (28:18). Jesus, as the Son of God, always had authority, but he exercised only a fraction of it during his ministry. He taught with authority and healed people with a word, but now the Father has bestowed full authority on him. He exercises it in a wider sphere: in heaven and on earth, over men and angels, over his disciples and over all mankind. His reign over the nations now begins (**Dan. 7:27**). Jesus came to serve, but he will now be served.

At the end of the commission he says, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (**Matt. 28:20**). At the beginning of Matthew, we learn that Jesus is God with us to redeem his people (1:23). At the midpoint, we learn that he is God with us to purify his people (18:20). At the end, we learn that he is God with us to disciple the nations (28:20). We have his strength, his Spirit, his presence, and his comfort for our mission; we are not alone.

Jesus supplies two sweeping motives to fulfill a charge that is as large as the world itself. We have all the authorization we need for the task. We never need to hesitate, never need to apologize. Whenever we speak of Christ, we are within our rights. We also have all the power we need, for we have the very presence of God.

Robert Gundry: This paragraph contains a compendium of **important Matthean themes**: Jesus as the greater Moses, the deity of Jesus, the authority of his commands, the trinitarian associations of baptism, the danger of doubt among disciples, their ministry of teaching, discipleship as obeying Jesus’ commands, the presence of Jesus with his disciples, and the directing of Christian hope to the consummation. Paramount among these themes, however, is **the mission to all nations**.

R. T. France: Theologically one may read back from this final scene to illuminate the significance of much that has been said and done in earlier chapters.

Craig Blomberg: This short account contains the culmination and combination of all of Matthew's central themes:

- (1) the move from particularism to universalism in the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom;
- (2) discipleship and the establishment of the church;
- (3) Jesus' commands as ultimately incumbent on Christians; and
- (4) the abiding presence of Jesus as teacher, as divine Son of God, and the risen and sovereign Lord of the universe.

Jeffrey Crabtree: These instructions must have been a **surprise** to the disciples. Their expectations were probably neither worldwide (**Acts 1:6**; **Wilkins** 954) nor long-term. Compare the question in **Acts 1:6** with “*unto the end of the age.*” However, these mountainside instructions were the **long-term marching orders of the church**. All disciples must make other disciples and teach disciple-making—or we have failed (**Carson**, Matthew 599).

This commission may well give a hint of Matthew’s purpose for penning his Gospel. He brought together large blocks of Jesus’ teaching to share with later generations of believers. This written record was one way Matthew obeyed and satisfied his obligation to make disciples and teach Jesus’ commands. (This writer hopes this commentary will do the same!)

[Ed: As do I!]

With these words, Matthew brought his record to a close. The King has come (**1:1**). He is God with us, Immanuel (**1:23**; **Blomberg** 100). He is God in the midst of the assembly (**18:20**). He is God who is always with His people as they carry His kingdom news to the ends of the earth (**28:20**) in this the end of the ages (**1 Cor. 10:11**).

David Turner: One is immediately struck with the repetition of the word “*all*” in this passage:

1. Jesus has been given all authority (**28:18**).
2. Disciples are to be made of all nations (**28:19**).
3. Such disciples are to be taught to obey all that Jesus commanded (**28:20**).
4. Jesus will be with his disciples all the days until the end of the age (**28:20**).

Leon Morris: We must bear in mind that the picture of Jesus as a Jewish rabbi, with a little group of disciples around him, traveling in leisurely fashion in rural Galilee contrasts sharply with the **missionary-minded church** that we find in the early chapters of Acts. From the beginning the church exercised a missionary function and sought to make disciples out of those who listened to its proclamation. Why this sudden and dramatic change? Surely it is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, coupled with the charge the risen Lord gave to his followers to make disciples of all nations.

Grant Osborne: Mission for Israel to the nations was to be centripetal; that is, Israel was to stay in the holy Land and witness to the grace of God, so that the nations could come to them to be blessed (the Abrahamic covenant, **Gen 12:3; 15:5; 18:18; 22:18; 26:45**). The centrifugal mission, taking the message to the nations, would be a messianic act (**Isa 11:9-10; 42:6; 49:6**). This passage is that messianic launch of that universal mission, and it constitutes “the final word of the exalted Jesus to the disciples” in Matthew.

(:16-17) PROLOGUE – STAGING OF MOUNTAINTOP COMMISSIONING SERVICE

A. (:16) Clear Logistics

1. Participants

“*But the eleven disciples*”

Donald Hagner: For the first time the disciples are referred to using the poignant term οἱ ἕνδεκα, “*the eleven*,” rather than οἱ δώδεκα, “*the twelve*” (cf. **10:1–2, 5; 11:1; 20:17; 26:14, 20, 47**).

2. Location

“proceeded to Galilee,”

3. Commander

“to the mountain which Jesus had designated.”

David Turner: Jesus’s meeting them on a mountain echoes the giving of the Torah from Mount Sinai as well as previous mountain experiences in Matthew (4:8; 5:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1; 24:3; 26:30; **T. Donaldson** 1985: 170–90; **Allison** 1993b: 262–66).

B. (:17) Confused Outlook

1. Worshipful

“And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him;”

2. Hesitant Initially

“but some were doubtful.”

Richard Gardner: When the moment of reunion finally occurs, the experience evokes two reactions. As did the magi at Jesus’ birth (2:11), the disciples worship Jesus. Some, however, even as they worship, do so with the same hesitant or little faith that has characterized the disciples throughout the Gospel. They doubt (cf. 14:28-33; 17:20-21). It will take the **reassuring word of Jesus** in the verses that follow to fortify them for their calling.

R. T. France: The last time these eleven disciples had seen Jesus was as they ran away from him in Gethsemane; so what sort of reception could they now expect from the master they had deserted? The conflicting instincts to worship the risen Jesus and to avoid a potentially embarrassing encounter make very human sense in this context.

Donald Hagner: It is natural to believe that the eleven disciples would have been in a state of **hesitation** and **indecision**. Too much had happened too fast for them to be able to assimilate it. They did not doubt that it was Jesus whom they saw and whom they gladly worshiped. If their faith was too small in measure, that was because they were in a state of uncertainty about what the recent events meant and what might happen next. They found themselves in “a situation of cognitive dissonance par excellence”; (**Walsh and Keesmaat**, 195). It is precisely this state of mind that is addressed in the words that Jesus speaks to the disciples in the following verses (vv 18–20; see **Giblin**, who refers to “reassurance”). Jesus’ words will accomplish what the sight of the risen Jesus alone could not. Two things remain intriguing, however: first, that Matthew bothers at all to insert the reference to their doubting, and second, that Matthew records no resolution of their uncertain state of mind (cf. **Leon-Dufour**, “Origin”). It seems clear that Matthew wanted members of his community to apply the truth to themselves. This can be put in a variety of ways. **Garland** writes: “Matthew understands that the fluctuation between worship and indecision is every disciple’s struggle. What is needed is confidence that Jesus is Lord of all and present with them at all times”.

Grant Osborne: The disciples are still growing in their faith and understanding and have not yet reached maturity.

I. (:18) THE GREAT COMMISSION CONVEYS DELEGATED AUTHORITY – THE POWER OF JESUS

*“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying,
‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”*

Craig Blomberg: Because of this authority, Jesus has the right to issue his followers their “marching orders,” but he also has the ability to help them carry out those orders.

Jeffrey Crabtree: First, Jesus established His “power”: that is, His right or authority (v. 18; Greek *exousia*). He had every right to give the instructions He was about to give. Matthew recorded earlier mentions of Jesus’ authority.

- Jesus had taught them as one having authority (7:29).
- He had authority to forgive sins (9:6, 8).
- He gave His disciples authority against unclean spirits (10:1).
- He claimed authority over the temple (21:23-24).

Now, following His resurrection He declared possession of all authority in heaven and on earth. He is Supreme Commander of the universe. He is Ruler. He has the right to govern. He has authority over all—even over those who do not want His story told (vv. 11-15).

David Turner: The glory seen by the disciples at the transfiguration has become the permanent mode of Jesus’s life as the exalted Son of Man.

R. T. France: Jesus has spoken several times, using the language of **Dan 7:13–14**, of the future sovereignty of the Son of Man (16:28; 19:28; 24:30–31; 25:31–34; 26:64);²³ three of those passages have indicated that that sovereignty would be achieved in the near future, to be seen by those then alive (16:28; 24:30–34; 26:64; cf. also 10:23). But now what has been a vision for the future, albeit the imminent future, has become present reality. The risen Jesus, vindicated over those who tried to destroy him, is now established as the universal sovereign, and his realm embraces not only the whole earth which was to be the dominion of the “*one like a son of man*” in Daniel’s vision but heaven as well. At the beginning of the gospel Satan offered Jesus sovereignty over the whole earth, but his offer was refused (4:8–10); now Jesus, going the way of obedience to his Father’s will even to the cross, has received far more than Satan could offer. He has spoken already in 11:27 of “*everything entrusted to me by my Father*;” now that authority is fully spelled out—indeed Jesus himself now possesses the authority that he attributed to his Father as “*Lord of heaven and earth*” in 11:25. It is this universal sovereignty that is the essential basis of the commission which is to follow in vv. 19–20, and thus of the continuing life of the disciple community until the end of the age.

Grant Osborne: This is not a new authority, for it is linked to the authority Jesus displayed throughout his earthly ministry. Yet at the same time it is a new level of authority, as Jesus receives from his Father his preexistent glory and authority (a further link to the transfiguration). As seen in 16:19; 18:18 this authority “*in heaven and on earth*” is linked to the authority to “*bind and loose*,” given to the church, so it is intimately linked to the church’s mission in v. 19.

II. (:19-20a) THE GREAT COMMISSION CONCENTRATES ON THE MISSION OF MAKING DISCIPLES – THE PROGRAM OF JESUS

David Turner: Those who are baptized are to be taught not only to know all of Jesus's commands but also to obey all of them (**28:20**). Thus in discipleship the intellectual component is secondary, the means to the end, which is **spiritual formation** (cf. **John 13:17**). All this implies the **central role of the church** as God's primary agency for mission. Only in the community/family that is the church can disciples be baptized and taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded (cf. **Matt. 16:18–19; 18:17–20**).

A. (:19a) Scope of the Discipleship Mission Requires Missionary Outreach

“Go therefore”

Jeffrey Crabtree: *Make disciples* (v. 19), is the **main verb** in this sentence in the original and the only imperative. The other three actions—go, baptize, and teach—are participles that function as adverbial modifiers of this main verb and are part of the command.

Charles Swindoll: First, making disciples takes *going*. It will take reaching into hearts and communicating the good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead victorious. People need to know that there's nothing they can do to earn salvation. It is received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That's the proclamation we bear as those entrusted with the Great Commission. And we take that proclamation not just to family members, and not just to neighbors or people within our own country. We take it to the world – to the nations, as Jesus said. There are no exceptions, no borders, and no boundaries to our disciple-making mission.

B. (:19b) Summary of the Discipleship Mission = Making Disciples Worldwide

“and make disciples of all the nations,”

Craig Blomberg: The main command of Christ's commission is “*make disciples*” (*math teusate*). Too much and too little have often been made of this observation. Too much is made of it when the disciples' “*going*” is overly subordinated, so that Jesus' charge is to proselytize merely where one is. Matthew frequently uses “*go*” as an introductory circumstantial participle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb—here “*Go and make*” (cf. **2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7**). Too little is made of it when all attention is centered on the command to “*go*,” as in countless appeals for missionary candidates, so that foreign missions are elevated to a higher status of Christian service than other forms of spiritual activity. To “*make disciples of all nations*” does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus' main focus remains on the task of all believers to **duplicate themselves wherever they may be**. The verb “*make disciples*” also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith. The truly subordinate participles in v. 19 explain what making disciples involves: “*baptizing*” them and “*teaching*” them obedience to all of Jesus' commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task.

D. A. Carson: “To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher, ‘taking his yoke’ of authoritative instruction (**11:29**), accepting what he says as true because he says it, and submitting to his requirements as right because he makes them” (**Broadus**). Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching (**12:46–50**). The injunction is given at least to the Eleven, but to the Eleven in their own role as disciples (**28:16**). Therefore, they are paradigms for all disciples. Plausibly, the command is given to a larger gathering of disciples.

Either way, it is binding on all Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are—disciples of Jesus Christ.

Leon Morris: In this Gospel a disciple is both a **learner** and a **follower**; a disciple takes Jesus as his teacher and learns from him, and a disciple also follows Jesus. The life of a disciple is different because of his attachment to Jesus. The Master is not giving a command that will merely secure nominal adherence to a group, but one that will secure wholehearted commitment to a person. In the first century a disciple did not enroll with such-and-such a school, but with such-and-such a teacher. Jesus' disciples are people for whom a life has been given in ransom (**20:28**) and who are committed to the service of the Master, who not only took time to teach his disciples but who died for them and rose again. Those who are disciples of such a leader are committed people. And, of course, this is the kind of disciple that he looks for his followers to make. They are to make disciples of all the nations, which points to a worldwide scope for their mission. It took the church a little time to realize the significance of this, and in the early chapters of Acts we find the believers concentrating on proclaiming their message to the Jews. But there seems never to have been any question of admitting Gentiles, the only problem being **on what conditions**.

C. (:19c-20) Specific Components of the Discipleship Mission = Baptizing and Teaching

1. (:19c) Entrance into the Faith via Evangelism and Baptism

“baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,”

Stu Weber: Baptism is not a step to salvation. Rather, it is an initial step of obedience that results from a person's decision to trust the Messiah. Baptism represents the identification of people with this new way of life and faith. Baptism should be experienced as soon as possible after a person trusts Christ.

Craig Blomberg: The singular “*name*” followed by the threefold reference to “*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*” suggests both **unity** and **plurality** in the Godhead. Here is the clearest **Trinitarian** “formula” anywhere in the Gospels.

Jeffrey Crabtree: **Faith in Jesus (18:6)**, not baptism or learning, brings one into a discipleship relationship with Jesus. Baptism is a testimony that grace has been received (“*the answer*” or “*the pledge*” (NIV) in **1 Pet. 3:20-21**). It is not a means of grace (contra **Bruner 2:821; 1 Cor. 1:14**). Once a person becomes a disciple of Christ, the **first act of obedience** for that individual is to follow Jesus in baptism. According to N.T. practice, **only believers were baptized (Acts 2:41; 18:8)**, which is one reason gospel baptism is only for those who are mentally mature enough to place personal faith in Jesus as Savior. In other words, baptism is not for children too immature to place saving trust in Christ. . .

“*Baptize*” is a transliteration of the Greek verb (*baptizō*). In its most basic sense, it means to dip, to immerse. John the Baptist, Jesus, the Twelve during Jesus' earthly ministry, and the early church all practiced **immersion** as their mode of baptism. Other forms were introduced into church practice decades later but they were not part of the original practice. Extended teaching times between profession of faith and baptism were also a later introduction. . .

In Christian believers' baptism, Jesus' disciples **identify** with the Triune God. This is the fullest revelation of the divine, greater than the revelation of the O.T. In the N.T., devotion to God encompasses **all three Persons** of the Godhead. The doctrine of the Trinity is distinctive to

kingdom theology and mandates a commitment to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well as to the Father.

This listing of the members of the Godhead also reflects Jesus' own baptism. The Father spoke, the Son was in the water, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove (**3:16-17**). It is important to note that in **28:19** each member is mentioned **equally**. Neither Person is presented as being superior to or less than either of the other members. This is a clear pronouncement of Jesus' deity (**Wilkins** 955).

Grant Osborne: baptism “*into fellowship with*” (**Allen, Albright and Mann**) or “*into the Lordship of*” (**Carson**) the Godhead, expressing a **new relationship** (**Davies and Allison**).

2. (:20) Edification in the Faith via Teaching Obedience to Christ's Teaching
“*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,*”

Craig Blomberg: Evangelism must be **holistic**. If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus' commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part. Key implications for preaching appear here. There must be a balance between evangelistic proclamation and relevant exposition of all parts of God's Word, including the more difficult material best reserved for the mature (cf. **1 Cor 2:1-5** with **2:6-10**). So, too, the ministries of the church overall must reflect a healthy balance of “**outreach**” and “**inreach**.” Individuals who have differing gifts should be encouraged to expend most of their energies developing their strengths, whether evangelizing or nurturing, speaking or serving. Nevertheless, Jesus calls all Christians to be **both witnesses and disciplers**.

D. A. Carson: Remarkably, Jesus does not foresee a time when any part of his teaching will be rightly judged needless, outmoded, superseded, or untrue. Everything he has commanded must be passed on “*to the very end of the age.*”

Grant Osborne: We are at the heart of Matthew's gospel here, with the five discourses centering on Jesus' ethical teaching as the basis here for the teaching ministry of the disciples.

III. (:20b) THE GREAT COMMISSION COUNTS ON CHRIST'S ABIDING PRESENCE UNTIL HE RETURNS – THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

“*and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

Richard Gardner: As disciples pursue their mission, they do so with the assurance Jesus offers in **20b**: *I am with you always*. It is the promise that God gave to Jacob in **Genesis 46:3-4**, to Moses in **Exodus 3:12**, and to the exiles in **Isaiah 43:1-7**. Now Jesus speaks as God speaks. To put it another way: The One who is named *God-with-us* at the outset of the Gospel (**1:23**) promises that he will continue to be *God-with-us* in his community. (Note how **28:20b** and **1:23** thus form a literary inclusion.) Earlier, Jesus indicated that he would be with his disciples when they assembled in his name (**18:20**). Here he assures us that he will accompany us in our going out as well, until the day dawns when his now hidden presence becomes visible in glory.

Grant Osborne: The final of the six uses of “look” in **ch. 28** points to the dramatic truth that provides a proper conclusion to this commission and to the gospel as a whole. It completes one of the key Christological themes of the book, namely, the omnipresence of Christ with his new kingdom community, seen in the beginning (**1:23**, “*Immanuel . . . God with us*”) and center (**18:20**, “*there am I in the midst of them*”) of Matthew; and so it stresses the deity and divine glory of the Christ. The gospel ends with the “*Emmanuel*” with which it began. The Great Commission is thus framed by the omnipotence (v. **18**) and omnipresence (v. **20b**) of Christ. The theme partakes of the **Shekinah glory** of the OT and the divine comfort of Yahweh’s presence among men (not just divine presence but divine assistance). So God’s protection of his people throughout the ages is promised to the church.

David Turner: Jesus’s presence will last until “*the end of the age.*” This expression (**13:39–40, 49; 24:3**) clearly refers to the time of eschatological judgment and renewal at the conclusion of the present order (cf. **Cuvillier** 1999a). This makes clear that the commission is not only for the original eleven disciples but also for their disciples and their disciples’ disciples in perpetuity until Jesus returns. Through all these days, there will never be a single day when Jesus will not be with his disciples as they are busy about his business.

Marvin Rosenthal: If “*the end*” in **Matthew 24:14** is inside the seventieth week, then “*the end of the age*” in **Matthew 28:20** must also be **inside the seventieth week**. . . If the Great Commission of the church is to evangelize the world **up to the end**, then the church must enter the seventieth week of the book of Daniel in order to fulfill its holy calling, only then to be raptured before the Day of the Lord judgment.

Donald Hagner: The great commission and its frame with which Matthew ends remain, like the whole Gospel itself, one of the priceless treasures of the Christian church, providing comfort, strength, and hope until the final dawning of the eschaton.

D. A. Carson: Matthew’s gospel ends with the expectation of **continued mission and teaching**. The five preceding sections always conclude with a block of Jesus’ teaching (**3:1 – 26:5**); but the passion and resurrection of Jesus end with a commission to his disciples to carry on that same ministry in the light of the cross, the empty tomb, and the triumphant vindication and exaltation of the risen Lord. In this sense, the gospel of Matthew is not a closed book until the consummation. The final chapter is being written in the mission and teaching of Jesus’ disciples.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was this meeting staged in Galilee instead of in Jerusalem?
- 2) What movements throughout church history have been strong in their focus on evangelism but weak in their focus on edification and practical discipleship?
- 3) How do you correct the false teaching that not all Christians are disciples . . . but that discipleship is some type of second tier level of Christianity?
- 4) What are some errors regarding baptism that this passage refutes?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: Here we come to the end of the gospel story; here we listen to the last words of Jesus to his disciples; and in this last meeting Jesus did three things.

(1) **He assured them of his power.** Surely nothing was outside the power of him who had died and conquered death. Now they were the servants of a Master whose authority upon earth and in heaven was beyond all question.

(2) **He gave them a commission.** He sent them out to make all the world his disciples.

(3) **He promised them a presence.** It must have been a staggering thing for eleven humble Galilaeans to be sent forth to the conquest of the world. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have failed them. But no sooner was the command given than the promise followed. They were sent out -as we are – on the greatest task in history, but with them there was the **greatest presence** in the world.

Stu Weber: The entire Gospel of Matthew serves to equip us for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

- Matthew gives the historical basis for our status as disciples of the Messiah and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew gives us our true identity.
- Matthew shows us the person with whom we have begun a deeply intimate and loyal relationship.
- Matthew reveals this master's unbending demands and his unending grace, contrasting him with the many other masters who clamor for our loyalty. None of these false gods will reward us for faithfulness as he does. None of them care for our well-being.
- Matthew demonstrates the authority with which we are sent out so we might fulfill our disciple-making ministry with confidence. This confidence is not in ourselves but in the Lord and Savior who promised to be with us.
- Matthew promises us the reward that awaits the good and faithful servant, motivating us to faithfulness in our earthly kingdom task.
- Matthew sets before us a detailed example, in the Messiah himself, showing us exactly how to carry out our commission.
- Matthew provides, through the teachings of the Messiah, the basis for the right character of kingdom citizens as well as guidelines for right relationships within the church family.
- Matthew gives us a message of warning and hope for a world heading for destruction. We must proclaim this message fearlessly and lovingly. Some people will become disciples because of our proclamation of Matthew's message.

Seen from the perspective of the Great Commission, Matthew's Gospel is a **training manual** for life and ministry. We will become true disciples of the Messiah, effectively reproducing other disciples, if we abide with him and live out what we learn from him.

Jeffrey Crabtree: A sermon might focus on the all-encompassing aspects of the great commission:

- (1) all authority;
- (2) all nations;
- (3) all of Jesus' teachings; and
- (4) all the days.

Likewise, Jesus gave the greatest commission:

- (1) the greatest charge (go);
- (2) the greatest invitation (become a disciple of Jesus);
- (3) the greatest drama (baptism, a reenactment);
- (4) the greatest lesson (Jesus' words);
- (5) the greatest communion (I am with you);
- (6) the greatest promise (I am with you always, to the end of the age).

John MacArthur: The Making Disciples of All Nations

So, Christ came into the world with one motive, basically, and that was **to glorify God**. And that motive has been passed on to the church. We are to give God glory; that is our reason for being. As the French would say, that's our *raison d'être*, that's our reason to be: to glorify God, in terms of a motive.

But what about a mission? What is the mission that flows out of that motive? . . .

And the mission that does that is to **win men and women to the Savior**. And as they come to know Him and their sins are forgiven, and they are transformed from death to life and darkness to light, God is glorified in the miracle of that transformation. The glory of God is manifest in His loving desire, and in His power to redeem lost men out of the world. . .

We are left here to **make disciples**, to bring people to Christ, to cause people to become followers of the Savior, to seek and to save those that are lost. The verb *make disciple*, *mathēteusate*, is an imperative command, from the verb *mathēteuō*.

He sent the Son, then, to seek and save that which was lost. And then the Spirit, to empower us to witness, as it says in **Acts 1:8**, to accomplish the same goal. Jesus, in **John 17:18**, said, "*Father, as You sent Me into the world, so send I My disciples,*" for the same reason; that is, to seek and to save those who are lost. And Jesus said, "*After the Spirit is come, you will receive power, and then you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.*"

So, we're in line with that calling and commission that has always been on the heart of God. Even when Jesus initially called the disciples, He said, "*Follow Me*" - in **Matthew 4:18 to 20** - "*and I will make you fishers of men.*" Nothing has changed. From the call of **Matthew 4**, to the commission of **Matthew 28**, there has been a training process, so that those who were called to

be fishers of men, when they are commissioned to be fishers of men, will know what that involves, and will be faithful to fulfill it.

The tragedy of the church of Jesus Christ is that so many people have lost sight of that commission, and they have settled for a comfortable, self-indulgent kind of Christianity, that is little more than an inexpensive social club membership. That is not God's intention. . . It is not only an available heart, it is a worshiping heart. And then thirdly - and this is where we come to our lesson today - the third element of fulfilling the great commission we see in the passage is submission; submission. . .

He, then, has all authority. What that says is this: He is in charge. He is sovereign, and to Him we must submit. Now, why does He say this? Because it is on the basis of our submission to His authority that we put ourselves in the place of obedience, isn't it? We have to understand that His command is binding before we are going to undertake to obey it, because the command itself is staggering. . .

So, you make a disciple when you lead someone to Christ. All of this stuff that I keep reading about nowadays, that a second - that a disciple is some second-generation or second-level Christian, and later on you can become a disciple, just does not square with Scripture. Making a disciple means leading someone to faith in Christ, which baptism typifies. When you come to Christ, confess Him as Lord and Savior, believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, and demonstrate that in an act of obedient baptism, you are a disciple. . .

I understand that what God wants out of me is availability. What He wants from me is a worshiping heart, that's totally centered on Him, and not the junk of the world. What He wants is a submissive spirit, that says, "Whatever You ask, Lord, I'll do it." And then when I hear it, He wants obedience. And what He gives me in return, is not only all the commands, and all the orders, and all the right instruction, but the power of His own presence to pull it off and make it happen.

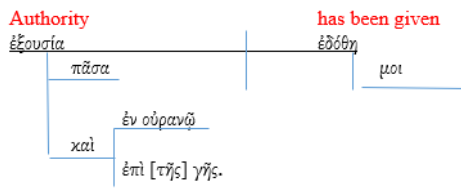
Walter Wilson: The abrupt transition in **28:16** picks up the narrative thread from **28:10** without indicating how much time has passed or what has transpired in the interim. The disciples are now reconstituted as Jesus's apostles, recalling their original call as apostles at the beginning of the mission discourse, where they were conferred with authority (**10:1**) and instructed to "go" (πορεύεσθε, **10:6**). The Messiah's renewed life, then, generates a **renewed mission**, one that reflects the character of that life. The symbolism of the Twelve in **10:2-4** (cf. **19:28**) is now broken, the reference to the Eleven (**28:16**) drawing attention to the absence as well as the betrayal of Judas (cf. **10:4**). By the same token, the reference injects an element of hope, inasmuch as the group's presence ameliorates the earlier impression of complete failure (cf. **26:56**). The resurrection, then, represents the means by which Jesus continues to be "*with*" his followers (cf. **1:23**) as well as the means by which he is elevated as universal lord and judge (cf. **25:31-46**). Insofar as the resurrection also signifies victory over opposition to the messianic movement, it also inspires his followers to be fearless in carrying out their mission (cf. **10:26-31**). . .

Thus, having revealed his universal authority to them, the Risen One next orders the disciples to undertake a **universal discipling mission**. The command to "go" (**28:19a**) recalls the opening lines of the mission discourse (**10:6-7**, also with πορεύομαι). Once again, we see that the manner in which the disciples both follow Jesus's example and participate in his authority is by creating

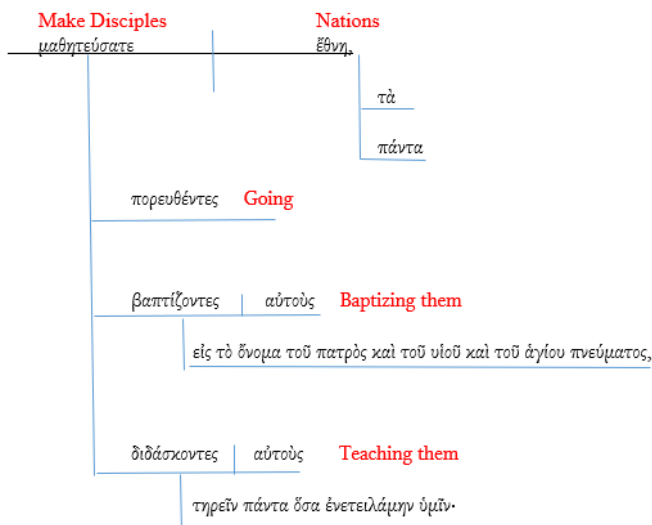
new disciples. Whereas they previously had been directed not to evangelize the ἔθνη (10:5), now they are commanded to “*make disciples of all the nations*” (28:19a). The era of the exclusive mission to Israel (10:6; cf. 15:24) has ended, giving way to the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world, a development that Jesus has anticipated through both his words and his actions, and to which he had assigned eschatological significance in 24:14.

Stanley Saunders: The reordering of heaven and earth under the lordship of Jesus Christ provides Matthew’s basis (“*therefore,*” 28:19) for the commission proper, which is delivered by means of supporting clauses surrounding the primary, **central command:** “*make disciples of all nations.*” The supporting clauses delineate the means or circumstances under which the “discipling” takes place. **Jesus’ own training of his disciples is the model.** They have been “going” throughout Galilee and Judea, back and forth into Gentile and Jewish territories, and finally to Jerusalem and the cross. Now the disciples are to begin again from Galilee, where Jesus’ mission started, baptizing and leading others to discern, comprehend, and embrace God’s rule. Does the mission to “*all nations*” suggest the end of the mission to Israel in favor of a predominantly or exclusively Gentile mission? There is no compelling evidence in the Gospel that God’s covenant with Israel has ended. Despite the resistance of Israel’s rulers and people, and even the desertion of his own disciples, Jesus’ saving power embraces all. The mission to the nations depends on the realization that the cross and resurrection bring to fruition Jesus’ mission to “*save his people from their sins*” (1:21). Jesus’ comprehensive authority over all of heaven and earth includes Israel. God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation now extends to the nations because Israel’s true king is now enthroned.

Greek Diagram Analysis:



οὖν Therefore



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