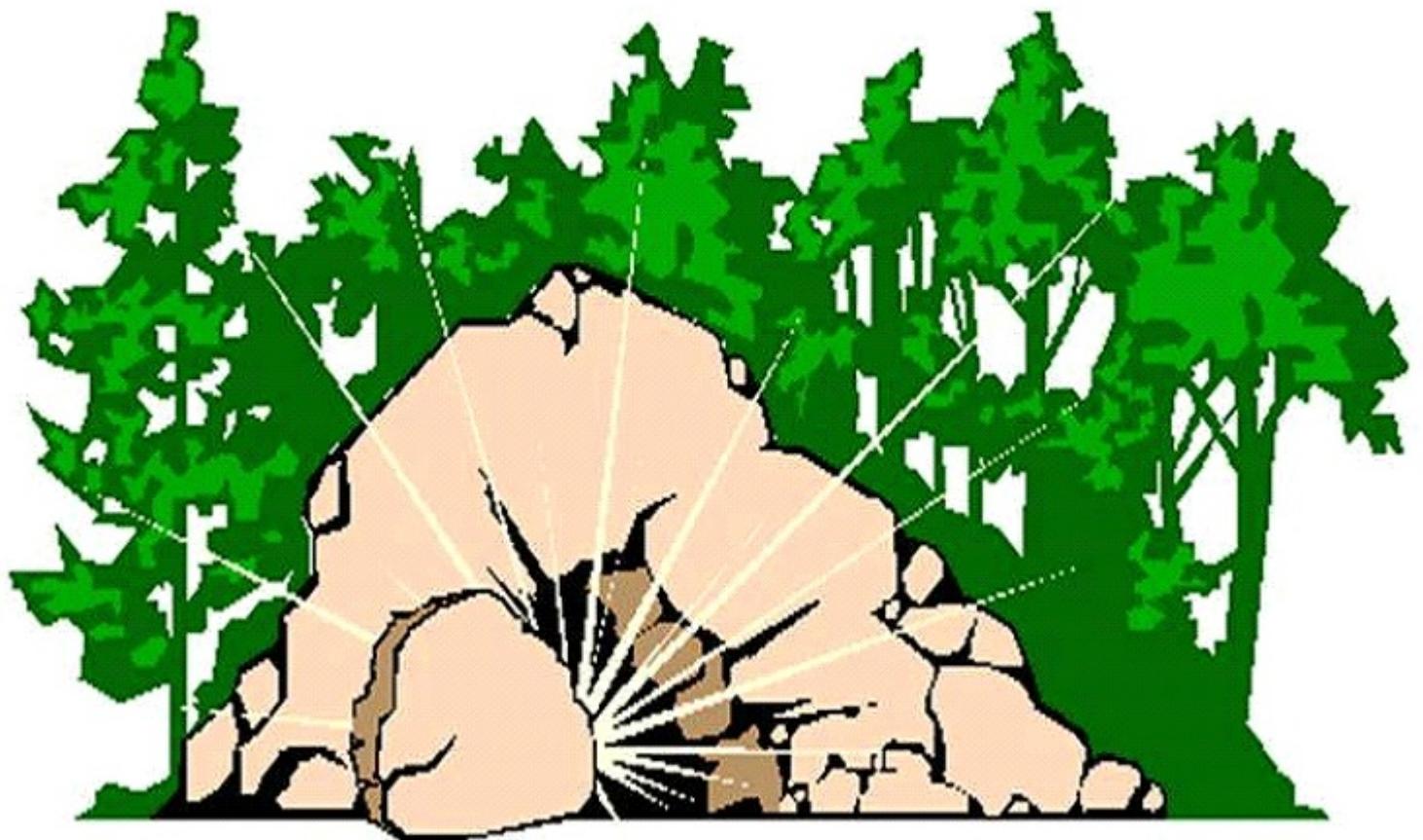


The Gospel of
Matthew

Part Three: Chapters 21-28



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ
Adult Bible Class Sunday Morning Spring Quarter 2023

A Workbook By Daniel R. Vess

Table of Contents

Lesson 1: Here Comes the King, 21:1-27	5
<i>Sunday, April 2, 2023</i>	
Lesson 2: Three Parables for the Pharisees, 21:28-22:14	11
<i>Sunday, April 9, 2023</i>	
Lesson 3: Final Exams for Jesus, 22:15-46	21
<i>Sunday, April 16, 2023</i>	
Lesson 4: Sermon for the Scribes & Pharisees, 23:1-36	29
<i>Sunday, April 23, 2023</i>	
Lesson 5: Predicted Destruction of Jerusalem, 23:37 - 24:35	37
<i>Sunday, April 30, 2023</i>	
Lesson 6: Parables of the Second Coming, 24:36 - 25:13	44
<i>Sunday, May 7, 2023</i>	
Lesson 7: Parables of the Coming Judgment Day, 25:14-46	52
<i>Sunday, May 14, 2023</i>	
Lesson 8: A Packed Day of Preparation, 26:1-30	58
<i>Sunday, May 21, 2023</i>	
Lesson 9: A Difficult Night of Desertion, 26:31-56	64
<i>Sunday, May 28, 2023</i>	
Lesson 10: A Trying Morning of Trials, 26:57 - 27:10	70
<i>Sunday, June 4, 2023</i>	
Lesson 11: Passion & the Cross, 27:11-44	77
<i>Sunday, June 11, 2023</i>	
Lesson 12: Death & Burial, 27:46-65	83
<i>Sunday, June 18, 2023</i>	
Lesson 13: Resurrection & Commission, 28:1-20	89
<i>Sunday, June 25, 2023</i>	

Here Comes the King

Matthew 21:1-27

King's Public Claim to the Throne, 21:1-9

Matthew 21 marks the beginning of Jesus' last week. Over the next eight days Jesus would be very busy arriving in Bethany where He would be anointed by Mary. He would enter Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey to the praise of the masses. The next day He cleanses the Temple. Tuesday and Wednesday would be devoted to teaching in the Temple area. Thursday was the Passover. And then His death on that Friday before Sabbath began at sundown. Matthew will devote 25% of his Gospel to the last week of Jesus. He is not alone. Of the eighty-nine chapters in the Gospels some twenty-nine of them are devoted to the last eight days of Jesus life. Luke uses 20% of his Gospel. Whereas one third of Mark is dedicated to this last week. Up to half of John's Gospel is so used.

This day is known as Palm Sunday. Jesus was beginning the final phase of His ministry. It is centered around Jerusalem and would end in His death. To enter Jerusalem He would have traveled up from Jericho and come to Bethany next to Bethphage. It was here he would send two disciples back to Bethany to fetch fitting transportation as the Messianic King. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is not His coronation as King. This took place when He ascended to sit at the right hand of God (Acts 2).

Did Jesus know the owner of the donkey and her colt? Was the owner a disciple whom Jesus has prearranged a deal to borrow them? Or did God arrange this by providence? Some have suggested that it was the practice known as *angaria*. This is where someone in the military or a public official or even a rabbi could request the lending of a beast of burden to help them transport military equipment, the mail or even a traveling teacher of the Jewish Law (Pope 697). Whatever the case may be the disciples were able to find and procure the beast of burden just as Jesus had said.

This colt had never been ridden before that day. This is why Matthew records its mother came along. Matthew quotes from Zechariah 9:9 as his eighth prophecy fulfilled by Jesus. This time Jesus Himself is involved in the fulfilling of it. Verse five quotes the prophecy: "*Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*" The inhabitants of Jerusalem represent the "*daughter of Zion.*" Jesus is clearly identified as their King. The translation of Zechariah makes it appear Matthew is telling us Jesus was riding with animals. However, a better rendering of the verse would be: "on a donkey, that is, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Boice 435). Notice the Zechariah describes not just the mode of travel which identifies Jesus as the King but the attitude of this King's character: "*lowly.*" Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a white powerful stallion although He will be depicted coming in Judgment on one in the Revelation (Rev. 19:6). He did not enter in a war chariot with an army. Perhaps if He had, He would have been better received. Jesus entered on a donkey as David had Solomon when proclaiming his son to be the next king. Jesus was humble, meek, and lowly. Just as He claimed to be in Matthew 11:28-30.

In preparation to the Passover. Jerusalem's population would swell to about two and a half million. As Jesus traveled on the colt down the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem many Jews who had heard of Lazarus' resurrection would follow from Bethany and the surrounding villages (John 12:9).

As a show of praise and respect the people laid their garments down before Jesus' path. Branches were cut from palm trees to do the same. Palm branches were a symbol of joy and salvation. In fact, Hosanna means "save now". It is from Psalm 118:25: "*Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity.*" When the multitudes cried out, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*" in verse nine they were referring to Psalm 118:26. This Psalm was one of several sang in connection with

the Passover. But are these people looking to Jesus for salvation from sin. Not hardly. They have been brainwashed into thinking of a militaristic/political Messianic King. In fact, later they would claim: *"We have no king but Caesar!"* Yet the Psalms do apply to Jesus. Later in Matthew 21:42 Jesus would refer to this same Psalm and apply it to Himself. And His connection to this Psalm shows His Deity. When the multitude call Him *"Son of David"* they recognize His royal lineage and right to the throne. To come in God's name is to be sent by Divine Authority.

This triumphal entry would be short lived. The very multitude proclaiming Him *"Son of David"* would by the end of the week demand of the Romans *"crucify Him, crucify Him."* Jesus was not the Messianic King they had hoped for. The rulers of the Jews did not like this entry of by Jesus, mostly because of the response of the people. *"The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, 'You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!'"* (John 12:19).

Jesus is now open and very public in His teaching this week. Why? Because His time has come. The prophecies of Daniel have pinpointed the time. Jesus is about to fulfill many more prophecies.

King's Attack on Thieves, 21:10-13

After Jesus entered Jerusalem He went *"into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve"* (Mark 11:11). He went out to an area where He would have His base of operations that week east of the Mount of Olivet. We are not told whether He and the twelve stayed with Simon the leper, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus or just camped outside at Bethany with the rest of the Jews who came from out of town for the Passover.

On Monday Jesus returns to the Jerusalem. He had created quite a stir in Jerusalem when He entered the day before. The term *"moved"* does not quite catch the intense meaning of what was going on in Jerusalem in reaction to Jesus. Weymouth translates it as: *"was thrown into commotion."* Just who is this man who has caused all this stir among the people. *"So the multitudes said, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee'"* (21:11).

If they thought Jesus had caused a commotion on Sunday, He is about to go mad on Monday. For the second time Jesus is going to cleanse the Temple. Three years prior during the time of the Passover, Jesus had cleansed the Temple (John 2:13–25). How long it took the money changers and the livestock merchants to return and set up shop is not known. Perhaps by the next Passover it was business as usual.

When it says that Jesus went into the Temple, it does not mean into the Holy Place or the Holy of holies. The Temple itself was small in comparison with the large Temple complex. A large court of the Gentiles was surrounded on three sides by Solomon's porch. This is where business was being conducted. One might argue that these merchants were not in the Temple itself, however, it was part of the Temple, or house of God and needed to be treated with reverence due a holy place.

Why did Jesus demonstrate such righteous indignation at those in the Temple? When Jesus called the temple *"my house,"* His deity is affirmed and ownership of the Temple confirmed. What were they doing that was so irreverent? The temple tax as to be collected. Jesus and Peter's temple tax had already been collected. At this time this poll tax had to be paid in the Temple by those attending the Passover. Since many Jews are attending from all over the Roman Empire and beyond, they had come with foreign currency. The money changers charged six percent for exchanging currency and another six percent for making change. These same pilgrims to the Passover had to buy acceptable sacrifices. Sacrifices had to be without blemish. Priests determined whether or not a lamb was acceptable. So even if a Jew brought their own lamb, it would most likely have been rejected. The opportunity for greedy abuses of worshipers was abundant. Inside of the Temple area doves cost up to fifty times more than on the streets of Jerusalem. *"A Jewish teacher named Simon ben Gamaliel going into the temple courts and compelling the money-changers to lower the price on sacrificial birds to one one-hundredth of the previous price (Kerithoth 1.7)"* (Pope 712).

Jesus defended His attack by quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:1. The Temple was to be *"a place of prayer"* however, they have turned it into a *"den of thieves"* or cave of brigands. God is

opposed to unjust extortion and the commercializing of religion. Jesus did not just upset the money changers and merchants. He was attacking the High Priest who was in charge of the Temple. The High Priest was made a wealthy man by charging for booths in the Temple complex and taking a cut from their proceeds. Jesus was faced the wrath of the High Priest late that week.

King's Acceptance of Outcasts, 21:14

Although the blind and the lame were not allowed according to the Law of Moses to be priests, they were permitted in the Temple courts. Yet by this time they were not encouraged to participate in temple services. When they came to Jesus in the Temple, *"He healed them."* He accepted them and removed the stigma of their physical maladies. While He cast out the merchants who were taking advantage of others. He is seen as a compassionate and just king. Furthermore, by healing Jesus demonstrates His authority in the Temple.

King's Accepts Praise from Youth, 21:15-17

While healing Jesus was receiving praise from the youth who were copying what they had heard the day before. Of Jesus they were saying, *"Hosanna to the Son of David!"* Once again the Jewish leadership are enraged at this. Notice while Jesus was indignant against the extortion going on in the Temple, they did nothing. Now they are upset with Jesus for healing and accepting praise in the Temple.

When they asked Jesus, *"Do You hear what these are saying?"*, it was a condemnation of Him for allowing them to utter such blasphemy in the Temple. Jesus points out once again their ignorance of the scriptures: *"Yes. Have you never read."* In other words, "I sure have heard their praises, have you heard what God said in His Word: *"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?"* This is a quotation and prophecy from Psalm 8:2. Again Jesus uses their attack on Him to show proof of His deity and kingship.

"Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there" (21:17).

King's Judgment Upon a Fruitless Nation, 21:18-22

Mark tells us that on Monday morning on His way to cleanse the Temple, Jesus cursed the barren fig tree. The next morning, Tuesday Jesus and His disciples are on their way to Jerusalem and pass by the same tree which is now withered away. Matthew condenses the story into one event. Jesus *"returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, 'Let no fruit grow on you ever again.' Immediately the fig tree withered away"* (21:18,19).

Jesus was not angry with the tree itself. He did use the tree for object lessons about fruitfulness, hypocrisy, and prayer. In Palestine there were many fig trees. These bore fruit first and then put out leaves. The Passover occurs around the end of March and mid-April. According to Mark this was not the time for figs (Mark 11:13). Jesus was human and being hungry sees a tree with leaves. Thus it is advertising that it has fruit. However, due to conditions of moisture, weather or disease this fig tree is guilty of false advertisement. It is a perfect illustration of the nation of Israel. The fig tree symbolized the nation of Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hos 9:10, 16; Luke 13:6-9).

Israel made a pretense to have spiritual fruit. However, it only showed the signs by having leaves but bearing no spiritual fruit. This hypocrisy merits God's condemnation and anger. Such a nation will be judged. Jesus has already spoke a parable about a barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). The owner wanted it cut down, but the care giver wanted time to save it. God has given Israel John the Baptist's and His Son's ministry to warn Israel and bring it to repentance. Yet, there is not fruit. The probation period is up. The withered fig tree is a visible parable in action. The inner corruption is seen by the abuse of the Temple, this results did not result in a house of prayer but in a den of thieves. As a result of this they are not able to bear fruit to God or accept the King.

This miracle is not just a parable in action but prediction of Israel's future. They have rejected God and His Son. They will not bear fruit as a nation for God ever again. Jesus said of the fig tree, *"Let no*

fruit grow on you ever again.” So Jesus is predicting that the nation will not for all eternity bear fruit. It is no longer God’s special nation or people. The time of destruction would come forty years later when the Romans would destroy Jerusalem along with the Temple. This is in conflict with Premillennialism which claims Israel will be reestablished at Christ’s return and be fruitful once more.

The disciples see the tree the next morning and are amazed at how much it has withered in twenty-four hours. It had *“dried up from the roots”* (Mark 12:20). Even trees cut down will have moisture and live roots for days or weeks. Jesus does not rebuke their lack of faith in His miraculous ability. Instead, He uses this as a chance to teach them a lesson about prayer. *“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive’* (21:20-22). This is a repetition of the promise made by Jesus in Matthew 17:20. Jesus is not rambling or sidetracking from His original point. The Jews had turned the temple into a fruitless den of thieves instead of maintaining it as a house of prayer. Therefore, He encourages them to continue to pray faithfully trusting in God’s willingness to answer. This prayer of faith is not giving disciples a blank check to use for anything and anytime they want. Prayer has conditions. It must be a growing faith like that of a mustard seed. It must be according to the will of God (1 John 5:14). Prayer must be made in the name of Jesus (John 16:23). It must be accompanied by a heart of forgiveness (Matt. 6:14,15). Prayer that *“ask amiss”* is invalid (James 4:3).

King’s Authority is Questioned, 21:23-27

When Jesus entered Jerusalem that Wednesday morning He once again went the Temple. With the money changers and merchants gone, the courts were filled with people willing to turn their ears to Jesus. His cleansing of the Temple would have been very popular with the populous who had been long victimized by the extortion allowed by the religious rulers. The leadership of the Jews would have been offended by this self-proclaimed rabbi, prophet, Messiah, king and Son of God. They sent a delegation of the highest authorities to confront Jesus. The group included *“the chief priests and the elders of the people.”* The chief priests were not former High Priests, but heads of the twenty-four orders of priests created by King David for Temple service. The elders could have included leaders from all the various political/religious sects among the Jews, such as, the Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, and Zealots.

The two questions they asked Jesus are wise and of grave important. They must be asked of every religious leader and group in every generation. They asked, *“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”* Their questions shows two things: 1) a recognition of a need for authority in religion and 2) that such authority must come from one who has the rightful power to grant authority. If Jesus’ authority is from men it is as worthless as the Pharisees and their traditions of men and therefore should be shunned and not obeyed. However, if His authority is from God in Heaven, then all must obey.

Jesus, as is His custom, does not give a direct answer. But answers them with a question of His own. *“I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”* (21:24b,25). Jesus’ question shows that authority can be derived from two sources: 1) God in Heaven or 2) men on the earth. Jesus shows great wisdom in using John. Both Jesus and John came preaching the coming of the kingdom and repentance; both commanded baptism; both were not ordained by the Jewish authorities to be rabbis or elders or scribes; and both used their authority to support the validity of the other. John even publically proclaimed Jesus to be the *“Lamb of God”* and the *“Son of God”*.

The Jewish religious authorities soon realized Jesus had caught them between the horns of dilemma. *“And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet’* (21:25-26). Jesus had previously rebuked them for rejecting the baptism of John. *“The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him”* (Luke 7:29).

Jesus has skillfully exposed the hypocrisy and corrupt heart of the Jewish leadership. Instead of answering truthfully, out of cowardice they embarrassed themselves by claiming, “*We do not know.*”

Jesus responded out of wisdom not cowardice, “*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things*” (21:27b). He has answered them. They know His answers. However, in the next lesson He will share three parables which will remove all doubt as to what Jesus’ answer would be.

Questions:

1. Why do you think the Gospels spent 25% of their chapters on the last eight days of Jesus' life?
2. What did Jesus ride on into Jerusalem? Why?
3. What did the people do for Jesus as He entered Jerusalem?
4. What did the people say about Jesus as He entered Jerusalem?
5. Did the people really accept Jesus as their King and the Messiah? Explain.
6. When did Jesus first cleanse the Temple?
7. Why were the moneychangers and merchants in the Temple?
8. Why did Jesus overturn their tables and drive them out?
9. Did Jesus go into the Temple proper, that is, into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies? Explain.
10. Who did Jesus accept and have compassion on in the Temple?
11. How does the Jewish leadership react to Jesus' healing and being praised in the Temple?
12. What scripture does Jesus refer them to? Why?

13. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?
14. What was this an illustration of?
15. What comparisons can be made of this fig tree with Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6-9?
16. What implications for the Jewish nation is there in Jesus cursing the fig tree to never ever bear fruit?
17. What lesson about prayer does Jesus teach from the withered fig tree?
18. Who were the chief priests?
19. Why are the questions the Jewish leaders asked of Jesus so wise and important?
20. Why wouldn't the Jewish leaders answer Jesus' question about the baptism of John?

Application & Discussion:

1. How one uses the church building is not important? Jesus would not have a problem with how some have added stores and restaurants and are changing entry fees to services? Explain.
2. Certainly, the questions asked by the Jewish leaders need to be asked today of all men and all churches everywhere. Suppose someone came into our assembly and asked, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" How would we answer? What would be the proper answer? Must a Christian or church have authority for what they teach and practice?

Homework: As a subject to the King of kings remember to respect and obey His authority.

Three Parables for the Pharisees

Matthew 21:28-22:14

The chapter begins with the last week of Jesus before He is crucified. First, there is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11). This is followed by the second cleansing of the Temple where Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers and cast out both men and animals (21:12-16). While leaving Jerusalem Jesus passes by a fig tree which has no figs even though it has leaves advertising the possibility of fruit. He curses it and it withers. This turns into a object lesson for His disciples (21:17-22). Next, while He is back at the Temple "*the chief priests and elders of the people*" question Jesus as to the source of His authority. After all, what gives Him the right or authority to cleanse the Temple (21:23-27). This was not an honest inquiry. As was their usual mode of operation, they were planning to trap Him in what He said. Jesus turns the tables on them by asking them about the authority for the baptism of John whether it be from men or heaven. They quickly realize they are trapped between the horns of dilemma. If they say "from heaven" they will incriminate themselves, for they did not listen to John. If they say "from men" they will upset the people for they regarded John as a great prophet. So they would not answer Jesus.

Parable of the Two Sons, 21:28-32

Relationship to the Father

- **First Son**
The "man" or "father" represents God. Jesus makes it clear that the first son would represent the tax collectors and sinners. The phrase "*tax collectors and harlots*" is a by-word representing the wicked in general.
- **Second Son**
The second son represents the leaders of the Jews, that is, the chief priests and elders of the people. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were always making a show of serving God, but when Jesus came, they loathed His teachings and finally crucified him.

Command from the Father

- **Both Called to Work**
The father commands both sons to go work in His vineyard. Immediate obedience is required. These are reasonable commands of the father. He feels that he has the right to ask sons to go work in his vineyard. To work in the vineyard here represents any command that God requires man to do.
- **God Needs Workers Today**
Man was created for labor. Even in paradise, the first couple were called to work in the Garden of Eden. God is ever seeking workers. Disciples need to evangelize the nations (Mt. 28:19,20). The call is universal, and it is individual. Today is the day for salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). There is much work to do in the vineyard.

Initial Response to the Father

- **The First Son Refused**
The first son rudely refused to obey his father. These are the ones John came and called to repentance and baptism and they came. As they would openly refuse to obey in the past, they are

obeying now.

- **The Second Son Consented**

The second son promises his father, he will obey. Whether he was sincere in his first response or was just telling the father what he wanted to hear, he is disobedient to the father. So many children of God say and do not. They honor God with their lips, but the heart of obedience is far from obeying (Mt. 15:7-9). The religious elite of Jesus' day claimed they were going to obey God, but in reality did not follow through. The case in point would be their reaction to the preaching of John the Baptist.

Ultimate Response to the Father

- **The First Son Repented and Went**

The first son refuses and then repents. He is like David who confesses "*I have sinned*" and truly repents. Others are like King Saul who said he was a sinner but kept on sinning. He lacked true repentance. Repentance is not simply conviction of sin. Repentance is more than sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10). Herod was sorry for his rash vow to his dancing step-daughter and he was sorry for taking the head of John, but his sorrow did not lead to repentance or else John would have kept his head. The first son repented when he changed his mind, turned toward the vineyard to go to work. Bringing forth fruit meet for repentance is not merely making a verbal response or confession of wrong any more than agreeing to obey equals obedience.

- **The Second Son Failed to Go**

The second son was disobedient in that he did not carry through with his commitment. Both sons were commanded by the father to go, both needed to repent, and both stand in condemnation. But only one went out into the vineyard to work. Good intentions and sincere promises are not the same as obedience. The simple fact is that the second son disobeyed. Excellent words can never take the place of obedient deeds. No matter what the excuses the second son is in sin and has lied to the father. Many call themselves Christians, but do not even take time out to worship God with fellow saints. When one is baptized into Christ he is making a commitment to God to live the life of faithful obedience to God.

The Obvious Answer

- **The First Son Obeyed**

The leaders of the Jews would not answer Jesus' question about the source of authority of John's baptism, because they did not want to incriminate themselves. Now they readily give Jesus the obvious answer to the question: Who obeyed the father? The only answer is the "*first son.*"

Even the most wicked (tax collectors and prostitutes) can be saved. Salvation came to the home of Zaccheus, a chief tax collector. The thief on the cross was invited by Jesus into Paradise after his death. Even the pharisee of pharisees and persecutor of Christ and his church, Saul of Tarsus, was able to have his sins washed away.

- **The Second Son Disobeyed**

The condition of the second son tells us that even the religious leaders who have all the right answers and intentions to obey God can be lost.

Parallel to John's Ministry

Some believed John's preaching. Thousands of the common people and even the tax collectors and prostitutes who had openly disobeyed God were baptized by John bringing forth fruits of repentance.

In contrast, the religious leaders rejected John's witness, teaching, and baptism. In rejecting John they were in effect claiming to obey God and yet never going to work in the vineyard, so they could "*bear fruits worthy of repentance*" (Matt. 3:8). "*And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*" (Luke 7:29,30).

Application

No matter how disobedient and wicked a soul has been, God will make room for him in the kingdom, so long as he repents and obeys. Jesus promised "*come unto me ALL...*" (Matt. 11:28). This includes the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Even in Jesus' lineage there are two prostitutes listed: Tamar and Rahab.

There is no room for the self-righteous who make claims of intended obedience and yet do not carry through with their commitments. Since they see no need for a Savior from their sins, they have no need to repent. They fail to realize how spiritually bankrupt and impoverished they are. Their greatest fault was not seeing they had any faults.

In the end the religious leaders of the day would feel the painful points of this and the other parables of Jesus which were leveled at them. Would-be disciples who honor God with a mere "Lord, Lord" still come a dime a dozen. To these Jesus still asks, "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46). They say "Lord, Lord" but do not obey him as their master and boss. They call Him their Savior, but live in sin. They claim a new life, but continue to live in the old. They want to live in Heaven for all eternity, but cannot make themselves worship God for even a few hours a week. They sing "I surrender all" but cannot give to the Lord on the first day of the week. They want all the treasures of Heaven, but hoard up all their time and money for themselves. They say "amen" to the sermon, but instead of being a doer they become a forgetful hearer of the Word. Do not say "yes" to the Lord, unless you mean it.

Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, 21:33-46

In Luke's account of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen he mentions the chief priests and scribes being present for this parable. When Jesus asked his audience to "*hear another parable*" He is adding insult to injury to the Jewish leaders. He had just told them in the previous Parable of the Two Sons that the tax collectors and the prostitutes would enter the kingdom of heaven before they would. Now this parable is going to accuse them of murdering God's servants, the prophets, and also the very Son of God. They also will be accused of rejecting the Messiah, whom they saw as the chief cornerstone.

In this parable God is the householder or owner who planted the vineyard. The vineyard is the Jewish nation. The wicked husbandmen who were placed over the vineyard are the priests and elders of the people who failed to listen and obey God's prophets. The servants that were sent again and again are the prophets of the Old Testament and including John the Baptist. The son who was cast out of the vineyard and killed is Jesus Christ Himself. The parable can be divided into God's part, man's part, and Christ's part.

God's Part

- **God's Provisions for Man, 21:33**

To keep a vineyard safe from animals and thieves a hedge was planted or a stone wall built to keep them out. Several things are provided by the owner. This represents all the great blessings which God had given Israel when He made them His own special nation. It would not be prudent to attempt to assign specific events and items to each of these provisions. Generally speaking God gave Israel a land, cities they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, fields they did not sow, etc. He gave them the Law of Moses, the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle and later the Temple, etc. In the parable the owner placed a hedge, built the wine press, provided a tower for the workers and for security, and of course planted the vines in the vineyard. He gave them every possible advantage to help insure that they would be able to take the vineyard and bring forth fruit. God Himself founded their Kingdom. God made every provision for their benefit. God gave over the possession of the Promised Land to the Israelites. All He expected of them was their undivided obedience and worship to Him and only Him.

- **God's Purpose for Man, 21:34**

According to the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:23-25) the first time the owner was able to collect on the vineyard would have been after five years. Giving the vines time to mature and the vinedressers a

chance to practice good husbandry. God expects the fruit in its season. He wants to see the fruits of obedience coming from His servants. God provides all of man needs for him to be a faithful, obedient worker. As God had provided everything for the first couple in the Garden of Eden and expected them to obey, so He did with Israel in the Promise Land.

- **God's Patience with Man, 21:35-37**

Notice the longsuffering the owner. He gives the husbandman several chances to give what they owed. They were shown mercy and responded with wickedness. They were given more mercy and they continued to rebel. It is very evident that God sent more and more prophets the longer the Israelites rebelled. Most of the prophets sent by God came not in the beginning of the nation but toward the end just before God punishes them with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

The high point of the owner's mercy is when he sends his son to collect, thinking they will surely respect his son. The Gospel of Mark adds that this was an only son, greatly beloved. When God sent His only Son of Promise to the Jews of the first century, it was not because he had run out of prophets or patience. The longsuffering of God has always been used to motivate His people to come to repentance. However, they killed the Son of God just as they did the prophets. And would continue to kill the apostles and prophets in the New Testament.

- **God's Punishment of Man, 21:41**

In the parable, after the wicked men had killed the Son, no more mercy could be shown. It was time for the owner of the vineyard to take vengeance. The longsuffering of God will eventually give way to the Divine Justice. Jesus is most likely referring to the slaughter and destruction fell upon the Jews when the Romans came against Jerusalem in 70 AD. This parable looks back at the good God has done for them throughout the centuries and the evil they had done, the current rejection of His Son, and it also looks forward and predicts the utter destruction of the Jews as a nation.

Man's Part

- **Rejected God's Servants, 21:35,36**

The Old and New Testaments are resplendent with examples of the rejection of God's servants. The Hebrew writer explained the great faith of many of the men and women who suffered persecution at the hands of their fellow Jews, *"others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth"* (Heb. 11:35-38). This passage may be referring to prophets like Jeremiah (Jer. 20:1,2) or Zechariah son of Jehoiada (2 Chr. 24:20,21). In the New Testament they had beheaded John the Baptist, in the near future they would stone Stephen to death and beheaded James.

- **Rejected God's Son, 21:37,46**

The thrust of the parable hits its target. The Jewish religious leaders would have arrested Jesus on the spot, had they not feared the people who regarded Him as a prophet. This was blasphemy to the religious leaders, and they would have arrested Him then and there were it not for their fear of the people. Yet by the end of the week they would have their chance to kill the Son. Peter would later accuse them of murdering God's Son (Acts 2:23; 4:25,27). The rejection of God's Son is always fatal.

- **Rejected God's Kingdom, 21:42**

The goal in killing the son was to take the vineyard for themselves. Just as Naboth was killed, so that King Ahab could seize the ownership of his vineyard. Note that in Naboth's case, as would be true with Jesus, false witnesses were used against him. Killing the Son of God did not spare the kingdom of the Jews or preserve it for the Pharisees. It only hastened its final destruction.

- **Rejected Themselves, 21:41,45**

Jesus asked the religious leaders what the owner of the vineyard should do to these rebellious servants. Inadvertently they decided destruction against themselves. What other answer was there for

them to give? They would perceive the parables were leveled at them. This only hardened their hearts in wanting to kill Him and thus fulfilling the very parable that predicted their attitude and actions.

Christ's Part

- **Proclaims to Be God's Son, 21:37**

Jesus is viewed not as a servant but a son. Even though the common people viewed Him as a prophet, the parable shows Him to be the Son of God. In Mark's account Christ is called "*a beloved son*" (12:6,7). The incarnation of the Son of God to the Jews was God's final act of mercy in an attempt to bring them to repentance.

- **Provides Proof of Messiahship, 21:42**

For the true patriotic Jew the term "Messiah" stimulated dreams of valiant Jews taking up arms and defeating the hated Romans and reestablishing the Jewish Nation free from foreign control. When He arrived in Jerusalem that previous Sunday, Jesus was proclaimed the Son of David. In quoting from Psalm 118: 22,23 the Jews would see the connect to Him and the promised Messiah. The very fact that Jesus is rejected is proof that He is the Messiah.

- **Professes to Be the Chief Cornerstone, 21:42-44**

The prophecy of the rejected cornerstone in Psalm 118:22,23 is quoted or referred to in Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:4,7; Romans 9:32,33; Ephesians 2:20. Now the son of the owner who is Jesus is identified with the stone which the Jews would reject. By rejecting Jesus the religious leaders among the Jews would be casting aside the very cornerstone of the building which they seek to erect. Jesus did not fit their concept of a military and political Messiah. By casting him aside they would stumble over Him and destroy themselves. Even killing Jesus would not prevent this. The cross of Christ thereafter became unto the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

- **Presents the Kingdom to Others, 21:43**

The Jews were God's special people who had all of privileges and the greatest of opportunities yet all this was lost when they rejected Jesus. If they would lose the vineyard and the Gentiles which represent the other nation in the parable would be given the opportunity and privilege to demonstrate obedience to God. "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Tit. 2:11).

God is still being merciful with mankind today in His delay of sending His Son. "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9). To reject Christ today is be bring judgment upon the disobedient.

Parable of the Wedding Feast, 22:1-14

The parable of the Wedding Feast is often confused with the Parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:13-24. Several similarities exist between the two. Both parables portray the kingdom of Heaven as a feast. Both speak of God's great blessings to Israel and the contempt He receives in return. Both parables mention excuses given. They both talk about God inviting those who are unworthy but likely to accept the grace of God.

Despite the similarities it is evident that these two parables are distinct. Luke's parable of the Great Supper was told while Jesus was a guest in the home of a Pharisee. By the time Jesus gives the parable of the Wedding Feast the Pharisees are estranged from Jesus wishing to kill Him. With the Pharisees absent Jesus tells this story to his disciples at the Temple. In Luke's parable the Jews have rejected the invitation, but are not in outright murderous mode against the king as they are in this parable.

Throughout the Old Testament the prophets used both marriage and festivals to illustrate God's intimate relationship with Israel (Is. 25:6; 65:13; 61:10; 62:5; Hos. 2:19). This parable combines both. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Bridegroom.

"*And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son'*" (Matt. 22:1,2). The word "*again*" points back

to the two previous parables in Matthew chapter 21: the parable of the Two Sons and the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. The focus of this parable is the invitation to the Kingdom and the accepting and rejecting of the invitation. God is the King while Jesus is the Son. The wedding feast represents a state of salvation and intimate relationship with them. The five groups who receive the invite can be further divided into those who received and those who rejected.

Those Who Rejected the Invitation

- **The Rejection by the Apathetic**

It is likely that two invitations went out. The first invitation was a general one informing them of the event, while the second was to let those previously invited to know that the feast was now ready for them. *"And sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come"* (Matt. 22:3). Those invited just did not care about the event. Evidently, the feast of the Son and his marriage had no appeal for them. Many souls today reject the Gospel invitation, because they are indifferent to the needs of their soul and have no appetite or concern for anything of a spiritual nature.

- **The Rejection by the Worldly Minded**

The king sends out the servants to invite others, "again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding. But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business'" (Matt. 22:4,5). The killing of the oxen and fattlings shows that the feast is ready now. First, the farmer is too concerned with his need to tend his possession to care about the feast. To make light of something is to devalue it and regulate it to a lower priority. The world is of more value than a party with the king. His rejection based on the worldly attitude like that of the Rich Farmer in Luke 12. Second, the business man has another pursuit, it is not a wedding but more wealth. Perhaps, Jesus is referring to *"The Pharisees, who were lovers money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him"* (Lk. 16:14). Jesus' advice to this group would be *"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:33).

- **The Rejection By Those Who Are Openly Hostile**

"And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them" (Matt. 22:6). The remnant of those who rejected the invitation were like those who murdered the prophets of old. In the New Testament it was those who stoned Stephen (Acts. 7:58) and King Herod who beheaded James (Acts 12:2). The book of Acts shows the fulfillment of this predicted persecution by those who reject the Gospel (Acts 4:3;5:18;8:3;5:40;14:5,19;17:5;21:30;23:2). The way they treated the king's servant represented their hateful attitude toward the king. Saul by persecuting Christians was in fact persecuting Christ.

Judgment upon Those Who Reject the Invitation

"But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Matt. 22:7). The city of those murderers can be no other than Jerusalem. The Romans came against Jerusalem in 70 AD and destroyed the city and its inhabitants. Jesus foretold the siege of Jerusalem by Titus and the horrors connected to it in Matthew 24:15-22. Just as the Assyrians were called *"the rod of God's anger"* (Is. 10:5; 13:5; Jer. 25:9; 51:20) in dealing with the rebellious children of Israel, so were the Romans used to deal with Judah.

The king's servants were rejected and killed. These represent *"all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken"* (Ac. 3:24). Men like Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Stephen, the apostles, etc. In rejecting the messenger, they in fact were rejecting the One who sent them.

Just as Jesus said in the parable of the Great Supper *"none of men who were invited will taste my supper"* (Luke 14:21,24), so the king here says to the servants, *"the wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy"* (Matt. 22:8). And it is like what Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia, *"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the*

Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:46,47). It must be remembered that some Jews throughout the Roman Empire received the invitation, however many refused and were rejected.

Those Who Accepted the Invitation

- **The Acceptance by the Righteous**

After the rejection of the invitation by those who were hostile to the king, he then sends out his servants again "*Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests*" (Matt. 22:9,10). The Gospel was first preached to Jews at Jerusalem. Next, the Gospel spread forth to Judea. Then the invitation was received by the Samaritans and finally the Gospel invitation was extended and accepted by the first Gentile converts in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10).

- **The Acceptance By the Unrighteous**

As if Jesus were giving a parable within a parable attention is given to one invitee who is not appropriately dressed for the wedding feast. "*But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'*" (Matt. 22:11-13). Why should those invited as a last choice be expect to have appropriate attire. Two customs might explain this. The Romans had robes called *creatoria* to be used on these occasions. Second, in the middle east there is the custom of the host providing wedding garments to guests called *caftan* which are white robes. God is handing out our robes of righteousness that we must put on (Rom. 6:1-18; 1 Cor. 6:19,20; Col. 2:6-12). Keep in mind this scene is not in Heaven else this parable teaches that unworthy souls will somehow find their way into Heaven.

Whatever the guest is wearing or not wearing is offensive to the king. Wearing the right clothing to a formal dinner honors the host and the occasion. Neglecting to wear it is an insult. The guest is speechless, he had nothing to say. He was muzzled and had to remain silent for there was no excuse he could honestly make.

The inappropriately garbed guest is judged unworthy of a place in the feast and is kicked out. The conditions are similar to that of those cast into hell of judgment day (Matthew 8:12; 25:30). This represents the miserable condition of the lost soul. Can a saint lose their hope of heaven? Yes they can. God will not accept casual treatment or attitude toward His Kingdom.

Many Are Called but Few Are Chosen

Jesus concludes this parable with: "*for many are called, but few are chosen.*" (Matt. 22:14). Those who are called and receive Christ, become His chosen ones. In order to be chosen by the Lord one has to be called and accept the call. Of the twelve who were sent to see the promised land, only Caleb and Joshua were chosen. Of Gideon's Army, all were called, but only three hundred were chosen (Jg. 7).

A Cleveland Mayor's wife refused to dine with the President because it would interfere with her bowling night. When the God of Heaven invites you to the marriage feast of his Son will your priorities rob you of salvation? "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*" (Heb. 2:3).

Questions:

1. Looking at the context of the chapter, what do you think was the attitude of the Pharisees as Jesus spoke this parable?

2. How did Jesus self-convict those listening to the parable?
3. Who does the man with two sons represent?
4. Who do the sons represent? Why do you think so?
5. What does the work in the vineyard represent?
6. What is the difference between all other work and the work we do in God's vineyard?
7. How do we make amends for past negligence?
8. How did the Pharisees perceive their righteousness?
9. Who did Jesus say would enter the Kingdom before some of His listeners in the crowd would?
10. Who is the John mentioned in this parable (Matthew 21:32), and where was he at this time?
11. Who is the householder who planted the vineyard represent?
12. What does the vineyard represent?
13. Who do the servants represent?

14. If the heir died what did the workers perceive would happen?
15. When Jesus told this parable He was aware His death was near?
16. What unmistakable claim does this parable point to that would have directly challenged Jewish authority?
17. Who would work the land in the end?
18. What lesson should we as the new workers learn from this? (Rev 2:5, 3:16)
19. How is the parable of the Wedding Feast different from the parable of the Great Supper (Lk. 14:13-24)?
20. What is the significance of the word "*again*" in verse one?
21. How can those who received the invitation be divided?
22. One group that was invited were not "*willing to come.*" Why?
23. Why did the second group make light of the wedding feast?
24. Who might the servants who were killed represent?
25. Which verse may be prophetic of the Romans destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD?

26. After sending his armies out, the king sent forth his servants again. Who is invited this time? Who might these represent?

27. Why was the king upset at one of the wedding guest?

28. What might the wedding robe represent in the spiritually?

29. What happens with the guest the King disapproved of? What might this represent?

Application & Discussion:

1. What will become of those who reject the Gospel invitation today? What are their reasons compared with this parable?

2. How does the inappropriately clothed wedding guest who is rejected help defeat the Calvinistic doctrine of once saved always saved?

Homework: Accept the Lord's invitation today.

Final Exams for Jesus

Matthew 22:15-46

Jesus had put the Jewish leadership on trial using His parables as a sort of mirror which reflected their guilt. Now they are going to attempt to put Jesus on public trial by means of three questions. Just as the Passover Lamb had to be examined for blemishes to see if it were a worthy sacrifice, so Jesus is being tested by His foes to find fault with him.

The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar? 22:15-22

■ **Fault Finding Pharisees**

After Jesus gives them three scathing parables leveled right at their corrupt hearts and hypocrisy, *“the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk”* (22:15). They wished to trap Him like a little bird gets entangled in a snare. Jesus had warned them of their impending judgment. They wish to bring their judgment upon Him. If they could catch Him in a blasphemy, they would have a capital offense leading to capital punishment.

■ **Friendly Foes with the Pharisees**

Since the Pharisees were not having any success to discredit Jesus by themselves, they had started enlisting the aid of their political and religious enemies. This time *“they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians”*. Not much is known about the Herodians. However, they were in support of the Herods. And the Herodian dynasty was supported by Rome. Submission to Rome’s occupation and taxation supported their cause. The Pharisees would have further rejected the Herods, because they were not Jews but Idumeans from Israel’s ancient enemy the Edomites.

The Herodians were needed as potent informants against Jesus. If Jesus came out in public against paying Roman poll tax, He could be charged with sedition. The Romans would therefore have cause to punish Jesus with death.

■ **Flattering Pharisees**

When the Pharisees approach Jesus, they try to lower His guard with five points of flattery. 1) First, they address Him as *“Teacher.”* However, they were not there in the capacity as disciples ready to learn. 2) Next, they say *“we know that You are true.”* This is in support of Jesus’ character. Yet they attacked His personal integrity many times in the past even claiming Jesus was in league with the Devil. 3) The third point of flattery points to Jesus’ doctrinal integrity: *“and teach the way of God in truth.”* If they really believed that Jesus was teaching God’s Will, then why did they oppose His teachings and not accept Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. 4) The fourth false praise points out that Jesus was not one to be swayed by popular opinion or respect of persons. They said, *“nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men”* 5) Finally, they flatter Him by asking Him in public to answer a question of great importance. When they asked Him, *“Tell us, therefore, what do You think?”*, they were asking His opinion as if it really mattered.

■ **Formidable Fix by the Pharisees**

Their question: *“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* The Pharisees were against being taxed by a pagan nation, whose ruler was worshiped as a god. They would have seen the support of taxation of God’s people as treason and morally corrupt. The Herodians on the other hand would have supported sending taxes to Rome. After all, Roman occupation did support many benefits for Palestine, such as, the Pax Romana or Roman Peace, the building and maintaining of a reliable road system, aqueducts to supply water, etc.

This is an attempt to catch Jesus between the horns of dilemma. If He favored the paying of the poll tax to the Romans, He would be discredited as the Messiah before the people. After all, supposedly the Messiah was to come raise an army and overthrow the Roman occupants of the Jewish lands and set up the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem. Jesus' approval of the heavy tax burden which supported Rome would be in direct contrast with their expectations.

■ **False Face Pharisees**

Jesus was not to be blindsided by their flattery. He knew they were testing Him. The Son of God *"had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man"* (John 2:25). The Pharisees were putting on the false face of a Greek actor. They were playing the part of a mere student, but in fact they were seeking Jesus death, not His advice. As the servants said in the previous parable, *"This is the heir; come, let us kill him"* (Matthew 21:38).

■ **Flipping the Feign upon the Pharisees**

Jesus often used objects to illustrate His lessons. This time he asks for a *"denarius."* This was the common coin and often used to pay the Roman poll tax. It was the daily wage paid to soldiers and day workers.

In answering their question about paying taxes, Jesus does not use the term *"pay"*. Instead He uses the term *"render"* translated from the Greek word *apodidomi* which "means to pay or give back, implying a debt. It carries the idea of obligation and responsibility for something that is not optional" (MacArthur 321). By doing this He makes taxes a repayment of what belongs to Caesar. *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."*

Why did the coin belong to Caesar? According to Jesus it had the image and inscription of Caesar on it. The coin had the head of Tiberius and the inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the divine Augustus, Emperor."

The second part of Jesus answer *"and to God the things that are God's"* shows a limitation on the first part. Whereas Jesus recognizes the authority of Government, which is derived from God, He shows that God's authority over man is dominant. In other words, Christians are to obey the laws of the land in so far as they do not come into direct conflict with the authority of God. When the Sanhedrin commanded the apostles not to preach in Jesus' name anymore, they said, *"we ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:28,29). Today, all men are to obey the speed limits, pay their taxes, follow the rules, etc. To do otherwise is to dishonor the government and God and to disobey God by disobeying the government (see Rom. 13; 1 Peter 2:13–17; 1 Tim. 2:1ff.). Christians are in a unique position in that they have a dual citizenship. One can be a citizen of South Korea and have citizenship as a Christian in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Like Tiberius' image was on the coin which they owed back to Rome, God's image in on His creation: man. Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). Therefore, man owes all of himself to God. Total commitment to the Creator is a form of just repayment (see 22:37).

■ **Frustrated Flight of the Pharisees**

"When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way" (22:31). For the moment the Pharisees had failed and retreated from the attack with no rebuttal. Jesus had sprung their trap and caught them. They ended up with nothing on Jesus. In fact, they were seen as insurrectionist against Rome and disobedient to God.

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection? 22:23-33

◆ **Sad "You Sees" of the Sadducees**

Jesus having evaded the horns of dilemma by both the Pharisees and Herodians is now tested by the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the most populous, most popular, and most religious of the Jewish sects. In contrast, the Sadducees were perhaps the smallest and more materialistic and political. Unlike the Pharisees they were pro-Roman. They had greater power and influence. They had many members in the priesthood and Sanhedrin. They only accept the Pentateuch or five Books of Moses. Their strict literal interpretation of these books result in their rejection of the rest of the Old Testament

as mere commentary on the Law and historical accounts of the Jewish people. As a result they rejected many of the doctrines taught in the other thirty-four books. Luke informed us the “*Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both*” (Acts 23:8). Thus, their testing of Jesus is going to focus on the resurrection. There was plenty of evidence from the Old Testament that God taught through the prophets that there is an afterlife (Ps. 16:9-10; 49:15; 73:24; Hos. 6:1-2; Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2). They could not find where Moses taught about the resurrection. The Pharisees could not answer them.

Notice the Sadducees sad attempt at flattery by calling Jesus “*Teacher.*” This too is insincere.

◆ **Sad Testing by the Sadducees**

The question to entrap Jesus was: “*Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her*” (22:24-28).

Their argument was based on the teaching in the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This is known as the levirate marriage law. This is not con to confused with the Levites who served the Tabernacle and Temple or the tribe of Levi. The term *levirate* comes the the Latin term for “a husband’s brother.”

If a man died and left no heir, his unmarried brother was to marry his bride and bring up an heir for his brother. This would ensure the continence of tribes, families and inheritances in the promise land. The purpose of this law was to preserve a man’s name should he die without a male heir. When Ruth was left childless at the death of her husband Mahlon. A relative of her husband, Boaz took Ruth and thus preserved the lineage of Christ by obeying the Law (Matt. 1:5).

◆ **Sadly Mistaken Sadducees**

Jesus does not call into question the probability of this hypothetical illustration. He deals with it as a possibility. First thing He does in attack their ignorance: “*You are mistaken.*” The term indicates one who wanders away from the truth. Two reasons are given from their being mistaken. First, “*not knowing the Scriptures.*” They talk about Moses’ teaching, but Jesus points out that in the Law of Moses it is God who is speaking. They assume Pentateuch never spoke about the resurrection. Jesus is about to show them how wrong this is. Jesus would say in Luke’s account: “*even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised*” (20:37).

Second, they were mistaken about “*the power of God*”. They failed to see that God’s power to raise the dead was possible. If God created man in His great power, He could restore man in the resurrection.

Additionally, they were mistaken about the nature of relationships in the afterlife. Jesus said, “*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage*” (22:29b). Marriage is an institution created by God to be temporary and limited to man’s time on earth. In the afterlife there is no need for the marriage relationship for honorable sex or procreation or companionship. So they base their argument on the absurdity of a woman having seven husbands in the afterlife. Therefore, they concluded there is no afterlife. When in fact there is no marriage in the afterlife. Thus, the absurdity never existed.

The Sadducees as noted before, did not believe in angels. Jesus uses this opportunity to not only correct them on the question of the resurrection but also their belief in angels. The reason marriage is not found among men and women post-resurrection is that they “*are like angles of God in heaven*” (22:30b). Notice Jesus is not saying in the resurrection we will be angels but like them. They do not have marital relationships. They only serve God not a spouse. Neither is Jesus saying that all traces of gender will be erased after the resurrection. The Bible consistently refers to angels as male.

◆ **Sad Ignorance of the Sadducees**

Jesus exposes the ignorance of the Sadducees when He says “*have you not read what was spoken to you by God.*” He quotes God in Exodus 3:6: “*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” (22:32a). God did not say “I was” but “*I am*”, therefore Jesus conclusion was “*God*”

is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (22:32b). Coffman explains, "Christ made an argument on such an important subject as the resurrection to turn upon a single word in the Old Testament, a single verb, and the very tense of the verb at that!" At the time of Moses, God still had a relationship with the dead patriarchs, who had been long dead. However, for this to make any sense at all, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to be alive in another realm.

◆ **Sad Silence of the Sadducees**

Sadly, we are not told of the response by the Sadducees. This was not because Jesus failed to adequately answer their question. *"And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching"* (22:33).

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All? 22:34-40

It was Tuesday. The day that has been called "the great day of questions". Jesus dealt with three questions and one by one silenced the Pharisees, Herodians and then the Sadducees. Next, a single scribe asked about the greatest commandment.

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (22:35-40).

In many pagan religions, the relationship between a person and the deity that is worshiped is based on fear. Anyone who allowed a plurality of gods instantly and automatically set oneself apart from the people of God. Nobody whether scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, or ordinary child of Abraham would have quarreled with the first segment of Jesus' answer or with what He said next. The Greek word for "lord" had several meanings. It could mean the owner of a thing; it could also mean master, one who controls another; it also was used to designate a sovereign ruler whose subjects surrendered control of their lives to Him.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4. It is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew word for "hear" and is the first word in the verse. The phylactery, a small leather box that the scribes wore fastened to the head or arm and contained a slip on which the Shema was written. Christ shows this rule has not changed just because we live in the Christian Age.

A person's duties begin with an unqualified love for God. We have managed to convince ourselves that we "fall" in love as accidentally as one might trip over loose carpet. Loving God is a conscious, deliberate choice on our part. We have all seen two dreamy-eyed young people looking longingly at one another. We have all heard of the "look of love." When you love someone with all of your heart, you think about them almost all of the time. You long to be with them. They are the priority in your life. We call this being "in love" and it is wonderful. With regard to our love for God, *"We love, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

Extent of our Love for God

♥ **With All Your Heart - Emotionally Involved**

The heart was associated with the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Since "mind" is already mentioned, this is dealing with the "emotions". What Jesus is saying is that we are to love the Lord without pretense. Fully love Him without reservation or just a portion of our devotion.

A young man proposed to his sweetheart as they sat overlooking a beautiful lake. "Darling," he said, "I love you more than anything else in the whole world, I want you to marry me, I'm not wealthy: I don't have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Green, but I love you with all my heart." His sweetheart thought for a moment and then replied, "I love you with all my heart too, but tell me more about Johnny Green." In regard to our Christian commitment, how many of us are like this fickle young lady? Do we

tell God we love Him and want to serve Him, and then carry on a flirtation with the world? Let us not say, "Tell me more about the world," but, "Tell me more about Jesus."

♥ **With All Your Soul - Eternally Focused**

The soul is one's spiritual essence. It is the part of one that is immortal - the I, the person who controls what one thinks and says and does. Love has been abused and watered down by a liberal mind set as a sentimental, syrupy gush about God. Our love is taking time for the eternal relationship. A. W. Tozer once said that, "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." Charles E. Hummel's *The Tyranny of the Urgent* was written 35 years ago. It says, "Don't let the urgent take the place of the important in your life." How easy it is for us, in our hectic world, to spend so much time dealing with pressing matters that we never take time for what is eternally important.

True love of God involves total commitment. Following a great victory, King Cyrus of Persia took as prisoners a noble prince, his wife, and their children. When they were brought into the leader's tent to stand before him, Cyrus said to the prince, "What will you give me if I set you free?" He replied, "I will give you half of all that I possess." "And what will you give me if I release your children?" continued Cyrus. "Your majesty, I will give you all that I possess." The king questioned him further, "But what will you give me if I set your wife at liberty?" Looking at the one he loved so dearly, the prince replied without hesitation, "If you will restore my wife to freedom, I will give you my life." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he released the entire family without asking recompense. That evening the prince said to his wife, "Did you not think Cyrus a very handsome man?" "I did not notice him," she answered, "Why, my dear, where were your eyes?" exclaimed her husband. She replied, "I had eyes only for the one who said he would lay down his life for me."

♥ **With All Your Mind - Thoroughly Considered**

The mind is the seat of our reason, knowledge, and wisdom. The word "mind" is not included in the passage in Deuteronomy 6:5. Its addition here emphasizes the place of the intellect in conversion and maturity in faith and life. We are not to serve God emotionally, while committing intellectual suicide.

Don't check your brains in at the door. We don't leave our intellectual bags packed when we worship and serve God. You see, love is not just a momentary feeling; it is a logical and specific action. Loving Jesus doesn't simply mean turning cartwheels in the aisle. This love is not mindless and empty-headed. True love for Jesus manifests itself in every area of life. It is just as wrong to serve God intellectually, but with no emotion as it would be to love Him just out of our emotions.

♥ **With All Your Strength - Fully Lived Out**

Strength represents the whole person. Serving God emotionally and intellectually, but with no actual obedience requiring the exercise of strength (i.e., action) would not be keeping God's commandments and thus a negation of love. Loving God means we are going to have to place His will ahead of ours. It means that we may have to say no to some things that we might want to do. It means that we are going to have to seek the Lord's will and make it paramount in my life. It may mean that we can't go places others can go, watch what others watch or enjoy what they enjoy. God's greatest desire for us is to love Him. We demonstrate our love for God through keeping His commandments. This is the love of God (1 Jn 5:3). This is evidence that we love Jesus (Jn 14:15)

In sixteenth century England, Oliver Cromwell ordered that a soldier be shot for his crimes at the ringing of the evening bell. But that night at the fateful hour, no sound came from the belfry. The girl who was to be married to the condemned man had climbed up into the tower and had clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. Brought before Cromwell to give an account of her actions, she only wept and showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell was greatly impressed, and he said, "Your lover is alive because of your sacrifice. He will not be shot!" It doesn't take much of a person to be a lover of God - just all of him there is.

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord? 22:41-45

Jesus has been thrice tested. He has silenced His tempters and evaded their traps by springing it upon those who has set them for Him. Jesus has turned the tables of the questioners. Now it is Jesus

turn to ask the Pharisees a question.

Perhaps one of the greatest questions ever to ponder is *“What do you think about the Christ?”* Upon one’s answer one’s eternal destiny can be determined. Concerning the origin of the Christ, Jesus asks, *“Whose Son is He?”* This too is a very important inquiry. For many of the Jews of that day it was one of those simple no brainer questions that even a child would be able to answer: *“The Son of David.”* If Jesus stopped here, there would have been no conflict with the Pharisees or apparent contradiction with the Scriptures. After all there were many passages in the Old Testament where the Messiah was believed to be prophesied to come from the lineage of David (2 Samuel 7:12–13, Psalm 78:68–72, and Micah 5:2).

Jesus was often called the *“Son of David.”* This fact could not be disputed in light of His foes’ ability to check His genealogy. However, being a legitimate descendent from David was not going to be a real point of controversy. Jesus had been proclaimed the Son of David when He entered Jerusalem on Sunday. Before that two blind men at Jericho screamed out, *“Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David”* (20:30). Before that two blind men in Galilee cried out, *“Have mercy on us, Son of David”* (9:27). Also see Matt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15.

The next question from Jesus sets them up to consider a connection between the “Son of David” and the Messiah and the Son of God. *“He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’?”* (22:43). Jesus is about to quote from Psalm 110. He first establishes that David did in fact author this Psalm. Second, Jesus attest to the fact that David wrote this while under the inspired guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is, Psalm 110 is representative of the words of God written by David as he was led by the Holy Spirit.

The 110th Psalm is the most often quoted psalm in the New Testament. Twenty-seven times a New Testament writer draws upon this one psalm. It is one of several Messianic psalm along with Psalms 2, 22, 45, and 72. Many Jewish scholars of the day had already accepted this Psalm to be about the Messiah.

With the understanding that they understood the Psalm to be about the Messiah as the Son of David, He quotes from verse one: *“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”* (22:44). The right hand position of a rulers implied a shared rule and equal position of royalty and authority. To have an enemy as a footstool referenced a king’s conquered foe prostrating himself before the king and the king resting his foot in victory on the defeated enemy as if that man were a mere footstool.

Jesus now asked one final question: *“If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?”* (22:45). The only way a son is called Lord by the father, is if somehow the son is greater than the father. The Son of David is not only the Messiah but He is the Son of God. Jesus is both the *“the root and the offspring of David”* (Rev. 22:16). Jesus’ humanity comes from being an offspring of David. Jesus Deity is attested to in that He is the root or origin of David. As David’s Son Christ was a mere man. As God’s Son the Christ was Deity and David’s Lord (Matt. 1:1, 20).

What was the response this time? Pretty much the same as before *“And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore”* (22:45). So why did Jesus even go to the trouble to ask these questions? Perhaps, He felt there were others like the lawyer who had questioned him. *“when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God’”* (Mark 12:34). However, these Pharisees could not answer, because they were afraid to face the truth. They would never again have a chance to ask Him anymore questions. Because by the end of the week they would have realized their goal behind this day of questioning: Jesus would be crucified.

Questions:

1. Why did the Jewish leadership want to entangle Jesus?

2. Who were the Herodians and what differences would then have with the Pharisees?
3. List the five points a flattery used with Jesus.
4. Why were the Pharisees and the common people so opposed to paying Roman taxes?
5. Why does this question about taxes put Jesus in the horns of dilemma?
6. Why did Jesus use the term "*render*" taxes instead of "*pay*" taxes?
7. Why did the coin belong to Caesar?
8. Since man is made in God's image what should he do?
9. Who were the Sadducees?
10. What did they not believe in?
11. What was the *livirate* law?
12. What were the Sadducees mistaken about in their question?

13. What does Jesus mean men and women are like angels in the afterlife?
14. What argument does Jesus use to teach that the Law of Moses taught the resurrection?
15. Matching: Extent of our love for God.
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| _____ with all your heart | a. Eternally focused |
| _____ with all your soul | b. Fully Live Out |
| _____ with all your mind | c. Emotionally Involved |
| _____ with all your strength | d. Thoroughly Considered |
16. Who is the Christ according to the Pharisees?
17. What is significant about Psalm 110?
18. What does it mean to make one's enemies a footstool?
19. Answer Jesus' question: *"If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"*
20. How did the Pharisees answer the question?

Application & Discussion:

1. If a Christian believes the government is not spending tax money on the right thing or using it to persecute with prejudice a group of people or are being unfair in their taxation, should they still pay their taxes? Explain.
2. List some practical ways a Christian can show his love to God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Homework: Sincerely ask questions, seeking the truth.

Sermon for the Scribes & Pharisees

Matthew 23:1-36

Jesus directed three scathing parables at the Pharisees which they realized at last were condemning their corrupt religion and hypocrisy. Next, He silenced them on their questions along with the Sadducees and Herodians. Finally, he exposed their dishonest quest for truth by asking them a question would not or could not answer.

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples" (23:1). Now in His final public sermon He sums up what the Pharisees truly represent. In the beginning of His ministry at the beginning of His sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned the multitudes, *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Mt. 5:20). Toward the middle of His ministry He warned His disciples, *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"* (Lk. 12:1).

Keep in mind that Jesus is condemning the Pharisees as a group in a religious/political sect. Not all of Pharisees were hypocrites by engaging in these following areas of wickedness. Nicodemus (John 3; 7:50-53) and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38ff.) appear to be exceptions to the rule. Furthermore, not all scribes (lawyers) were hypocrites. In fact, Ezra of the Old Testament appears to be one of the first of the type of scribes found in the New Testament.

Pharisees Did Teach Some Truth, 23:2,3a

Jesus does begin with one small positive note about His enemies, *"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat"* (23:2). Moses' seat was a literal chair found in some synagogues of the day. Ancient literature as well as archeology attested to the existence of these. Seats or chairs of Moses were found at Chorazin (11:21) where Jesus had visited and found as far away as Delos in Greece. Their purpose was for the speaker to sit in this chair and explain the passage from the Old Testament he had just read while standing.

The term for *"seat"* is the Greek *kathedra* form which the English word "cathedral" comes. When the Pope is said to speak with Divine authority he speaks *ex cathedra* or words from out of the chair. Universities have the same concept with academic chairs, such as, the chair of history or math.

How are the people to respond to the teachings from the Law of Moses being read in the local synagogues by the scribes and Pharisees? Jesus commands, *"Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do"* (23:3a). Why? Are they not condemned as hypocrites and blind guides and a brood of vipers? All are to listen to and obey God's Truth regardless of who speaks it. The reading of the Word of God does not turn into a lie simply because it comes out of the mouth of one who is a false teaching hypocrite. Furthermore, most of the common people did not have copies of the Old Testament scrolls. They were dependent upon the synagogues and Pharisees and scribes for readings.

Pharisees Did Not Practice What They Preach, 23:3

First, Jesus tells them to obey the truth the Pharisees speak. Next, He warns them *"but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."* This is a precise definition of a hypocrite. "In Greek literature the hypokrites was a person who played a part on a stage. He usually wore a mask, and in speech and action imitated the character whom he represented in the stage production. There was no necessary connotation of evil or deception involved in the early use of the terms. Context always made it clear whether the act was to be viewed as evil or not. In the N.T. the terms are invariably evil in

sense" (ISBE, V. II, p. 790). Thus, they pretend to be righteous and even speak some truth, but in fact they do not practice what they preach. A hypocrite is "a hen that cackles, but lays no eggs. The world awards actors who expertly and exactly play a role of a person they are not. God does not reward but condemns those to pretend to be righteous but live wickedly.

Pharisees Bear Not the Burdens Placed on Others, 23:4

Jesus came to lessen the burdens of man (Matt. 11:28–30). In contrast, He said of the Pharisees, *"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers"* (23:4). Like a man with a mule. He packs the mule down until it can hardly walk. Then he walks beside or behind the beast to berate it for not moving faster. All the while He carries nothing. The Pharisees were harder on others than they were on themselves. They demonstrate an egotistical attitude of superiority. Rules they can create and mandate, but these rules are for the masses not the Masters. For example, a Jew could not travel more than three fifths of a mile on the Sabbath from their home. But a Pharisees could get around this by placing an object they possessed at an fellow Pharisees' home. Since home is where you keep your possessions, they could effectively travel all over Jerusalem and beyond on the Sabbath.

Pharisees Playing Dress Up as Righteous, 23:5

Jesus sums up their motivation: *"but all their works they do to be seen by men"* (23:5a). He gives an example of what He means. *"They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments"* (23:25b). They developed the use of these due to a literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8: *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes"* McGarvey explains phylacteries: "They were strips of parchment on which were written four passages of the law; Ex. 13:3-10; 11:16; Dt. 6:4-9; 11:13-21. These were enclosed in a leather case and were fastened to the forehead and left arm. The authority for wearing them was purely traditional, and the practice seem to have arisen from a literal interpretation... The Pharisees made the leather case large, that their righteousness might be more conspicuous" (McGarvey 607). Naturally, the bigger the phylactery the more attention the device would get for its wearer. Appearances are everything. Looking the part is more important than being righteous. Gods Word was meant to be used in calling attention to God not to be used to call attention to one's self-righteousness.

Pharisees Pretending to Be Great, 23:6-10

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being a bunch of showboating glory-seekers in public. *"They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces"* (23:6,7a). Previously, Jesus had advised them to take the lowest seat when invited to a dinner (Luke 14:8). That way they would not be embarrassed one someone considered greater showed up to take their spot. In synagogues there were benches on the stage for visiting dignitaries. This is much like the denominational deacons' bench. All such positions of glory and honor need to be rejected by God's servants today.

Another illustration of the Pharisees' love for public recognition of greatness is found in three titles which they coveted: Rabbi, Father, and Master. Rabbi literally means "my great one." According John's Gospel it meant *"teacher"* (John 20:16). However in Latin, *rabbi* is *docere* from which comes "doctor" to the English language. Many today accept the authority of "Doctor So and So" instead of the teachings of the Word of God. Yet Christ alone is to be the Teacher for His followers because *"you are all brethren."* All ground is level before the cross of Christ. Next, His disciples are not to call them *"Father"*. Because *"One is your Father, He who is in heaven."* This is obviously talking about a spiritual relationship not a physical father. The third title which should be rejected is that of "Teacher" or "Master". Of course slaves have masters. But only Jesus is the master authority in spiritual matters for His disciples. Moffatt's translation makes this verse read, *"Nor must you be called 'leaders,' for One is your leader, even the Christ."*

Pharisees Need to Become Humble Servants, 23:11,12

Jesus gives the Pharisees some much needed advice at this point. *“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (23:11,12). He had given this same command to His disciples a several occasions (also see 1 Peter 5:6). Jesus practiced and encourages servant leadership.

Pharisees Are Denounced With Eight Woes, 23:13-33

Jesus now begins a series of denunciations of the Pharisees called “woes”. A woe is a term used in the Bible as an exclamation of grief or cry in pain or in this case a divine pronouncement of Judgment. Various lists of woes against the wicked are found in Isaiah 5:8-23; and Habakkuk 2:6-20. The pattern is that after the woe the subjects are identified as *“scribes and Pharisees”* They are called *“hypocrites”* and then reason for the woe is given.

Verse fourteen has been rejected from the text by some due to the fact that it is found in only a few manuscripts. However, the woe is found in both Mark and Luke’s account of Jesus’ sermon to the Pharisees. Without verse fourteen there is a “perfect” number seven. However, if there are eight woes then these may correspond with the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus first public sermon has to do with the righteousness of the pharisees and so does this last public sermon by Jesus. It makes perfect sense He is contrasting the woes here with the beatitudes. For example, the Pharisees are here shutting up the kingdom (23:13) whereas the poor in spirit enter the Kingdom (5:3).

X First Woe: Blocking the Gates to Heaven, 23:13

In the first woe Jesus condemns them for shutting *“up the kingdom of heaven against men.”* They shut it up in one of two ways: 1) *“for you neither go in yourselves”* or 2) *“nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”* The Pharisees were opposing John the Baptist at the Jordan River. They showed up often to confront Jesus and challenge His teaching. They could have used their knowledge of the Messiah and pointed the people to Jesus. But as the Greek verb here indicates the people were trying go to into the kingdom, but the Pharisees kept blocking the way. They should have showed them the way by leading by example.

X Second Woe: Long Winded with Big Appetites, 23:14

In Bible class a little boy was asked to explain who the Pharisees were. He answered, *“they were men who fasting in public but in secret devoured widows houses.”* Which brings us to the second woe. This woe is called in to question as to whether it was an original part of Matthew’s Gospel. However, it is found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. Therefore, even if it was added to Matthew at least it is a actual part of the inspired Word.

Jesus is referring to the practice of assigning a trusted religious man to a widow to arrange her financial situation for her and her children’s benefit. However, as it the case with so many throughout the ages, money tempts good men to do terrible things. They end up consuming the funds themselves to the point the widow and family are left homeless.

The second part of the part of the woe: *“and for a pretense make long prayers.”* Jesus condemned this back on the Sermon on the Mount. What is condemned here is not the length of a prayer, but the motive behind the length of the prayer. Jesus was known to pray all night (Luke 6:12).

Jesus adds to this woe a warning: *“therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”*

X Third Woe: Fishing for Men and Throwing the Catch into the Fire, 23:15

The third denunciation by Jesus is: *“For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”* Jesus of course is not condemning the sharing of one’s faith with another or encouraging a pagan to repent and follow the one true God. Although the Jews were not particularly evangelistic, they had become more so since the Diaspora, the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman empire and the influx of Gentiles into Palestine. In the Old Testament there were those who were influenced to serve the one true God like Naaman or at least recognize Him like Nebuchadnezzar. There were two types of proselytes. First, *proselytes of the gate* who were not circumcised and followed some beliefs of the Jews. They were often found visiting the

Temple and synagogues. In the book of Acts they were known as “devout”, “god-fearing” and “a worshipers of God.” Cornelius and his household would represent this group. They would be part of those who were converted by the Gospel. Also there were *the proselytes of righteousness*. They were no longer considered Gentiles as the men were circumcised and they followed the Law.

The issue Jesus had with the Pharisees is the zeal in making a proselyte was not to lead them to God or heaven, but to win them over to the ranks of Phariseeism. Instead of becoming a citizen of Heaven, these were made a “son of hell.” This is the same as a child of the devil.

X Fourth Woe: Stop Your Swearing, 23:16-22

The fourth woe also shares much in common with the Sermon of the Mount where Jesus condemns the trivializing of oaths. Jesus quotes them, “Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.” A vow made using the Temple was insignificant, but the gold of the Temple required the oath taker to keep his word. Jesus calls them “Fools and blind!” The Greek term for “fool” is *moros* from which is derived the English term “moron”. The term means “stupid.” Jesus is not being very kind in saying: “You stupid morons, you are too blind to see that the gold is not greater than the Temple for it is the Temple which makes the gold sacred.” Giving another example of their dishonesty, Jesus quotes them, “Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.” Again He calls the morons and to blind to perceive spiritual truths. The altar is just as great as the gift for the altar makes the gift holy before God. Jesus informs them that it does not matter which they swear by, they are obligated to keep their word. Another issue was the use of God’s name in a vow. As long as they did not use the name of God but a substitute such as “heaven” or “the throne”, they were exempt from keeping their word. Jesus again negates such hair-splitting foolishness. They are like little children crossing their fingers behind their backs. God is all-knowing and everywhere, therefore He knows when you are trying to lie your way out of a commitment. Remember, God is involved with every oath.

X Fifth Woe: Majoring in Minors and Minor in Majors, 23:23,24

The Pharisees wanted to keep the Law. They often made some good decisions to keep from breaking the Law of Moses. However, there were times when they became so focused on tithing that they missed on doing things which were a greater priority. The Law of Moses commanded tithing (Lev. 27:30). This was needed to support the Temple and priests and the Levites (Num. 18:26). They took this to the extreme of tithing “*mint and anise and cummin.*” Anise “was used for medical, purposes and also for culinary seasoning, so that Pliny says the kitchen can not be without it” and cummin is “a condiment and a medicine, the bruised seed mixed with wine being used as a styptic, especially after circumcision. It was also used as an ingredient for salves or plasters such as were applied to the ulcers of cattle produced from bites, grubs, etc. or insects” (McGarvey 609). Counting out a tenth of each of these household spices would require a bit of time and devotion. Notice Jesus does not condemn this practice but rather encourages it. “*These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*” The “other” things He refers to are “*weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.*” These are the very things which they have “*neglected*”. Micah wrote of the importance of these virtues, “*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:8).

Jesus concludes this woe with a very humorous hyperbole: “*Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*” Imagine a blind Jew eating a bowl of soup. He works hard of finding an unclean insect such as a “gnat” which is very small and he ends up swallowing the largest unclean animal, a camel. Eating an unclean animal would defile a Jew (Lev. 11:44). Both the gnat and the camel were unclean (Lev. 11:4). To further impress this image on His audience with a bit of humor Jesus makes a play on words. In Aramaic camel is *qamla* and gant is *qalma* and in Greek gnat is *konopa* while camel is *kamelon*.

Jesus is not saying some laws are not important and you should skip doing them. Tithing and justice are still commanded. Refusing to eat that which is unclean was still a obligation. Jesus issue was not with what they were doing but with what they were neglecting to see as a greater need or priority.

X Sixth Woe: Don't Let a Pharisee Wash Your Dishes, 23:25,26

Jesus continues with the idea of avoiding that which is unclean. The Jews would cleanse their bowls and plates for eating lest they inadvertently eat something that was unclean. Again using a humorous exaggeration he warns them: *"For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence."* Could you imagine someone only concerned with washing the outside of a bowl or cup and not the inside? The Pharisees were more concerned with appearing righteous on the outside than being pure of heart on the inside.

This time Jesus gives them a piece of advice: *"Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."* What is so funny about this is that it is overwhelmingly simple and obvious. Again, Jesus is getting to the heart of the matter. Cleanliness is a matter of the heart not a mere matter of outward appearances.

X Seventh Woe: Just Keeping Up Appearances, 23:27,28

As the Passover was approaching the Jews would go out before the 15th of the month of Adar and brush the white powdered limestone to mark the graves. This way the Jews coming into Jerusalem would not unknowingly defile themselves by coming in contact with the dead (Num. 19:16). However, they were really be coming in contact with the place where the dead were buried. No matter how well they marked them these place might look nice to Passover pilgrims passing by but the fact is they were still filled with rotting corpses and bones of the dead. Jesus pronounces that the scribe and Pharisees are like this. *"For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."* Jesus then explains what He means by this illustration: *"Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."* They were merely keeping up appearances. Like cleaning the house and shoving all the dirty stuff in the closet. When the door is opened the truth is revealed. The fact is there were being hypocrites. While avoiding unclean graves in obedience to the Law, they were preparing all the while to put Jesus in the grave contrary to the Law.

X Eighth Woe: Go Ahead and Complete Your Hit List, 23:29-32

Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees the final reason they are hypocrites: *"Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous."* Again, there is nothing wrong in placing flowers at the tombs of your heroes and making monuments to the good men and women of the past. The problem is they arrogantly and falsely believed themselves to be better than their forefathers and made the claim, *"If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."* All the time they are engaged in this activity, they are planning to have Jesus killed. Jesus warns them they have just inadvertently admitted their relationship to the Jews of the past. *"Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets."* Many prophets had been murdered by the Jews throughout their long history. Their only crime was being a messenger of God's Word to the people. This cup of iniquity they will continue to fill until it is overflowing. Jesus knew their hearts were intent on getting rid of Him. He would tell Judas who was about to betray Him, *"what you do, do quickly."* In like manner He tells the Pharisees, *"Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt."* They are true sons of their evil fathers. They are like the persecutors of the past not superior to them. They have a free will. They have been warned. When men are intent on doing things their way, God does not always stop men from making bad decisions.

Jesus calls them *"serpents, brood of vipers!"* They are like the vipers of Palestine. A bunch of little poisonous snakes were often mistaken for a stick. They will harm those who make the mistake of getting too close to them.

Jesus warns *"How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"* If one is insistent on doing evil, he must know that he will not be able to escape his punishment. John the baptist also gave his warning to them, *"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* When a farmer sets fire to the stubble in his field to clear it for a new planting, snakes will try to flee, many will not escape. Neither will the Pharisees be able to outrun the judgment of God.

Pharisees Would Kill Christ's Messengers, 23:34-36

Getting rid of Jesus would not stop God from sending His messengers out with the Gospel later. Some they would kill like Stephen by stoning or James by beheading with the sword. Others they would scourge in the synagogues and persecute from city to city. Like Paul who was thrice beaten and fled from Damascus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Jerusalem, Caesarea, etc.

Using a hyperbole to demonstrate the great extent of their guilt and thus earned punishment Jesus said, *"on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."* Cain killed Abel because his brother was righteous and he was not. This Zechariah could be the minor prophet, Zechariah (Zech. 1:1) of which the Old Testament speaks nothing concerning his death, or Zechariah who was stoned in the temple because he uttered a prophecy against King Joash (2 Chron. 24:20-22). Keep in mind the Hebrew Bible did not end with Malachi but with 2 Chronicles. The Jews have killed those messengers from Able to Zechariah or from A to Z.

Jesus gives a timeline for the fulfillment of this prophecy, *"Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (23:36). In about forty years the Roman legions would descend upon the Jewish nation and ultimately destroy Jerusalem and the Temple by 70 AD.

Questions:

1. Is Jesus condemning all scribes and Pharisees? Explain.
2. What is Moses' seat?
3. How are the people to respond to the teachings from the Law of Moses being read in the local synagogues by the scribes and Pharisees? Why?
4. What is a hypocrite?
5. Give an example of how the Pharisees are putting burdens upon others but not obeying themselves.
6. What are phylacteries? Why did the Pharisees wear them?
7. Why do they seek the best seats at synagogues and feasts?
8. What does *"rabbi"* mean? What does it mean in Latin?

9. Why are they not to be called "*father*" in a spiritual sense?
10. What advice does Jesus have for them in verse 11 and 12?
11. How were the Pharisees shutting up the Kingdom of God?
12. Why will the Pharisees "*receive a greater condemnation*"?
13. Who Jesus condemning the Pharisees for making proselytes out of Gentiles? Explain.
14. Why is their form of swearing foolishness?
15. Does Jesus condemn doing lesser laws as well as neglecting "wiegther" matters of the Law of God? Explain.
16. What is humorous about the fifth and sixth woe?
17. What advice does Jesus give in the sixth woe?
18. How are they hypocries in regard to the seventh woe?
19. How are these Pharisees like their forefathers?
20. How are they like snakes?
21. Show how Jesus' prediction of His messengers being persecuted was fulfilled.

22. When would this prediction be fulfilled?

Application & Discussion:

1. Should a Gospel preacher permit one to call him “reverend” or “father”? Explain.

2. Make a chart contrasting the eight woes with the eight beatitudes.

Homework: Read Matthew chapter 23 as if Jesus was speaking about you and see if any of it applies.

Predicted Destruction of Jerusalem

Matthew 23:37-24:35

Jesus Laments over Jerusalem, 23:37-39

Having spent the last thirty-six verses condemning the scribes and Pharisees Jesus changes His emotional righteous indignation against the Jews to an emotional lamentation. In Luke's account (Luke 19:41-44) Jesus wept at this time. He went from warnings and woes to weeping. Jesus knows they will keep on stoning and killing those messengers of God sent to call them to repentance. He knows His grace and mercy has been rejected by the people. There is no such thing as irresistible grace. God's desire to show grace is met with the unwilling hearts of those who out of their own free-will have rejected Him. God would not force them to be saved.

Jesus uses a beautiful illustration of His desire and their rejection in that of a farmyard fowl. A hen will gather her chicks under her wings for protection and comfort. God has always sought to do this for His people. *"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings"* (Ps. 36:7). They continue once more to reject this offer. Jesus told them earlier in His ministry, *"You will not come to me that you may have life"* (John 5:40). The Gospel of John opens with the warning they would not receive Jesus (John 1:11).

As a result Jesus says, *"see! Your house is left to you desolate."* Earlier Jesus called the Temple *"my house"* in Matthew 21:13. In the next chapter Jesus was going to deliver His prophecy of doom upon Jerusalem. The Romans would come in 70 AD and utterly destroy both the city and the Temple. Jesus is crying for a people who are have been sentenced and will be on death row for the next forty years. What made this so sad was that it did not have to be. God has warned and warned them though the prophets. When Solomon's Temple was been built it was warned that God would desert it if they deserted Him (2 Chron. 7:19:21).

Jerusalem and the Temple are deserted by God. because *"for I say to you, you shall see Me no more."* It was not just their rejection of God but also God's Son.

There is a ray of hope for those in the future. They will not have a relationship with God till they say, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* Jesus is quoting Psalm 118:26. Just a couple of days earlier the Jews had quoted this same verse as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (21:9). However, they were not looking for a Savior from sin but a deliverer from Rome. This is not a promise to the nation to be revived and reestablished in the future. It setting forth the conditions for individuals who will hopefully accept Jesus as the Messiah and obey the Gospel. Many of them would from the day of Pentecost onward.

Forewarning of Jerusalem's Destruction, 24:1,2

As Jesus departed the Temple for the last time we cannot help but think of Him deserting it or leaving it desolate. The disciples pointed out its beauty to Jesus. Jews would say, "he who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building" (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 51b). It was indeed a great wonder of the ancient world. Having taken forty-six years to construct (John 2:20).

Jesus may have shocked them when He gives a prediction of the destruction of the Temple with not one stone being left upon another (Matt. 24:2). The context of these verses begin with Jesus' prophecy of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. *"Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall*

not be thrown down" (24:1-2). The fact that there is no real trace left of the Temple is evidence of the exact fulfillment of Jesus' words.

Fact Finding Questions by the Disciples, 24:3

On the Mount of Olives while looking over at the Temple, the bewildered disciples asked when it would be destroyed and what will be the sign of the coming destruction. The disciples of Jesus asked three questions: *"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matt 24:3). Jesus answers the first with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem which would take place in 70 AD when the Roman legions leveled the city and the Temple (24:4-35). Note that the passage is limited to the area of Judea. *"...let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains"* (Matt 24:16). Jesus clearly explains that this passage was to be fulfilled during the lifetime of the apostles. He said, *"assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Matt 24:34-35).

As far as the sign of His coming or return (although He had not yet left), would be answered in 24:36ff). The disciples may have thought that these are simultaneous occurrences. They may have believed that when Jesus came the Temple would be destroyed and this was the end.

This chapter is considered the most difficult of all Matthew. Some see premillennialism and the thousand year reign of Christ. Others see the fulfillment of the Second Coming of Jesus in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Coffman explains, "practically all of the difficulties in understanding this astounding chapter will disappear when it is remembered that in a single prophecy Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment and destruction of the whole world, making the first a type of the latter, and choosing a number of details that apply to both." Similarly, Dummelow wrote, "Our Lord referred in it not to one event but to two, and the first was typical of the second" (Dummelow 702).

False Signs of Jerusalem's End, 24:4-8

Jesus said *"when you see all these things"*: false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, apostasy, and false prophets. A false Messiah is mentioned in Acts 5:36 who went by the name of Theuds. Paul was asked by a Roman commander if he was the Egyptian who had led many out to the wilderness (Acts 21:38). None of these are to be mistaken as signs of the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. They are just the *"beginning of sorrows"* or birth pains (24:8). These are common disasters and tribulations and troubles which look like signs of bad times ahead. However, these are just a part of life and do not indicate the end only the beginning. Jesus clearly says, *"but the end is not yet"* (24:4).

Future Persecution & the Faithful, 24:9-14

Jesus goes on to mention several things which must take place before the fall of Jerusalem. First, there will be the persecution of the saints. *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another"* (24:9,10). These are terrible tribulations for the saints, but do not signal the end. But Jesus' prophecies will take place as they have throughout the Gospels. These will happen before they see Jerusalem fall.

Next, *"many false prophets will rise up and deceive many"* (24:11). Many of the letters of the New Testament were written warning about false teachers, such as, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, Jude, 2 and 3 John and the seven letters to the churches of Asia (Rev. 2,3). These too are not signs, but will take place before the Temple is leveled.

The third thing which they will witness before the end is the heating up of sin will result in the cooling down of the love for God. *"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold"* (24:12). He follows up with an encouragement to the disciples. *"But he who endures to the end shall be saved"* (24:13). Many Christian will fall away. This is not a sign of the end. In response to these things which will come about before destruction comes, they need to endure faithfully.

The final thing that must take place *“and then the end will come”* (24:14b) is the preaching of the Gospel throughout the Roman world. *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations”* (24:14a). By about 62 AD Paul claimed, *“the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven”* (Colossians 1:23).

First Sign: “Abomination of Desolation”, 24:15-22

The end will come but what will they see as a sign? *“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place”* (24:25a). This is the first sign. Daniel spoke about it in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. The text encourages those who read it to understand. The Jews understood the *“abomination of desolation”* to refer to the time when the Greek King Antiochus Euphianes came into Jerusalem and set up idols and sacrificed to them in the Temple (2 Maccabees 1:54-56). Joseph tells us that He offered up a pig on the altar (Antiquities 12,5,4). This event would be seen by Christians still trapped in Jerusalem at the time of Titus with His legions besieging Jerusalem. On the very day that the last sacrificial animal was offered on the altar, the Romans captured the Temple. During the course of the battle, the Temple was set on fire. The next day Titus offered up a pig on the altar (see Josephus, Wars 6.6.1). This was the *“abomination of desolation”* and the sign of the end. Soon after the Temple was utterly destroyed.

Jesus tells them what to do after witnessing the sign: *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains”* (24:16b). Eusebius informs that a large group of Christians and some Jews did escape to the region of Perea beyond the Jordan to the town of Pella.

A warning of the difficulties they will face and the haste they need to engage in to be safe is given. *“Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath”* (24:17-20). Jesus does not imply Christians were to keep the Sabbath but in Jewish controlled Jerusalem fleeing on the Sabbath day would add to their tribulation the opposition of the Jews. Christians were not to let anyone judge them with regard to Sabbath day regulations (Col. 2:16).

The reasons given for fleeing and the warnings about the difficulties they may face is given in verse twenty-one: *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”* This may be a hyperbole. However, the destruction of Jerusalem was severe. The death toll was placed at 1.1 million. Almost of 100,000 women and children were sold into slavery. The starvation level reached the point of people turning to infanticide cannibalism. Thirty thousand young men were crucified.

The Lord made sure that the siege only lasted five months from April to September of 70 AD. *“And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened”* (24:22).

Luke gave an additional sign for the Christians in Jerusalem, *“when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near”* (Luke 21:20). Josephus said, *“For Cestius removed his army, and having received no loss, very unadvisedly departed from the city.”* This also allowed many to escape the siege, when it was temporarily lifted.

Forewarning of False Prophets and Christs, 24:23-28

The following verses (24:23-34) may refer to either the destruction of Jerusalem or the Second coming of Christ. The jury is still out on this one. However, the discussion will continue as if the passage deals with the time after the city fell. Jesus at this point forewarns that after the fall of Jerusalem there will be come those who will continue to claim to be the Christ. They will use deceptions, such as, false signs and wonders. Even some of them may be taken in by this. With this warning Jesus dispels in notion that the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming are to occur at the same time. However, from 70 AD and onward false Messiah will come.

What are Christians to do when these false Christ show up? *“Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look,*

He is in the desert! do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it" (24:26). Why are they to reject those who claim to be a Christ (like David Koresh in Waco), Do not believe them. Why? "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (24:27,28). When Christ does come again, He will be easily and quickly identified like lightning. He will be as obvious as vultures circling about their next meal.

Falling of the Rulers of Jerusalem, 24:29

Jesus goes from talking about the coming of false messiahs, to the tribulation of *"those days"* meaning the destruction of Jerusalem. *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (24:29).* Is this verse talking about the Second Coming of Christ? This same language is used reference to the downfall of several nations of antiquity, such as, Babylon (Is. 13:10); Edom (Is. 34:4,5); Samaria (Amos 8:9); Egypt (Ezek. 32:7,8); and Judah (Jer. 4:23,24,27,28). This prophecies of the removal of princes and rulers from their places of authority. Here it refers to the Jewish rulers and powers which fell with Jerusalem. The High Priests, the Herodians, the Sadducees where no more. This verse is not a sign or reference to the end of time when Christ returns from Heaven, but is speaking with regard to events resulting from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.

First Sign of the Second Coming, 24:30,31

Apparently Jesus switches back from talking about fall of the Jewish leadership, to answer the signs connected with the Second Coming of Christ. *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* When Christ comes again the first thing will be His appearing in the sky (1 Thess. 5:13f). No one is going to miss out or be mistaken about His coming. *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" (Rev. 1:7).* His coming will be bad news for the majority of mankind. There will be the sound of the last trumpet. *"For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible" (1 Cor. 15:52).* The angels will be sent to harvest the souls of the earth. In explain the Parable of the Tares Jesus said, *"the enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels"(13:39).*

Fig Tree Parable, 24:32,33

Another switchback occurs in the text when Jesus gives a short parable. Jesus is effect is saying, "Now let us consider the sign of the destruction of the Temple. It is as easy as looking at a fig tree and tell whether or not it is summertime." So when they *"see all these things"* referring to seeing the *"abomination of desolation"* as well as all the events which must come before they will clearly *"know that it is near—at the doors!"*

Fulfillment in that Generation, 24:34,35

"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place" (24:34). *"These things"* are the same *"these things"* in the previous verse, which is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. The understanding of this passage all hinges on the definition of the phrase *"this generation."* The term *"generation"* is used four times in Matthew 12 to mean Christ's own generation (12:39,41,42,45). It is the same generation Jesus was speaking about in chapter twenty-three and verse thirty-six: *"assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."* Jesus was preaching to His own generation - the people who were living contemporaneously with Him.

How certain is the fulfillment of Jesus prophecy about the Temple and Jerusalem? *"Heaven and*

earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (24:35). Peter wrote, “The word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:25). Of the destruction of heaven and earth, Peter explains what will happen to them when Christ comes again. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up...all these things will be dissolved,...because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

Summary

The key to this chapter is understanding Jesus’ answer to the three different questions and dealing with two different events: the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the second coming of Christ which no one knows when but the Father. Another indication that Jesus is dealing with two events is the use of “days” in the first section and the “day” in the second. The plural “days” is used in verses 19,22,29 and the singular “day” (or hour) is employed in verses 36,42,44,60; 25:13. “That day,” “the day,” and “the hour” are commonly used in the Scriptures to refer to the Final Judgment (Matt. 7:22; 11:22; John 5:28; 1 Thess. 5:2). Nowhere in the New Testament is the plural expression, “the days” or “those days,” applied to Christ’s Second Coming at the Judgment. Verse 36 is talking about the Second Coming. Jesus had just referred to the time when “heaven and earth shall pass away” (24:35). Days refer to Jerusalem destruction which would be preceded by signs. “Day” or “hour” reference the time of the Second Coming which has not preceding signs. “The expression ‘day or hour’ is used throughout Scripture to indicate a general reference to time (e.g., 7:22; 10:19; 24:42). This includes not only a literal day and -or time of day, but also the year and/or month” (Wilkins 800).

Jesus turns His attention to the question asked in regard to the Second Coming in verse thirty-six. Whereas the disciples would have signs to know when the destruction of Jerusalem would take place no one would know the time of Christ’s final return except God the Father. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt 24:36). No signs were given for man to pinpoint the time of Christ’s return. His coming would be like that floods that suddenly came upon the wicked during the days of Noah and the ark (24:37-39). He would come as a thief comes unannounced in the middle of the night (24:43). The disciples were not to spend time trying to figure out the time and hour when the world would come to an end instead they were to “watch therefore, for you do not know waht hour your Lord is coming” (24:42). They were to be ready at all times. “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt 24:44).

Questions:

1. What is the illustration of Jesus grace and the Jews rejection?
2. What does it mean “your house is left to you desolate”?
3. What evidence is there for the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in verse 2?
4. Why is understanding Matthew 24 so difficult?

5. Are false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, apostasy, and false prophets signs of the end? Explain.
6. What are four things that must first take place before the Temple is destroyed?
7. What was the "*abomination of desolation*" as it was fulfilled by the Greeks?
8. How was the "*abomination of desolation*" committed by the Romans?
9. What were they to do when they saw the "*abomination of desolation*"?
10. What added difficulties might the saints face when fleeing to the mountains from Judea?
11. Why is the destruction of Jerusalem considered a "*great tribulation*"?
12. How long did the siege and destruction of Jerusalem last?
13. What are Christians to do when these false Christ show up? Why?
14. Explain verse 29?
15. What will be the first sign of the Second Coming?
16. True False The fig tree parable is about seeing the things related to the Second Coming?

17. What is the "*generation*" in verse thirty-four?

18. How certain is the fulfillment of Jesus prophecy about the Temple and Jerusalem?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain the use of "*days*" verses "*day*" in helping to understanding Matthew 24.

Homework: Encourage people to stop looking for the signs of the Second Coming and be faithful.

Parables of the Second Coming

Matthew 24:36-25:13

Secretness of Christ's Return, 24:36

Throughout the years many of these false prophets have arrived at their conclusions about the Second Coming of Christ by misusing and misinterpreting various passages of scripture. Matthew chapter twenty-four has often fallen victim to this abuse. The fundamental problem with the chapter is the failure of Bible students to recognize the chapter is dealing with two different events. First verses 4-35 are focused on the coming of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The second section of verse (36-51) are dealing with the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus said there would be signs for the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout the remainder of chapter twenty-four and into chapter twenty-five Jesus makes it very clear that no one knows the time of Christ's return.

- 24:36 - *But of that day and hour no one knows...*
- 24:42 - *...you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*
- 24:44 - *...will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*
- 24:48 - *My master is staying away a long time,*
- 24:50 - *...will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.*
- 25:5 - *The bridegroom was a long time in coming...*
- 25:13 - *...you do not know the day or the hour.*
- 25:19 - *After a long time the master of those servants returned...*

Jesus even claims that the angels do not even know. *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only"* (24:36). They knew of the time of his first coming and announced it. Notice the contrast between the *"you know"* in verse 33 and *"no one knows"* in verse 36.

Even more startling is Christ's admission that He does not even know when He is to return. This is an example of Jesus' voluntarily limiting his divine attributes. Jesus obediently restricted His knowledge to those things that the Father wanted Him to know during His earthly days of humanity. In fact, Jesus learned much of His earthly knowledge just as every human being learns, and it is for that reason that He was able to keep *"increasing in wisdom"* (Luke 2:52).

If angels and the Son of God do not know the day of the Second Coming, who does? According to Jesus only God the Father knows. *"When anyone tells you that Jesus is coming soon, your guess is as good as his, and his is no good at all."* Foy E. Wallace, Jr; *God's Prophetic Word* (Lufkin, TX: The Roy E. Cogdill Pub. Co., 1946), p. 201). Trying to calculate the Second Coming of Christ is therefore one of the biggest wastes of time in Bible study. When God does have the Son return every human being will be caught in total surprise along with the angels.

Suddenness of Christ's Return, 24:37-39

To describe the suddenness of the Second Coming Christ uses the analogy of the days of Noah. *"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be"* (24:37-39). The return of Christ will be characterized by normal activities among the mass of humanity. On that day it will be business as usual. Notice Jesus' point of comparison is not the

wickedness but the suddenness. While Noah built the ark, he also preached (2 Peter 2:5). But the people were just as unconcerned about his preaching as about the ark he was building. After all, they had never seen rain. Yet Noah was proclaiming a great flood was coming to destroy the whole world. The term for “flood” or “washing away” is the Greek word from which “cataclysm” is derived. Because they had never seen such a cataclysm, they ignored the idea that it could happen. Just as Noah and his generation saw not signs of coming doom, neither will this generation observe and signs of Christ’s return. They went about so absorbed in their day to day lives, they did not know what hit them until they were drowning. Likewise, men and women will be going about their daily business when suddenly the Lord’s Return will be upon them without a single warning sign.

Watchfulness at All Times, 24:40-41

Next Jesus encourages His disciples to be watchful at all times by giving two illustrations of men and women engaged in activities of day to day life. *“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming”* (24:40-41).

Only the watchful will be saved. From all outward appearances both men are doing the same work and as far as we know both men and both women could be Christians. Both sets are equal in every aspect except one man and one woman are always watching for the day of Christ’s Return. Therefore, one is taken and the other left behind. This makes it clear that not everyone will be saved. Universalism is not a doctrine taught by Jesus.

While the women are grinding grain with a hand mill they should be on the alert for Christ’s return with continued expectancy.

In Paul’s discussion of Christ’s return in 1 Thessalonians he refers to Christians being “*caught up*” (1 Th. 5:2) to be with the Lord. Peter informs us that those left behind or not taken will be consumed in the final conflagration of the earth (2 Peter 3:10). The verb “taken” in the Matthew twenty-four means “take to safety” whereas the term “left” has the meaning of abandonment or being forsaken in the first Gospel.

The “*therefore*” is focusing our attention of Jesus previous description of the suddenness of the flood of Noah’s day. Because Christ’s return is unpredictable like Noah’s flood, all men and women at all times whatever their activity needs to be watchful. The verb tense of the term “watch” indicates a continues vigilance, they are to keep on watching. Why? Because the soul of every man and woman is at stake. Jesus had warned, “*what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*” (Matt. 16:26).

This paragraph ends with a reminder need to always be read due to the secretiveness of the Lord’s return. “*Watch therefore, for you do not know what [g]hour your Lord is coming*” (24:42).

Readiness: The Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief, 24:43-44

Next, Jesus uses two parables to illustrate aspects about His Coming. First in the Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief He promotes need for readiness or preparedness. “*But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*” (24:43-44).

This parable highlights a well known fact about thieves that everyone knows. Paul sums it up well: “*for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*” (1 Th. 5:2). He does not give you any signs that he is coming to break in and steal. Imagine receiving the following note in the mail or as a text. “Dear homeowner, I will be at your house at about 10 pm. Please leave the back door unlocked and the lights off. Remember to turn off the alarm and put up the dog; preferably in a location where he is least likely he hear me. Leave your valuables out in plain sight for easy retrieval. Do not call the police.”

Of course, the modern idea of a police department did not exist in New Testament times.

However, if a homeowner could be forewarned he could be forearmed to deal with the intruder. This, of course, rarely happens. So, a homeowner must be ready at all times to deal with the possibility of a thief. For security purposes many will have a dog to help watch and warn. The best kind of watchdog is one that watches and is ready to do something about an intruder.

“Therefore” or since you know this about thieves being ready or prepared is essential. The same is true about being saved before the last trump sounds and the dead in Christ arise. After all, it will be too late to run off to the church and get baptized. Neither will there be time to repent and confess and be restored as a faithful saint. Since our salvation is past, present and future we must be ready by obeying the gospel in the past and in the present make sure we are safe every day. Readiness will enable us to meet the Lord with gladness and without shame.

Faithfulness: The Parable of The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant, 24:45-51

In Jesus' second parable He expounds the need for continued faithfulness. *“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (24:45-51).

This parable is a contrast between the faithful servant in verse 45-47 and the unfaithful servant in verses 48-51. The servants referenced here were the household stewards who supervised all the other servants for the master's household. He was the head of staff and was expected to care for the master's personal affairs. He would see that all the servants in the house were properly fed in a timely manner, as well as housed and cared for on a daily basis. He was the most trusted servant of the Master because of his continued faithfulness. *“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful”* (1 Cor. 4:2). Another parable on faithfulness is found in the next chapter (Matt. 25:14-30). The faithful servant is expecting his Lord's return at any moment. This continues to motivate him to service faithfully till the master's return. A faithful and good heart lives righteously regardless of circumstances. If Christians believe Christ is coming back suddenly at any moment, they too will behave faithfully. *“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives”* (2 Peter 3:11). Therefore, they must act as if they are expecting His return any day.

In contrast the unfaithful servant has an evil heart. The master's delay in returning is twisted into a motivation for unfaithfulness. Peter warns of “scoffers” making fun of the Christian hope of a second coming because of the long delay. *“They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation”* (2 Pet. 3:4). Someone has warned that “the most dangerous day in a man's life is the day he learns there is such a word a tomorrow.” This is a result of a false sense of security. However, the Lord is not delaying for His servants to be unfaithful, but He is waiting for others to become faithful. *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9).

The unfaithful servant was guilty of dereliction of duty. He practiced cruelty toward his fellow servants. Instead they all needed to work together to be found faithful in service when the master returned. His behavior is described as carousing. The master's delay is seen as an opportunity to indulge in sins and pleasures of life. With the assumed extra time on his hands, he cavorts with corrupt companions. Although he is not said to be drunken himself, he is in the company of those who are drinking.

The end result is that the unfaithful servant is unprepared for the master return. He has procrastinated his faithfulness.

When the master was present he was faithful in the master absence he is not motivated to be a good steward. When the master is present again, he will find only time for deep remorse and imminent destruction. To be ready when Jesus returns means salvation, not to be ready is to perish.

So we do not know when Christ will come again. That is the closest guarded secret in the universe. If man did know he may be tempted to put off salvation until the last moment. There is an old fable in which three apprentice devils were talking to Satan. The first one said, "I will tell people there is no God." Satan replied. "That will not fool many, because they know there is a God," The second devil said, "I will tell them there is no hell." Satan said, "You will never fool many that way, because they know there is a hell." The third said, "I will tell people there is no hurry." Satan said, 'Go, and you will ruin millions."

Parable of the Ten Virgins, 25:1-13

With these three parables in Matthew chapter twenty-five comes the conclusion of the Master Storyteller's final parables. This series is a byproduct of Jesus' speech to His disciples on the fall of the city of Jerusalem and the time of His second coming (Mt. 24:3ff). All three parables speaking concerning Christ's return and Judgment Day. The word "then" refers to the great event of the Lord's return.

■ **Background of Bridegroom's Coming, 25:1**

Marriage in first century Jewish culture was somewhat different. It was not uncommon for parents to arrange marriages while the bride and groom were still children. A formal betrothal or engagement ceremony was held. At that time the dowry was paid to the parents of the bride. This betrothal was absolutely binding. The couple was looked upon as husband and wife, and unfaithfulness on the part of either was considered adultery.

When it was time for the marriage feast the friends of the bridegroom went and brought the bride and their attendants to the home of the groom. The young unmarried women who are friends of the bride would wait with her for the arrival of the Bridegroom. If he lived a ways off the time of his arrival could be delayed. The bride is not mentioned because she is not essential to the main theme of parable.

Why ten virgins in this parable? According to Talmudic authorities the lamps used in bridal processions were usually ten. Ten was the number of persons required to be present at any office, ceremony, or formal benediction. Wherever there were ten Jews living in one place a synagogue was to be built. Ten is the number of completion. This parable is not trying to teach that half will be saved at the second coming and the other unprepared half will be lost.

The lamps were made of pottery, shaped like a circular, covered bowl. One end of the clay was pinched to hold a wick while the other side has a small handle of clay. Since the oil-reservoirs were small a small jar of olive oil was carried to refill it. When the procession of the marriage feast began these lamps were attached to long hand held poles and carried high above the head to give more light to those in the procession.

Seven days of feasting followed the wedding ceremony. If the bride was not a virgin but a widow the feast only lasted three days. Once the feast began the door to the home was shut. No wedding crashers were permitted, including latecomers.

■ **Anticipation of Bridegroom's Coming, 25:1**

Obviously all the virgins are waiting for the bridegrooms return. This return is the Christ's Second Coming. The implication of the parable may be that the virgins represent Christians who "*love His appearing*" (2 Tim. 4:8). According to some the oil represents the Holy Spirit while the lamps are the hearts of Christians. Others say that the lamps equal faith while the oil is the accompanied works. It's not necessary to make each detail of this parable mean something. In fact, the lamp and oil have no real meaning other than to show the need to be prepared.

There are many similarities among the ten virgins. All were invited to the wedding feast. All accepted the invitation. All were alike in their knowledge and in their ignorance. All of them knew the bridegroom was coming, but none of them knew when. All the virgins had lamps. All had the same potential opportunities. All their lamps had some oil. All of the women became drowsy and fell asleep.

All dressed alike in the same virgin attire. All have made some preparation with regard to the coming of the Bridegroom. The only difference is that five made sufficient preparation while five did not.

■ **Preparation for Bridegroom's Coming, 25:2-4**

Practically everything that is done requires preparation beforehand. School tests are passed when students prepare by studying before hand. Family trips go more smoothly when proper preparation is made when packing. All Christians can be prepared for the return of Christ. Since it will be the greatest journey and examination of their existence sufficient preparation is wise. As the prophet of old advised, "*prepare to meet thy God*" (Amos 4:12).

Adequate preparation is contrasted with foolish neglect in this parable. No one can neglect proper preparation and be considered wise. In an earlier parable of the Builders (Matt. 7:24-27) Jesus contrasted the wise man who built his house on the rock contrast with the fool who built his on the sand. It is easy for Christians to have a false sense of security (preparedness) relative to his soul (Mt. 7:21-23).

The disciples of Christ cannot neglect preparation and be ready for His coming. Forethought for the future and cautious preparation for the unforeseeable is part of wisdom. The five virgins were not ungodly or immoral. They simply did not make allowance for the possibility of the bridegroom's delay.

Far too many Christians are living a live of foolish neglect. They are not prepared for the Lord's Return because they are neglecting being always ready. Today, most believe they have plenty of time to do the work which will prepare them for heaven. They keep putting off Bible Study, prayer, attendance, self-examination, etc. One day when the Lord comes back they will find their lamps burned out and no oil available.

■ **Delay of Bridegroom's Coming, 25:5**

According to Paul's letters to the Thessalonians some early Christians had the impression that Christ's coming was very soon, that is, within a matter or months or years. In this parable Jesus hints at the fact that His return may be delayed. The second coming would not be immediate. If He had said plainly that He would not come for many centuries, early Christians would have been robbed of strong motives to live holy and be ready at all times.

As the night wore on some are nodding and napping while others fall fast asleep. The indication is that both the wise and the foolish are resting. This is not an implication negative behavior on their part. After all, those who are adequately prepared can rest. Those who were not prepared should have been out purchasing more oil for their lamps.

■ **Abrupt Coming of the Bridegroom, 25:6**

Wise preparation for the Second Coming of our Lord is essential because He will come "*as a thief in the night*". He will come when least expected just as the bridegroom showed up at midnight. All will be awoken at "*the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God*" (1 Th. 4:16).

The suddenness of His return will likely evoke emotions of all kinds. Some will be afraid, while some will be in despair and desperately try to get ready at the last possible moment. Others will rejoice at His Coming.

■ **Individual Responsibility at the Bridegroom's Coming, 25:7-9**

All ten arose from slumber and sleep to greet the bridegroom by first trimming their lights, that is, they cut off the ends of the wicks for a better flame and consequently more light. Some might read this parable and find fault with the wise virgins for being so stingy and heartless. However, the lesson is that personal preparedness cannot be bought from others any more than one can pay another Christian to obey God's commands for them. The wise virgins pointed out that if they shared their oil they would soon be in the same predicament. One cannot borrow obedience from another any more than they can borrow righteousness. Preparation for Judgment Day is an individual matter (2 Cor. 5:10). Each soul must see to its own lamp. Salvation cannot be bought or shared. So the wise virgins are not being selfish but wisely pointing out to the foolish that they cannot heed their request.

If one's home is on fire it is too late to install a smoke detector. Minutes after crashing your car into the back of another car is not the time to buy auto insurance. The Day of the Lord's Return is not the time to start making preparations for one's eternal soul. For the five virgins to go out at midnight and

find a merchant open for business at midnight and sell them olive oil for their lamps would have been next to impossible. One day the opportunities afforded the saints will be past and no time remaining to pack for heaven.

■ **Separation from the Bridegroom, 25:10-12**

How is it that the Bridegroom did not know his bride's virgins. "I know you not" is a Jewish idiom, for "favorable knowledge." The five foolish virgins were no longer counted as acquaintances. They were too late to be invited in. They lost their reservations.

One day the door of opportunity will shut forever. Today, the door is open. Once one misses Heaven his exclusion is unalterably permanent. The door in the parable is shut to include the wise and exclude the foolish. This reminds us of Noah's ark. When Noah's family and the representative animals had entered into it, the Lord shut the door (Gen. 7:16). All the banging on the ark door would not make one difference for God had sealed it closed. The phrase "*and the door was shut*" is one of the saddest in the Bible.

■ **Admonition of the Bridegroom, 25:13**

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

All parts of the parable are to be interpreted in reference to this admonition. Spiritual alertness to the coming of Christ is wise and will make the difference between who goes to Heaven and who is shut out forever. The one sure way to be ready on that Day is to be ready every day.

While making one of his expeditions to Antarctica Sir Earnest Shackleton's ship the *Endurance* was lost. All the men escaped alive. Some of the men ended up on Elephant Island. Shackleton went for help in a small open lifeboat to get help. His first attempts to rescue were foiled by sea ice. With the use of a tug by the Chilean navy he was able to pick up the twenty-two men on the island and return them to safety. They had spent over four months on the Island eating nothing more than penguins. As soon as Shackleton arrived they were ready to go. He enquired of his men why they were ready to board the rescue ship so quickly. They told him that every morning their leader rolled up his sleeping bag saying, "Get your things ready, boys, the boss may come today."

Questions:

1. List other false prophets and the dates they have prognosticated as the time of Christ's Second Coming.

2. Why has Matthew chapter twenty-four often fallen victim to abuse and misuse by those who wish to use it to calculate the time of Christ's Return?

3. What does "*days*" represent in first half of Matthew 24?

4. How many times does Jesus point out the secretness of Christ's return in Matthew chapters 24 and 25?

5. Who knows when Christ will return? Who does not know?
6. To what is the suddenness of Christ's return compared?
7. What two illustrations does Jesus use to point out the need for watchfulness in regard to His Second Coming?
8. What will happen to the man and woman who are taken?
9. What will become of the man and woman who are left behind?
10. What does the Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief illustrate about the Second Coming? What does it call upon us to do?
11. Why will the first servant be rewarded when the master returns?
12. What are the characteristics or behaviors of the second servant?
13. What punishment will the second servant receive?
14. How would the ten virgins be related to the bridegroom?
15. Where is the bride in this story?
16. Who does the bridegroom represent?

17. What significance does the number 10 have in Jewish culture/community?
18. How large are these oil lamps? What must one keep with them for long trips?
19. What does the “oil” represent?
20. List some ways all ten are similar?
21. How could they prepare for the long evening? How can we?
22. How did the bridegroom come? What announced his coming? Was there time to prepare?
23. Can we buy salvation? What does this teach about lost opportunities?

Application & Discussion:

1. What can you implement in your daily life to help you be ready when the Lord suddenly returns?
2. As Christ delays His return how can we wait patiently?

Homework: Learn to look forward to and love the idea that Jesus is coming back at any moment.

Parables of the Coming Judgment Day

Matthew 25:14-46

The Parable of the Talents, 24:14-30

The Parable of the Talents is compatible and comparable to the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Both deal with the Lord's absence and His return. Both have the saints waiting for the Lord yet this parable focuses more on working for Him. Watching with readiness was the main focus of the first and working with earnestness is the principal objective of the second of these three parables about the Second Coming.

The wealthy master represents Christ. His departure into Heaven after His ascension is indicated by the long journey. The servants are all baptized believers. The master's sudden return after many years is representing the unknown time of the Lord's Return at which time He will judge the good and the bad. The talents represent opportunities to obey and serve the Lord. All of these were given various opportunities according to their abilities. Some think of talents as the endowment of natural gifts or abilities, such as, a talented singer. Note that "talents" are different from "abilities," for in verse fifteen the master gave to every man *"according to his own ability"* (NKJV). The talents represent opportunities to use our abilities to serve Christ. "Talent" as used by Jesus, does not mean something the servants possess, but He possessed and loans the talents to His servants. Talents are a weight of money not a natural ability.

Failure Versus Success

- **One Talent Versus Two and Five Talents**

Originally, a talent was not a coin but a measurement of weight, equal to about seventy-five pounds. In the time of Jesus one talent was worth nearly a thousand dollars. Note the passage does not tell us whether the talent was of silver or of gold. Either way these servants were entrusted with a great deal of money.

Each man was given an amount commensurate with his ability to invest the money. Perhaps the servant who received the five talents had previously proven that he was trustworthy and could handle this amount of responsibility. He had more ability than the other two servants and therefore was trusted with more money. The master was not about to give to any servant more than he could handle.

No two people are alike. According to your abilities everyone of God's servants will be given opportunities. Having less opportunities does not excuse anyone from making the most of the opportunities they have. Dorcas had the ability to sew clothing and she saw the opportunities to help cloth the needy saints and others, so she held the needle in her hand that repeatedly stitched the torn garments of the poor among them (Acts 9:36-39).

- **Buried Talents Versus Increased Talents**

The man given five talents gained five more. The man with two gained two more. Yet the man with one just buried it.

- **Faulty Concept of God Versus "Lord"**

The one talent man did not have faith in his master. He pictured his lord as a hard man. This is exactly how some perceive God and therefore will not faithfully serve Him. It is true that He is an exacting taskmaster. Yet, He is fair and just in His dealing with all men. God will require only according to each man's ability (1 Cor. 4:2; Luke 12:48; 2 Cor. 8:12). In fact, since he does not give all the same opportunity He is demonstrating kindness and fairness to all. His yoke is easy and His burden is light

(Mt. 11:28-30). His commandments are not grievous (I Jn. 5:3). The one talent man was willing to call his master "lord, lord" but unwilling to do what he said (Luke 6:45).

Notice how the one talent man is attempting to shift blame onto his master. He is pictured as one who compels others and reaps only for himself. Yet the master was willing to give to the five talent man five more and to the two talent man two more.

- **Made Excuses Versus Gave Account**

The master returned to reckon or settle accounts. The first two servants simply gave the master an account of what had been entrusted to them. The one talent man came with his rationale ready. Perhaps he thought attack was his best defense. Contrast the number of words the other two said in giving an account compared to the many words the one talent man stated in excuse for do nothing. He used his time to make us excuses in a vain attempt to shield himself from blame. Eight talents became fifteen total talents which is one talent shy of becoming sixteen or doubling the master's money. The only thing the one talent man could contribute was his flimsy excuses.

- **Afraid Versus Invested**

The man with five and the other with two talents invested. They took same risk and it paid off for them. The one talent men did not have courage to work. He was paralyzed by the fear of losing the one talent. Afraid of making a mistake he made the greatest mistake of all: doing nothing. God does not require us to do as much as those who have greater abilities. God does not even demand perfection. He does require obedience. To be afraid and try is one thing. To be so afraid as to do nothing was the real problem. Do not forget that the fearful will be cast into Hell (Rev. 21:8). Fear is divinely prohibited (Lk. 12:4,5).

- **Wicked Versus Good**

When the master assessed the work of the five and two talent men, he said they had done "good." The one talent man's disobedience was not an active disobedience in that he tried and failed, but he was passive and did nothing but bury the talent. He may have not wasted his money like the Prodigal Son wasted away all his inheritance. He may have been able to at least return the one talent. However, the master's assessment was that he was "wicked." One does not have to be a murderer, thief, adulterer, etc. to be wicked. Men will be judged not merely for doing wrong, but for neglecting to do right (Js. 4:17).

- **Lazy Versus Faithful**

Regardless of all the excuses given by the one talent man, the fact remained he did not have to just bury the money. He could have at least given it over to bankers to provide him with some interest at a minimal risk. The fact that he failed to even do this proved to the master that he was more than just a wicked man but a lazy, slothful servant.

Regardless of how much we may have achieved, we will be judged upon faithful commitment. Man will be rewarded according to his faithfulness and not according to the results of his work. The most important thing to remember is the steward of God is to be found faithful (I Cor. 4:2).

Consequences Versus Reward

- **Lost Talent Versus Gained Talent**

Reward and punishment will be meted out at the time of reckoning. That time will come when the Lord comes again. The lesson is not one striving to teach that greater faithfulness will bring greater rewards in Heaven. The focus of the parable is using wisely the opportunities given to each saint according to their abilities.

One talent was not a small sum and was important. Just because it was less than five or two talents does not mean it played a small part in the master's affairs. Jesus constantly insisted on the worth of small things, things that seem obscure to us. There was the cup of cold water, the jot of the law, and the widow's mite.

An opportunity used is an opportunity gained. The one talent man lost all opportunity to serve the Lord. Forfeiture of the talent was just and natural. We lose what we fail to use. Use it or lose it. Loss

meant eternal loss and separation from the joys of serving the Master.

- **Cast into Outer Darkness Versus Entered Joy of Lord**

The happiest words a servant of God will ever hear will be: *“well done, good and faithful servant;... Enter into the joy of your lord.”* This was the Lord’s words of the reward for both the five and two talent man. The most terrible of words to hear will be: *“You wicked and lazy servant,... cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Unfaithful saints, like the one talent man, will miss out on the joy and honor at the master’s table and the blessings of eternal heaven.

Are you burying your opportunities to serve the Lord? Do you worship or bury your head in the pillow on Sunday mornings? Do you study with the brethren or do you bury your Wednesday evenings in overtime? Do you give or do you bury your money in a retirement fund? Do you pray or do you bury your mind in the funnies? When He comes will you be running for a shovel?

Parable of the Sheep & Goats, 25:31-46

Some do not consider the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats to be a fully developed parable. However, it is clearly connected with the previous two parables. It is more than a parable: it is a realistic prediction of the future. These three parables were uttered three days before Jesus’ death.

The Judgment by Christ, 25:31

In defense of the false doctrine of premillennialism Warren Wiersbe argued, "people confuse this passage by calling it 'The General Judgment,' thinking it's the same as the White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:1-15. there is no such thing as a general judgment in the bible. The saints have their works judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ immediately after the rapture (2 Cor. 5:1-10). The unsaved dead will be raised to face Christ at the White Throne Judgment at the close of the 1,000 year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1-15). This judgment is that of the Gentile nations at the close of the Tribulation" (Wiersbe 92).

The word *"nations"* in verse thirty-two is neutral in the Greek while *"them"* is masculine, referring to individual persons. The phrase *"all the nations"* has a meaning of the whole race of men, who, dead and living, small and great, Jew and Gentile, shall stand before God to be judged according to their works.

Also keep in mind that this parable as well as the two previous ones were given by Jesus in response to their questions in Matthew 24:3. All nations were to be assembled which did not take place at the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, premillennialists teach that that kingdom will not be established until the Christ sits on a literal throne in Jerusalem as King ruling for a thousand years. Yet twice in this parable Jesus refers to Himself as "King." Those whom He judges call Him, "Lord." The Bible speaks of Christ’s coming again a second time not a third and fourth time as various doctrines of premillennialism teach. And there is one and only one judgment of the nations or man-kind. That Judgment is done on an individual basis (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Righteous and Wicked Contrasted

- **Sheep Versus Goats, 25:32**

After bringing up the Day of Judgment Jesus turns to illustrate it with the dividing of the sheep and the goats. This was a very common scene in Palestine and still is. Shepherds will allow the flocks of sheep and goats to mingle with each other as they graze in the fields. At night when they are brought in from the fields the goats are separated from the sheep. This would be an easy task visually provided that all the sheep were white and all the goats were black.

Sheep were often used as a symbol of those who were innocent and harmless although they were known to easily go astray. Goats were naturally quarrelsome, unruly, and rowdy (Is. 14:9). They came to symbolize the wicked, or the riotous, profane and impure men.

- **Right Versus Left, 25:33**

The sheep were sent to the right and the goats to the left when the shepherd separated them. To be separated out on the right hand was a place of respect and honor (1 Ki. 2:19; Ac. 2:33-34). The left hand position was a place of dishonor, denoting condemnation (Eccl. 10:2). The Jews in their traditions say that when criminals were tried by the Sanhedrin those who were acquitted were placed on the right hand, and those who were condemned on the left. Virgil has the Elysian field or paradise on the right while placing Tartarus on the left in the Hadean realm. Notice that at the Judgment people will be divided into only two groups: the saved and the lost. There will not be intermediate groups for the "pretty good" or "not bad enough to be lost." Just as Jesus in a previous Parable of the Wheat and the Tares has the wheat gathered into barns while tares are up rooted bound and burned.

- **Serving Others Versus Neglecting Others, 25:35-39; 41-45**

When it comes to serving others Jesus does not illustrate it with difficult or expensive assistance for the needy. He mentions helping out with simple things, every day acts of kindnesses within the reach of every person willing to help, such as, a cup of cold water.

The sheep were the ones who helped those who were hungry that is "very hungry" by giving them food. Simple hospitality to others is a virtue which is blessed and exalted throughout the scriptures. Abraham had entertained three beings appearing in the guise men. These "men" turned out to be angels (Gen. 18:1-19:1; Heb. 13:2). Note that "naked" in this passage is not the idea of nude or without any clothing at all. It refers to anyone poorly clothed or those without an outer garment or without proper clothing for the weather.

- **Serving Christ Versus Neglecting Christ, 25:40,45**

If Christ were on earth today how would He be treated? Would Christians show Him hospitality? Would they defend Him from His enemies? He is not here so we cannot serve Him directly. The only way that we can do anything for the Son of God is to do something for His brethren. If we fail them we fail Him. Sin against the saints is sin against the Savior. Sin in this case may not be an outward expression of hatred to Christ or His brethren, it can be represented by neglecting to do the right thing toward those in need.

- **Come Versus Depart, 25:34,41**

Those on the right will receive an invitation to be eternally in the presence of the King. Those on the left will go to a place of equal duration "*the everlasting fire*" of hell to be in the eternal presence of "*the devil and his angels.*"

- **Blessed Versus Cursed, 25:34,41**

Notice that Jesus does not mention "brethren" as in verse forty. The reason may be as simple as the fact that the wicked do not see or regard them as brethren desiring their consideration or compassion.

- **Inherit Eternal Kingdom Versus Everlasting Fire, 25:34,41**

Christ says to the righteous that the kingdom was prepared for them. From eternity God planned to have man with Him. Faithful sons and daughters of God inherit a place in God's eternal kingdom. In contrast, the wicked on the left have a place prepared for them of everlasting fire. A place of punishment suited to their rebellion (Jd. 6; Rev. 21). He does not mention that it has been prepared from eternity since God's original intent was never to damn man or any of His creation into Hell.

- **Eternal Life Versus Everlasting Punishment, 25:46**

What does it mean that punishment is everlasting? No one would say that "*everlasting*" was applied to God and to a mountain in the same sense. The term "*everlasting*" is *aionion* in Greek. It is found some fifty-one times in the scriptures for the blessedness of the righteous. In most of these uses of the term no one could or would deny that it denotes unlimited duration. In verse forty-six both clauses use the term *aionion*. What ever it means with regard to the duration of "life" in Heaven it also means with regard to the duration of punishment in Hell. The doom of the wicked is as long-lasting as the reward of the righteous. To try to shorten the duration of punishment in Hell is to one day call for the end of the blessing of the saints with God in Heaven.

When the Shepherd/King comes again the goats will be punished with Hell. While on earth He saw men as "sheep having no shepherd," Again, when He comes again His sheep will be eternally cared

for in Heaven.

Questions:

1. What major theme stands out in this parable?
2. Where is the Lord in this parable? Why?
3. Who was the audience when this parable was spoken?
4. What is the derived meaning of "*talents*" now?
5. Who was the owner the talents?
6. How were the talents distributed?
7. Did the amount of talents delegated make a difference?
8. Who does the one talent man blame? What does this show?
9. How was the one talent man disobedient? How is that applicable to our work as disciples?
10. Was the reward greater for the five-talent man than the two-talent man?
11. Why was the master angry over one talent not being used when he now had seven more than when he left his servants?
12. Is this a parable? Why or why not?
13. What are the natural characteristics of sheep and goats?

14. Who do the sheep and goats represent?
15. What is the importance of left and right in the Jewish culture of Jesus' time?
16. When will the separation of sheep and goats take place?
17. Is there significance in the fact that Jesus sorted the animals into only two groups and not three, four, or more?
18. What reasons did the King give for rewarding His "sheep"?
19. What does "naked" refer to during the time of Jesus' teaching?
21. What should the nature of our giving be like (Matthew 6:3)? Does this verse teach "secret giving"?
22. Why does He not use "brethren" in verse 45 but does in verse 40?

Application & Discussion:

1. What opportunities has God intrusted to you according to your abilities? Have you been neglecting any of your opportunities?
2. What can a Christian do to serve Christ until He comes again?

Homework: Stop making excuses and seize the day.

A Packed Day of Preparation

Matthew 26:1-30

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings” (26:1). This verse marks the end of Jesus’ final major discourse with the final use of the transitional phrase: *“finished all these sayings.”* It also marks the beginning of a long busy day of preparations. Keep in mind the Jewish day began at sundown.

Preparation by Caiaphas to Kill Jesus, 26:2-5

Jesus gives his fourth and final predictions of His death. The three previous predictions were given with increasing detail. This time He not only prophesies of the type of execution (crucifixion) by which He will die, but He gives the day of His betrayal and passion. He will be delivered up during the Passover.

While Jesus was predicting, *“the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas”* and were plotting. They were not going to arrest Jesus publically for trial, they planned to take Him by “trickery” or stealth and then murder Him. They needed to do this after the Passover *“lest there be an uproar among the people”* (26:5).

God’s will would prevail. Instead of a quiet subtle arrest of Jesus, there would be six hearings which became more increasingly public. Instead of taking place after the Passover it would be during the days of Passover. Instead of murdering Him, the Roman Governor would consent to have Jesus crucified. The Jewish leadership wanted Jesus to just quietly, privately disappear. God wanted it to be very open and public for all generations to know what and why in regard to the murder of His Son.

Although the true high priest by inheritance was Annas. The office of High Priest had become a political office appointed to men by the Herods and then Romans. In fact, the Romans controlled the garments of the High Priest, so they could control the office. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of the Annas and was not considered by the Jews to have a legitimate claim to the position. That is why the first hearing for Jesus was in front of Annas, but only recorded in John. Coming to Caiaphas made logical sense, because He was politically the High Priest thus had the power. And he had previously made up his mind what to do with Jesus. He said, *“It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish”* (John 11:50).

Preparation by Mary to Anoint Jesus, 26:6-13

It would appear that the anointing of Jesus takes place two days before the Passover like the rest of this context. However, John informs us this supper took place *“six days before the Passover”* (John 12:1). And adds in verse twelve that He went into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey the *“next day.”* Therefore this is Saturday before His crucifixion. Matthew and Mark present a flashback for the purpose of the lesson they were trying to convey instead a following a strict chronology.

John fills in many details of this event left out by Matthew and Mark’s account. Martha as usual was serving the supper. Lazarus and Martha’s sister, Mary was also present. Only John gives the name of the woman who anointed Jesus. John also tells us she *“wiped His feet with her hair”* (John 12:3). A woman’s long hair was her glory (1 Cor. 11:15) but she used it to glorify the Lord. Every time we see Mary brought onto the Gospel stage she is at the feet of Jesus. When Martha was serving in the kitchen, Mary was at the feet of Jesus learning. When Jesus came to raise Lazarus from the dead, she was at His feet. Each time her actions were called into question, by Martha then by her neighbors and now by

the disciples.

John adds that it was Judas who was the instigator of this objection to Mary's action. He also gives us the true motive for his objection. *"This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it"* (John 12:6).

Many Bible students have confused this story with an similar event recorded in Luke 7:36-40. There are some parallels. In both the supper took place in the house of one named Simon. However, Simon is a very common name in Palestine at this time. Peter was named Simon. Jesus had another apostle named Simon the zealot. Judas was himself the son of Simon. A man named Simon was compelled by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross. Even one of Jesus' own half-brothers was named Simon. The Simon here at Bethany is not the same Simon in Luke 7. Luke tells us that Simon was a Pharisee whereas the Simon at Bethany was a leper. No doubt Jesus had healed him and this supper was perhaps in gratitude for Jesus' compassion. The suppers were at two different times: one at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and one at the very end. One took place in Galilee and the other at Bethany near Jerusalem. The only other parallel would be a woman anointing Jesus. The woman in Luke was a sinner. Mary of Bethany was a devout follower of Jesus. Jesus forgave the sinful woman, but Mary is given honor for her devotion. Clearly, these two suppers are two very different events.

Why did Jesus defend Mary's anointing of Him? The disciples considered it a waste to pour a year's worth of wages upon the head and feet of their Master. Jesus does not want them to give her trouble *"for she has done a good work for Me"* (26:10b). Once again Mary *"has chosen the good part"* (Luke 10:42). He also commends her for seizing an opportunity. Jesus did care about the poor (see 25:35f). The disciples' war on poverty would have to wait. The poor will always be there. But He would be dead in the few days and the window of opportunity to honor Him would be gone. Her motive was to prepare Him for His burial. She seems to have had a better understanding of Jesus' coming death than even the disciples. Furthermore, she is giving her all to Jesus. Total commitment is seen by her pouring out 300 denarai worth of spice which she seems to have been keeping ready for this day. She used her hair to wipe His feet. She shows service and commitment on a level not to be seen among the Twelve. Finally, Jesus envisions a time in the future when the Gospel story will be shared around the world and Mary's example will be known by all. The fact that you are studying this story today is evidence of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

Preparation by Judas to Betray Jesus, 26:14-16

Why does Matthew put Jesus' betrayal by Judas after the story of Mary's anointing? Perhaps to show the motivation behind His treachery. Judas was greedy. His pride may have been hurt by the rebuke. He may have believed that last three years with Jesus have been a waste. His Messiah is about to die and what does he have to show for his part? Nothing! Judas was thinking that he deserved a pay day.

So Judas goes to the chief priests and initiates a plan to betray Jesus. *"What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?"* (26:15). He is to be paid for his information and guidance to Jesus, so they can find a time and place to arrest Jesus without the multitudes whom they feared. They paid him in the Temple at that moment and in advance. *"And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver"* (26:16). This is an exact fulfillment of Zechariah 11:12: *"so they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."* Many of the prophecies about Jesus were not fulfilled at the hands of His friends, but by His enemies. And at this time Judas is not friend to Jesus. The fact Jesus was to be betrayed by someone very close to him had been prophesied (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14).

Another reason for mentioning Judas' plan after Mary anointed Jesus is to show the contrast between the two. Judas was a man and of course Mary a woman. Judas was an apostle. Mary was a mere disciple at the feet of Jesus. Mary understood the coming death of Jesus. Judas was still arguing with the others about who is greatest in the Kingdom. Mary gave a year's wages worth of spikenard to honor Jesus. Judas only wanted to steal from Jesus ministry and also sell Him out to His enemies. Mary's act will live on as a blessed memorial, but Judas goes down in history as traitor.

Preparation by Disciples for Passover with Jesus, 26:17-30

Why did Jesus wait till the last moment to prepare a place for the Passover? Perhaps, He was trying to keep its location a secret. He sent Peter and John (Luke 22:8). Of course not, Judas. After all, he was seeking a chance to deliver Jesus to the chief priests. Where will they keep the Passover? At the home of a man whom Jesus knew according to the Greek phrase used here. According to Mark and Luke they would follow a man carrying a pitcher of water to the home. All they had to say to the owner is: *"The Teacher says, 'My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples'"* (26:18). Apparently, this was enough. Especially if Jesus had made some prearrangement with the owner. Jesus' time on earth was about up. His death was close by.

Having found the location for the supper. It was prepared for them in a large upper room. But they still would have to procure a lamb and the rest of the menu. The Passover lamb had to be slain at the Temple at *"twilight"* (Ex. 12:6) that is between three and five o'clock in the afternoon. Since it was the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, they had to remove all leaven from the room (Ex. 12:15). Leaven has symbolically been associated with the influence of evil. For seven days they were to eat only unleavened bread.

Jesus and the Twelve were seated while eating the Passover. The original Passover required the Israelites to *"eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste"* (Ex. 12:11) while standing.

The Jews kept their feast with joy but on this occasion *"they were exceedingly sorrowful"* for Jesus shocked them by declaring, *"one of you will betray Me."* To the disciples credit they did not look at each other and say "Lord, is it Peter, Matthew, John, etc.?" They asked it in a way which expected a negative answer: "Surely, Lord NOT I?"

Jesus did give an indication as to who it was. He said, *"He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me"* (26:24). John tells us that Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas. He went on to say that this must happen because of prophecy. Does this mean Judas was a mere pawn in the plans of God? Peter said on Pentecost, Jesus *"being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God"* (Acts 2:23). Be careful not to make the *"son of perdition"* (John 17:12) into a son of righteousness. Judas made a choice to betray. Jesus in fact is trying to set up a roadblock to sin. Sadly, instead of repenting like David when confronted by Nathan, Judas goes out and fulfills his commitment to the chief priests. He could have repented. This is especially true when He ask Jesus, "Is it I?" And Jesus affirmed it was him. Jesus knew. Judas knew. Some of the disciples near Jesus and Judas knew.

Jesus' final warning to Judas was *"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"* (26:24). Judas went out and sealed His fate. He would rather listen to the temptation of Satan with a hardened heart.

Preparation by Jesus for the Lord's Supper, 26:26-30

- **Prayerful Observance**

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body'" (Matt. 26:26). The word *"blessed"* in this verse *eulogeo*. According to Thayer it means "to consecrate a thing with solemn prayers; to call God's blessings on a thing, pray him to bless it to one's use, pronounce a conservatory blessing on it" (Thayer 259). Notice that *"blessed"* in Matthew 26:26 and *"had given thanks"* in Luke 22:19 are referring to the same act of Christ. Thus, there should be prayers that offer thanks for the Lord's Supper according to the example of Christ and the teaching of Paul.

If we partake of it prayerfully we will also show that we are partaking of it discerningly, humbly, penitently, and gratefully. Prayer helps set the mind in the worthy manner. It points the direction of where our thoughts are to be directed. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (Mt. 26:26-29) He limited His prayers to the specific occasion.

- **Element of Observance: Unleavened Bread**

The Lord's Supper was instituted during the Passover Feast which was also part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matt. 26:17). Part of the preparations would have been the removal of all leaven from the upper room. The only bread available to Jesus to take up and use for the institution of the Lord's Supper that night would have been unleavened.

Jesus gave unleavened bread a spiritual and symbolic meaning. Unleavened was a symbol of purity. It had been used in the Passover in remembrance of bread baked hurriedly under God's commands before the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus said, *"this is my body"* in reference to the unleavened bread. It pictured the broken body of Christ which suffered upon the cross. His body would have been as pale and lifeless as unleavened bread.

- **Element of Observance: Fruit of the Vine**

Jesus next took a cup containing grape juice and made it part of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:27-29). The phrase *"fruit of the vine"* meant in the language of the day, the juice or fruit of or from the grapes (Lev. 25:5).

The terms "cup" and "fruit of the vine" are used interchangeably in Luke 22:17-18: *"Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'"* They divided the fruit of the vine. Jesus took "the cup" and said, "divide it among yourselves." Therefore, the cup is the fruit of the vine. Jesus blessed the contents, not the container.

The fruit of the vine had great spiritual and symbolic meaning in the Lord's Supper. It was used in the Passover Feast to remember the salvation from death received by those who put blood over their doors in Egypt. Jesus used the fruit of the vine to symbolize His blood, which was shed in death for the salvation of men and the ratification of the New Testament.

- **Purpose of the Observance: Authorization of the New Covenant**

The Lord's Supper is not just a commemoration of Christ Jesus' death, but it is also a symbol of the authorization of the New Covenant. *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (26:28). The Old Covenant, of which the Passover was a part, was about to end. Soon a New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Christ, was to be given. According to Paul, He has fulfilled His promise, having nailed the Law of Moses to the cross. *"having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross"* (Col. 1:14).

Thus, the Lord's Supper stands as a reminder each Sunday that we are not under the Old Covenant, but the New. The Lord's Supper is to remind us that we are not Jews, but Christians. It tells us that we are no longer responsible to the Old, but bound to the New.

- **Prophecy and Place of Observance**

Although there may not be a specified physical location for the partaking of the Lord's Supper, there is a proper spiritual place to observe it. This spiritual location is based upon one's relationship to God and one another. Jesus said on the night He instituted the Lord's Supper *"...I drink it new with you in the Father's Kingdom"* (Matt. 26:29) and *"...at my table in my kingdom"* (Luke 22:29,30). Jesus makes it clear that His Kingdom is yet in the future. The coming of the Messianic Kingdom has long been prophesied in Daniel 2, Joel 2; and Isaiah 2. Both John and Jesus and His disciples preached that the kingdom was at hand or coming soon (Matt. 3:1,2; 4:17). The Kingdom was established on the Day of Pentecost. They newly partook of the Lord's Supper with Jesus who was seated in Heaven as King in Acts 2:42 when *"they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

- **Day of Observance**

Jesus said that he would partake of it again on *"that day"* (Mt. 26:29). The word *"day"* may refer to a specific day of 24 hours or the word *"day"* may also refer to a general period of time. *"That day"* is when the Kingdom would exist. The Kingdom or church was established on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost came on a Sunday. The feast day of Pentecost was fifty days after the Passover which was on a Sabbath. So exactly seven weeks plus one day would make it Sunday. By necessary inference

the Bible teaches the Lord's Supper is to be observed on Sunday, the first day of the week. The Lord said he would not eat of the Supper until He ate anew with His disciples in His kingdom. The disciples ate of it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42). Therefore, Christ intended that the Lord's Supper be observed on the Lord's Day.

The Passover was concluded with a song. *"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives"* (26:30). This was most likely Psalm 118 one of the Hallel psalms including Psalms 113-118.

Questions:

1. Contrast Jesus' predictions with the plotting of the Jewish leadership with Caiaphas.
2. What had Caiaphas already determined about how to deal with Jesus?
3. On what day did Mary anoint Jesus?
4. What details does John add to the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus?
5. Each time Mary is represented in a Gospel narrative two things happen, what are they?
6. Why did Judas object to the anointing of Jesus? What was his true motive?
7. Contrast Mary's anointing of Jesus with His anointing in Luke 7:36-40.
8. How does Jesus defend the actions of Mary?
9. What prophecy was Judas fulfilling when he went to the chief priests at the Temple?
10. Contrast Judas with Mary.

11. Why did Jesus wait till the last moment to prepare a place for the Passover?
12. What was involved in preparing the room for the Passover?
13. How did the apostles respond to Jesus' announcement that one of them would betray Him?
14. What two ways does Jesus identify His betrayer?
15. Why should we pray while observing the Lord's Supper?
16. What two elements are to be used at the Lord's Supper? Why?
17. What two things is the blood of Christ said to do?
18. When did Jesus promise to partake of the Lord's Supper with them again? When was this promise fulfilled?

Application & Discussion:

1. List all the prophecies made by Jesus. How many were fulfilled? What if even one of them has not been fulfilled?
2. What preparations do you need to make in serving the Lord?

Homework: Focus on the two memorials in this lesson: Mary's anointing of Jesus and the Lord's Supper.

A Difficult Night of Desertion

Matthew 26:31-56

Desertion by Stumbling Block, 26:31-35

Jesus begins in discussion with the disciples that night by predicting, *“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night”* (26:31a). The term “stumble” is from the Greek meaning “a scandal or a stumbling block.” Jesus’ previous predictions of His coming death have proven to be a stumbling block to the disciples. Especially Peter who had taken his Master aside and rebuked Him.

Jesus paraphrases the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7: *“for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’”* (26:31b). God is the architect of Jesus’ death. The Shepherd is Jesus and the sheep in this case are His followers. Isaiah prophesied, *“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin”* (Is. 53:10). On the day of Pentecost Peter claimed Jesus was *“delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God”* (Acts 2:23). The plans of God’s enemies and even of His disciples were used and even at times thwarted to bring about God’s scheme in redeeming man from sin through His Son’s death.

Jesus also predicted, *“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee”* (26:32). His pre-appointed rendezvous with the remaining eleven disciples implies: 1) He will die. 2) He will be resurrected from the dead. 3) It also implies they would be restored after their desertion. After the women discovered Jesus’ empty tomb, an angel told the women, *“tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him”* As they left to do so, Jesus appears to them and says, *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me”* (Matt. 28:7,10). The fulfillment of this promise is seen in 27:16-20 when *“the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them”* (27:16).

Peter protests the Prophet’s predication, *“Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble”* (26:33). Peter’s first mistake is contradicting Jesus once more. Next, he considered himself spiritually stronger than the other disciples. He also put more faith in himself and the sword he was carrying instead of the prophetic words of Jesus.

Jesus adds still another prediction. *“Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times”* (26:34). Peter continues the debate the issue with Jesus. *“Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’”* (26:35). Peter was thinking of physically defending Jesus against an armed mob with trained soldiers among them. He did not stand a chance but planned to go down fighting. This was another mistake by Peter. Although He would fight with the sword, he would join the rest of the disciples in their desertion. Instead of being stronger than the others Peter would deny Christ three times before six in the morning.

Christianity is not for the self-dependant and those who are over-confident. Peter will be humbled and recognize he has failed to keep his promises to Christ in this matter. He will be shown not to be the super-disciple who is invincible.

Peter was the most forward and outspoken of the Twelve. He also had a great deal of influence on the others. All of them claimed never to desert Jesus. They were not being copy cats but like Peter were sincere in thinking they too were strong enough to face what is coming. If they wanted to be strong, they first had to deal with their weaknesses.

Desertion by Sleeping, 26:36-46

While Jesus was making His way up the Mount of Olives with the Eleven disciples, He brings

them to the entrance of a garden. Here He tells eight of them *“sit here while I go and pray over there”* (26:36). This place is called Gethsemane meaning “oil or olive press.” We are not told by the Gospel writers who owned this garden. Neither do they tell us who owned the donkey and her colt Jesus rode on into Jerusalem or the upper room where they had the Passover. These anonymous donors were likely disciples willing to support Jesus in His ministry.

Into the garden Jesus brings *“with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee.”* Just why these three are taken and the other eight are left we are not told. However, Peter, James and John had also joined Jesus at the raising of Jairus' daughter and upon the Mount of Transfiguration. There is one common denominator which will link of three events: sleep and death. Jesus said of the twelve year old daughter of Jarius that she was asleep and then awakened her from the death. Later while Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah where they spoke of His “exodus,” the disciples were sleeping. Again, they would be found sleeping as Jesus was praying and preparing for His death.

It is here that Jesus *“began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed”* (26:37). Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be *“a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”* (Is. 53:3). Jesus was a man who would weep tears as He does here. He wept at Lazarus' grave (John 11:35) and over Jerusalem. The humanity of Jesus and the seriousness of this occasion are made evident. The phrase *“even to death”* may be the extreme extent of His suffering. Thus it is a hyperbole. Others contend it speaks of the actual coming event of His death on the cross. He is sorrowful and distressed concerning His death.

To the three Jesus commands, *“stay here and watch with Me.”* Notice He does not ask them to pray for Him but to keep Him company.

Leaving them and according to Luke Jesus goes a stones throw away or a *“little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’”* (26:39). Jesus prays three times to the Father in Heaven. His subject matter is about the same event. Each prayer shows us how Jesus is struggling with the coming events. Just what cup is Jesus asking God to remove? “Cup” is used in the Bible literally and figuratively. Surely Jesus is not talking about a real physical cup. A cup could mean to drink the wrath of God or to endure suffering or accept one's destiny or even salvation. Mark's Gospel uses “hour” and “cup” interchangeably (Mark 14:35; 26) as so does John (John 18:11; 12:27). After Peter cuts off the ear of Malchus in the garden Jesus says to him, *“Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”* (John 18:11). Some may argue this cup is the wrath of God when Jesus bore the sins of the world and/or His separation from God while on the cross.

The cup is here talking about the time or hour of betrayal, desertion, trials, abuses, humiliation, crucifixion, Jesus is about to endure. Does He have the strength to withstand these coming temptations. When He was tempted at the beginning of His ministry, three temptations were mentioned. Here at the end of His ministry He prays three times about His struggles. He is not asking God to violate His Will any more than Moses did when he wanted to have God just kill him and let someone else lead this rebellious people (Num. 11) or Elijah who just wanted to lay down in the desert unto a juniper tree and die without complete God's will for him (1 Kings 19). Jesus *“was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15). The Hebrew writer speaks about His struggle in the garden. *“In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”* (Heb. 5:7,8).

The petition in Jesus' first prayer is announcing the struggle with the temptation and the possible removal of the temptation. *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (26:39). After all, Jesus taught His disciples to thus pray: *“And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one”* (6:13). Yet Jesus shows that He is willing to submit His will to that of the Father. By doing so Jesus not only is willing to submissively obey the Father's will, but it demonstrates that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. They are shown here as two distinct individual deities in the Godhead.

“Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass

away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (26:42). Jesus also prayed this again during His third prayer session in the Garden. He had made the request. He recognizes God’s Will must be done. He now is resolved to do it. Jesus has prevailed over the temptations of the Devil. He is the only man ever to perfectly overcome all temptations and never to sin. He had the burden of the lost of all time upon His shoulders in the Garden. He could not sin now or we all would be lost. No other man had to carry such a burden and no one ever had to suffer with such a temptation. Luke tells us that at this point *“an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him”* (Luke 22:43). Interestingly, these same thing happened when Jesus overcame the Devil’s temptations of Him in the wilderness: *“angels came and ministered to Him”* (4:11).

While Jesus was praying and dealing with His struggles, the three disciples were sleeping the night away. Luke does tell us why they had such a hard time staying awake. Jesus *“found them sleeping from sorrow”* (Luke 22:45). Perhaps Jesus being only a stone throw away was heard in His agony and they were exhausted from their own sorrow and slept. The first time He finds them asleep He *“said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (26:40,41). First, Jesus rebukes Peter for not being able to stay awake for just one hour. Peter claimed to never desert Jesus but die for Him if necessary, but he cannot muster enough of that determination, loyalty, and commitment to watch with Him an hour. He gave them advice about watching and praying as a means of avoiding temptation. This is exactly what Jesus is doing. By way of explanation of their difficulty in staying awake, Jesus points out that they do have a willing spirit but cannot seem to be strong enough at this time to overcome the physical and carnal weaknesses.

You don’t have to go far to see the application for the modern-day Christian. Worship service is the right place for a faithful Christian to be. However, coming to doze off on hard pews, expecting to be entertained or just day dreaming is not the right kind of activity for the occasion.

The second time He came back from praying, He found them back asleep *“for their eyes were heavy”* (26:43). The final time He found the three sleeping on the job, He asked, *“Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand”* (26:45,46). Jesus speaks as if He cannot believe they are still in need of sleep and rest. The hour He was preparing for is here and He is about to be betrayed. Perhaps He was pointing to the torches which were lighting up the Mount of Olives as the mob approached the entrance to the garden. He is not running away or preparing to fight. He has the strength to yield to the will of God. His disciples will not be prepared. Even though they are now better rested.

Desertion by Betrayal, 26:47-56

Jesus was still speaking when the mob led by Judas came through the darkness with torches to arrest the Light of the World. Matthew does not spew forth vehement words of condemnation at Judas. Instead he still refers to him as *“one of the twelve.”*

The exact number of the *“great multitude”* who were sent by *“the chief priests and elders of the people”* to arrest Jesus is not given. However, John tells us it was a *“cohort”* (John 18:3). This would have been six hundred Roman soldiers. In addition, were those who were sent as official Jewish rulers with their Temple police. The number could have been as high as a thousand.

The timing was important. Jesus had to be arrested, tried by the Jews, condemned to death by Pilate, crucified by the Romans and dead before the Sabbath began at sundown. Judas had offered to betray Him. Perhaps, the Jews thought that if Jesus was losing the support of His inner circle of disciples, it was time to move.

Why Judas needed to give them a sign to identify Jesus is unclear. Perhaps, it was the dark night. He had told those with him *“Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him”* (26:48). Judas wasted no time. He *“immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him”* (26:49). Kisses from a disciple were common. Men kissing men was a sign of respect. The Greek tense of the

verb indicates that Judas kissed Jesus more than once. It could be translated the Judas "kissed him much."

Notice how Jesus greets Judas, "*Friend, why have you come?*" (26:50). The term is not just for an acquaintance but for a close dear friend. Of course, Jesus knew what Judas was up to and why. He also asked him, "*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*" (Luke 22:48). Judas was showing respect to Jesus outwardly only to conceal the inward dishonor of His betrayal. Jesus was giving Judas another warning about the sin in Judas' heart.

"Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear" (26:51). We are told by John that it was Peter who struck Malchus (John 18:10). Peter had some kind of courage. He took on a whole band of trained soldiers by himself. Perhaps, Peter was aiming for the head of Malchus but instead cut off the man's ear as Malchus would have dodged in defense. Peter proves to be far better fisherman than a swordsman. Like so many modern religious militants, Peter was using the wrong weapon for the right battle. We do not fight a carnal war but a spiritual war. Instead of carnal weapons we need spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:10f). The correct weapon against the enemies of God is the sword of the spirit (Heb. 4:12). He was fighting the wrong kind of enemy - a mere servant. He was doing battle in the wrong location. The battle ground is spiritual, taking place in the hearts of men.

Jesus healed Peter's mistake (Luke 22:51), making it impossible for Malchus to press charges. (This is the first "miracle ear"). While it robbed them of the evidence to prosecute Peter for attempted murder, it provided further evidence of Jesus' Divine power and credibility, but also His compassion for His enemies.

Peter's action might have motivated the other ten to join the fight had not Jesus rebuked Peter to "*put your sword in its place*" (26:52a). Jesus gives several reasons why Peter's actions are wrong. 1) The sword has its proper place, but had no place in a spiritual fight. Peter is not to throw away his sword as if the sword has no place at all as a possession of a disciple. In fact, Jesus has commanded them earlier to buy a sword, even if they had to sell a garment (Luke 22:36). He asked them prior to His betrayal, if they had swords. In fact they had "*two swords*" (Luke 22:38). The Crusades and all other such attempts to advance the Kingdom or Gospel by force of arms is ungodly murder and futile. 2) Second, the use of a carnal weapon was dangerous for Peter. Jesus warning, "*for all who take the sword will perish by the sword*" is a generalization. It is commonly true. Peter could lose his life, when the mass of armed men fought back. This does not mean a sword has no place in the carnal world. In fact, God has ordained government among men. They are commanded to use the sword to protect good citizens and to punish those who are evil (Rom. 13:4). 3) Next, Jesus explains that He is more than capable of defending Himself with the help of His Father. "*Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?*" (26:53). Again, Jesus is not condemning self-defense or defending the innocent against attacks by others. The Lord does not need Peter's protection or defense. He could call 72,000 angels. If one angel could wipe out 185,000 soldiers in one night (2 Kings 19:35), twelve legions could destroy the entire Roman Empire in one night. God had sent a heavenly host of fiery chariots to protect Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). Peter's superfluous actions were the wrong actions for the right person. 4) Finally, Jesus again appeals to the need for the fulfillment of all the prophecies related to His betrayal. He reminded Peter, "*How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?*" (26:54). It was the will of God for Jesus to suffer betrayal and arrest (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14). The Psalmist predicted, "*For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me*" (Ps. 22:16).

Jesus has a good question for the mass of armed men who came to arrest Him. "*Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me*" (26:55). Why did such a huge mob come against Jesus? Jesus was not trying to hide from them. They had plenty of opportunity that week to take Him into custody. All He was doing was teaching the masses in the Temple. First, they were fearful of the multitude who at least held Jesus

to be a descendent of David, a prophet, and worker of signs, wonders and miracles. They did not wish to risk a riot or uprising. Second, they had tried to arrest Jesus early on, but the soldiers they sent came back empty-handed. Their excuse, *"No man ever spoke like this Man!"*(John 7:46). Then there was His famed supernatural powers. Yet Jesus would only use them that very hour to heal not defend or attack. Their masses and weapons were unnecessary. Jesus was willing to calmly surrendered to them. Jesus was a peaceful man. And they were acting out of cowardice.

Jesus was submitting to the will of God in allowing Himself to be taken into custody. *"But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled"* (26:56). It was at this point the disciples fulfilled Zechariah 13:7 which Jesus mentioned in verse 31: *"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled"* (26:56b). Also note the prophecies of Isaiah 53:3 and Dan. 9:26. This is the ninth prediction highlighted by Matthew's Gospel.

Questions:

1. What would be the reason the disciples stumble?
2. Where is the prediction found in the Old Testament that the disciples would desert Jesus?
3. Who planned the details for Jesus' death?
4. What does Jesus predict in regard to Galilee?
5. What mistakes did Peter make in response to Jesus' prediction of the disciples desertion?
6. What specific prediction would Jesus make about Peter?
7. Where did Jesus position His disciples on the Mount of Olives? Why?
8. In the three occasions Peter, James, and John were the only disciples with Jesus. What are two common denominators in these events?
9. What does Jesus pray in the Garden? What does the *"cup"* refer to?
10. How does Jesus resolve His struggle in the Garden?

11. What two times do angel(s) come to strengthen Jesus?
12. Why did Jesus rebuke the three in the Garden?
13. Estimate how many may have been in "*the great multitude*" which came to arrest Jesus?
14. What sign did Judas give? How did Jesus respond?
15. Who cut whose ear off?
16. Why was Peter's actions wrong?
18. What rebuke did Jesus have for the arresting multitude?
19. What predictions do the disciples fulfill when they desert Jesus?

Application & Discussion:

1. List some ways we may be overconfident in our service to Christ.
2. How does watching and praying assist in avoiding temptation?
3. How do some Christians desert Jesus today?

Homework: Stay alert, watch and pray and do not betray your Lord and Master.

A Trying Morning of Trials

Matthew 26:57 - 27:10

According to John those who arrested Jesus took Him to Annas (John 18:13). Annas was according to the Jews, the legitimate High Priest. However, he was replaced by the Romans. First, by his four sons and now by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Due to his political and religious power among the Jews his opinion was sought after first. If he found fault in Jesus, this would greatly influence the rest of the Jewish rulers.

This is just one of six trials Jesus endured in less than twelve hours. The Jewish trials came in three parts and the Roman trials had three sessions. There have been many important trials throughout the centuries, such as, O.J. Simpson, Watergate, King Charles I, Nazi trials a Nuremburg, etc. But this convenes the trial of all time: the trials of the Son of God.

Trial by the Sanhedrin, 26:57-68

◆ Injustice by Holding Night Time Court Proceedings

After first taking Jesus to Annas *“those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled”* (26:57). The Jews had a court system which included local 23-member courts and the highest court was in Jerusalem with seventy members. It was referred to as the “Council” or the Sanherdrin. In case of a tie vote the High Priest was permitted to vote.

This trial convened at night and therefore according to Jewish Law was illegal due to the fact this was a capital offense. Neither could they hold court on the eve of the Sabbath or one of the feasts according to the Mishnah. The legal rules to secure justice were being set aside because of this need to hurriedly find a crime to fit the desired punishment: death.

The trial was a series of injustices. They were merely going through the motions in this emergency meeting of the Council. After all Caiaphas had already made it clear that he intended to sacrifice Jesus in order to save the nation (John 11:47-54).

◆ Injustice by Use of False Witnesses

The Law of Moses forbade the testimony of a false witness (Ex. 23:1). Yet *“all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death”* (26:59). This is putting the cart before the horse in legal proceedings. One is first indicted of a crime and then the punishment is meted out according to the law. They are starting out with the punishment and then seeking evidence on which in accuse him of a capital crime. *“Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none”* (26:50). They were not seeking justice, but fishing around for evidence. They could not use Judas. He was about to confess his guilt in betraying Jesus, declaring Him innocent, and also return the thirty pieces of silver. Mark’s Gospel adds *“their testimonies did not agree”* (Mark 14:56). In today’s court of law jury members would be instructed not to even consider such testimony and it would be stricken from the record. So, with no usable evidence to convict Jesus, they had no reason to hold Him. Without any indictment they had no just reason to arraign Him in the first place.

◆ Injustice in Inconsistent Witness Testimony

All was lost and the night court wasted. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, *“This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days’”* (26:60a,61). Again Mark adds a detail which will add to our understanding. *“But not even then did their testimony agree”*(Mark. 14:59). One of the things they needed to agree on is not just the details about when and

where the incident took place. It is true that they had to have at least two witnesses in the capital case (Deut. 19:15). Yet, they did not have two witnesses that could agree. So, they are back square one. The case against Jesus is falling apart.

What did Jesus really say? *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”* (John 2:19). This was the answer he gave in the Temple during the time He first cleansed it. It was an answer to the Jews who were demanding a sign. Later they would demonstrate that they understood Him to be talking about His body and not the Temple itself. After Jesus’ dead body was placed in the tomb, they went to Pilate to ask for a guard. The reason given was Jesus’ claim to arise from the dead after three days. Still speaking against the Temple, the most holy place in all Jerusalem or the world at that time, was serious. The charge of speaking against the Temple would later be used against Stephen as evidence he was worthy of being stoned to death (Acts 7:45–50).

◆ **Injustice by Induced Self-incrimination**

With their case falling apart due to lack of evidence by a plurality of creditable witnesses, Caiaphas had to do something and fast. So he brazenly begins to berate and compel Jesus to respond, *“Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?”* (26:62). Jesus fulfills yet another prophecy by keeping silent. *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth”* (Is. 53:7).

Caiaphas becomes even bolder by inducing Jesus under oath to incriminate Himself. The High Priest says, *“I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”* (26:63). Caiaphas’ oath is well worded. For Jesus to claim to be the Messiah is not blasphemy or illegal. At best the statement alone is delusional. For Jesus to say He is the Son of God will not work for He had already claimed that all Jews think they are sons of God (John 10). However, for Jesus to admit He has claimed to be both the Christ and the Son of God is blasphemy.

Legally Jesus did not have to answer. However, God’s plan is controlled by Him, and not by man. Jesus hands them the evidence they are looking for by answering in the affirmative. Jesus said *“I am”* (Mark 14:62) or *“You say that I am”* (Luke 22:70) or *“It is as you said”* (26:64a). This was the capital crime they were looking for. Blasphemy was punishable by death.

Jesus uses this opportunity to focus Caiaphas’ attention of the fact that He is the Christ and the Son of God by referring to both Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 and applying it to Himself. He said, *“Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (26:64). *“Son of Man”* is considered by them and Jesus to be a title for the Messiah and *“sitting at the right hand of Power”* (*“Power”* being a substitute name for God) demonstrates His claim to be Deity.

No time or effort was allotted to investigate these claims made by Jesus. They were supposed to be the experts of the Law and deal justly according to the Law. If they only looked there was plenty of evidence to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God by way of His miracles and the fulfillment of many prophecies. Even those predictions being realized during the arrest and trial of Jesus.

◆ **Injustice Due to Illegal Court Procedures**

Caiaphas violates the Law of Moses when he *“tore his clothes.”* The High Priest was not permitted to treat these holy garments in such a desecrating fashion (Lev. 21:10). Clothes were torn in grief or out of objection to something one hears. However, this is done by Caiaphas for dramatic influence upon the Sanhedrin.

Claiming he has the proof, Caiaphas asks for the Council’s response. *“He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?”* (26:65,66a). Instead of voting upon Jesus guilty they move immediately to sentencing Him to death. *“They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death’”* (26:66b).

In a capital case, such as this one, the convicted criminal was to be sentenced on the same day of His verdict. A least one day of fasting was required before a death sentence could be carried out. This would allow time for the other evidence to come in preventing the execution of an innocent man. Furthermore, Jesus was not offered an opportunity for defense on his behalf.

◆ **Injustice by Mistreatment of Accused**

Although Jesus had been previously slapped during His hearing before Annas, now the Jewish guard “*spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands*” (26:67). To spit on one was one of the highest forms of expressing hate and insult. They blindfolded him (Luke 22:64) and then asked Jesus to “*Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?*” (26:67). Such treatment, was unjust and illegal.

However, their illegal treatment of Jesus did fulfil the messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 50:6: “*I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.*” And this allowed Jesus to be an example to His disciples on how to deal with such abuses. “*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (1 Pet. 2:21a-23).

Trial of Peter’s Denial, 26:58,69-75

While the other disciples fled in all directions, “*Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end*” (26:58). He has deserted His Master but not completely. A disciple is to follow his teacher and Peter is following, but at a distance.

▶ **First Trial and Denial**

Peter is met by three different individuals who are going to ask him a question about his association with Jesus. This is going to take place while Jesus is undergoing His interrogations by Caiaphas, the High Priest. Peter is first approached by a servant girl of the High Priest stating, “*You also were with Jesus of Galilee*” (26:69). Peter responds with his first denial, “*I do not know what you are saying.*” He had planned to remain incognito, but he was recognized in the crowd. Mark tell us that at this first denial the cock crowed for the first time (Mark 14:68). This would have been around three in the morning. This should have been a reminder of Jesus’ warning. Peter obviously pays no attention.

▶ **Second Trial and Denial**

Peter moved to another location out to the gateway when he was spotted again. This time another servant girl does not speak directly to Peter but calls the attention of others while point out Peter, “*This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth*” (26:71). Now Peter increases the intensity of his denial. “*But again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man!’*” (26:72). Instead of just claiming ignorance about what the first girl was saying, he started to claim that he did not know Jesus. This is supported with an oath. Imagine calling upon God as a witness to our lie. This is the same Peter who was the first to confess Christ as the “Son of God.” He should have remembered this and what Jesus said about taking such oaths “*do not swear at all*” (5:34). Instead he should have truthfully given a “yes.” While Jesus was inside taking an oath and telling the truth about His true identity and relationship with God, Peter was outside taking an oath and lying while claiming ignorance about Jesus’ true identity and his relationship with Him.

▶ **Third Trial and Denial**

Luke tells us that another hour passes (Luke 22:59), before someone else says to Peter, “*Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you*” (26:73). Peter obviously had an accent associated with Galilee. Those northern Jews could be identified by their dialect. (Yes, Peter was a Jewish yankee and in that case so was Jesus).

In each temptation of Peter the comments and questions also intensify with detailed evidence to convict Peter as an associate of Jesus. This time a relative of Malchus (whose ear Peter removed with a sword) asked Peter, “*Did I not see you in the garden with Him?*” (John 18:26).

Once more Peter intensified his denial with not only an oath but with cursing, “*I do not know the Man!*” (26:74a). The “*cursing*” is from the Greek *katanathematizein* meaning literally “to anathematize.” The prefix kata means “down”, so Peter is calling down upon himself a grave curse if he is lying about

knowing Jesus. This is not necessarily involving profane or dirty language, although it could include it.

At his final, third denial *“immediately a rooster crowed”* (26:74b). This was the second time according to Mark (Mark 14:72) and would have been at sunrise around 5:30 to 6:00 o'clock in the morning.

Luke's account reads, *“and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord”* (Luke 22:61). What Peter remembered at this point was the *“Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times”* (26:75a).

The final direct mention of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew is that *“he went out and wept bitterly”* (26:75b). The beginning of true repentance involves godly sorrow.

How did such a outspoken and courageous leader among the disciples fall to such a low point in his faith? His denials are a mere climax in a series of failures on the part of Peter. First, he argued with Jesus about the prediction that all of them would desert Him. Next, He belittled the strength and faith of his fellow disciples. Third, and associated with the second failure was his exaggeration of his own strength that he would never desert but die first. Fourth, Peter failed to watch and pray to avoid temptation like this, instead three times he was found sleeping. Then came the futile attack on Malchus using a carnal weapon. Following this he did desert Jesus along with the rest of the disciples. Then he comes and stands not with Jesus in defense but outside in the courtyard trying to blend in with others. Luke tells us that he was warming Himself by the fire like others (Luke 22:55). Finally, he had failed to remember the warnings of Jesus.

After Jesus' resurrection Peter would have a chance to recant and recover from his denials by confessing three times his love for Jesus (John 21:1ff). If Peter fell so hard in faith, so can we. If Christ can restore Peter, so He can restore us when we fall. When the rooster crows in our lives, we need to remember, repent and be renewed.

Trial by Pontius Pilate, 27:1-2

Jewish law required that a capital case not be tried in the night and have at least one day for trial and a second day of sentence. However, having accused Him of blasphemy and sentencing Him to death, they reconvened with all the members to the Council in the morning (Mark 15:1). The purpose was to plot *“against Jesus to put Him to death”* (27:1). There is one hurdle that they must pass and that is the fact that Rome had removed their right to inflict the death penalty (John 18:31). Only the Roman procurator or governor of Judaea had the power. So *“when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor”* (27:2). This event fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus in chapter twenty and verse nineteen.

Pontius Pilate was appointed by Tiberius, 26 A.D. The first archeological evidence found of Pilate was in 1961 at Caesarea. An inscription to Tiberius contained the words *“Pontius Pilate...prefect of Judea”*. He is most famous for the death of Jesus Christ whom he proclaimed to be innocent on at least three occasions. Pilate later slaughtered many Samaritans. For this he was called back to Rome to answer formal charges and believed as a result to have committed suicide in around 35 or 36 A.D.

Trial of Judas' Tragic Betrayal, 27:3-10

Where was Judas during the first two trials of Jesus. We can only speculate. However, he did see that Jesus *“had been condemned”* to death (27:3). Perhaps he heard the verdict and sentence handed down by the Council or he saw them leading Jesus to Pilate.

It is obvious the Judas did not intend for Jesus' death. Perhaps he assumed they would not be able to find Him guilty of a capital crime or he just was so greedy he did not think clearly about the consequences of his actions or he assumed Jesus would avoid the government powers as he did before. Judas responded to this turn of events by first becoming *“remorseful.”* This is not the same word for repentance which involved a change of mind and turning around. Instead it refers to Judas' regret. Paul says that only godly sorrow can lead to true repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

The second step taken by Judas was to try to rid himself of the guilt that plague his conscience

by bringing *“back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.”* He should have returned to Jesus who alone could have forgiven him. Restitution for one’s crime is scriptural (Luke 19:8). This world would be a better place if more men and women were like Judas and returned their ill-gotten gains. Restitution is involved in repentance, but more is involved.

Judas gives the priests and elders a two-part confession. First, *“I have sinned,”* (27:4a). Confession of sin is a good start. Again this does not prove genuine repentance or bring forgiveness. Only God can forgive sin, not the chief priests and the elders.

The second part of Judas’ confession is that Jesus is innocent. He had been with Jesus for three years and could find no fault in Him. Perhaps, he assumed that this admission and the return of the money would encourage the Jewish leaders to overturn their verdict and rescind the death penalty.

The Jewish leadership responded, *“What is that to us? You see to it!”* (27:4). Justice was their business and they should have seen to it. However, they did not care about Judas or Jesus or justice. Judas and the rulers were partners in crime, but they were not about to help each other correct this great travesty of justice. They are done with Judas. His problems are his and not theirs.

At their rejection Judas *“threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed”* (27:5a). This was done in malice. They were going to get the money back like it or not. Now the money is their problem and they need to see to it.

Judas’ final reaction to the realization of his sin was that he *“went and hanged himself”* (27:5b). Suicide was not the answer. It is just a small word beginning a very long sentence. Judas felt cursed. And rightly so for the Law of Moses says, *“cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person”* (Deut. 27:25). The Law of Moses also says, *“for he who is hanged is accursed of God”* (Deut. 21:23). He still could have repented and returned to Jesus. Nothing could atone for the blood stained conscience of Judas, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Now the Jewish leaders are in a dilemma. What to do with this blood money? They could not put it in the treasury, because it was considered *“the price of blood.”* This was based on Deuteronomy 23:18 where the money paid to a prostitute or a male prostitute could not be contributed to the Temple treasury. By their traditions they have added the price paid to betray innocent men to death. It does make good sense that blood money contributed to the Temple would be an abomination. They had no qualms about taking money from the Temple treasury to pay Judas to betray an innocent man or engage in illegal trials or find false witnesses or violate Jesus’ just rights to a fair trial or plot the death of an innocent man, but now their conscience will not permit them to take the money back into the Temple treasury because it is blood money. This is where they draw the line! Furthermore, they are admitting they are partners in the crime by calling it *“the price of blood.”* No wonder Jesus kept calling them “Hypocrites!”

By putting their collective heads together the Jewish rulers came up with a solution. They *“bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day”* (27:7-8). The place is called *“Akeldama”* according to Luke (Acts 1:19).

Matthew points out yet another fulfillment of prophecies. *“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me’”* (27:9-10). There has been an apparent contradiction here in that the closest comparable prophecy in the Old Testament is Zechariah 11:12,13. Some believe an early scribe mistakenly wrote Jeremiah instead of Zechariah. Others suggest that Jeremiah may have orally prophesied this and Matthew knew through the inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Still others claim that Jeremiah 18,19, and 32 are under consideration by Matthew. John MacArthur wrote, *“The explanation is found in the Jewish division of the Old Testament into three sections—the Law, the writings, and the prophets. In the rabbinical order of the prophetic books. Jeremiah was always listed first. For that reason the entire prophetic category was sometimes referred to as Jeremiah...was the equivalent of saying, ‘recorded in the prophetic books’”* (MacArthur 229,230).

Questions:

1. Why was the timing of Jesus’ trial illegal?

2. Why were they seeking witnesses? What problems did the witness pose for the case against Jesus?
3. What was the real meaning behind Jesus prophecy in John 2:19?
4. What injustice to Caiaphas commit when interrogating Jesus and putting him under oath?
5. Why did Jesus keep silent?
6. What blasphemy did they hold Jesus guilty? Was this a true case of blasphemy? Explain.
7. What proof does Jesus offer as to His claim to be both the Messiah and the Son of God?
8. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Jesus indictment of blasphemy?
9. What illegal court procedures were unjustly done in regard to Jesus' sentencing?
10. What prophecy was fulfilled in the treatment of Jesus by the guards of the court?
11. Show how each questioning of Peter's association with Jesus increases in intensity and compare it to Peter's response and how they increased in intensity.
12. How did Peter's speech betray him?

13. What did the crowing of the rooster remind Peter of? How did he respond? Why?
14. Why did the Jews need Pilate the Roman governor involved in convicting and sentencing Jesus to death?
15. How did the chief priests respond to Judas?
16. What did they do with the thirty pieces of silver?
17. How should have Judas handled his remorse?
18. What prophecy does Judas and the chief priests fulfill?

Application & Discussion:

1. What injustices are being done by the world against Jesus today?
2. Contrast Judas' remorse with Peter's.
3. What is the apparent contradiction involving Jesus quoting Jeremiah? How might this be resolved?

Homework: When the rooster crows in your life this week remember the warnings of Jesus and repent.

Passion & the Cross

Matthew 27:11-44

Trial before Pontius Pilate, 27:11-13

Matthew returns to the account of Jesus' trial before Pilate. First, the Gospel mentioned it at the beginning of the chapter in order to focus on why Judas was so desperate to undo his devilish deed. The Jews told Pilate that Jesus had claimed himself to be king. So Pilate asked Jesus, "*Are You the King of the Jews?*" (27:11). Jesus affirms this to be true. However, He also told the Roman governor that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

Pilate goes to the chief priests and elders to let them know that he has not found evidence to support their indictment. During their accusation Jesus again remains silent. Pilate would have seen many men brought before judgment. Most men under indictment could not be silenced as they defended themselves. Jesus could not be made to speak "*one word, so that the governor marveled greatly*" (27:14). Jesus was innocent and did not need to answer such unfounded charges. Pilate notices Jesus' brave self-assurance.

Upon finding out that Jesus was from Galilee He sends him to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. Matthew did not record the trial held before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12). Antipas does not find cause to condemn Jesus, so he sends him back to Pilate.

Taking the Place of Barabbas, 27:15-26

Pilate now attempts to release Jesus based upon a custom during the feast. "*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished*" (27:15). With a stroke of genius Pilate offers up the most vile prisoner and offers the people a choice between "*a notorious prisoner called Barabbas*" (27:16) and Jesus who was a peaceful Rabbi doing many good works.

Not much is known about Barabbas except what is mentioned in the Gospel accounts. John said "*Barabbas was a robber*" (Jn. 18:40). More details come from Luke: "*Barabbas - one who for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder, was cast into the prison...he, for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison*" (Lk. 23:19,25). And Mark says, "*Barabbas, bound with them that had made insurrection, men who in the insurrection had committed murder*" (Mk. 15:7).

There are three reasons given in the context as to why Pilate sought to release Jesus instead of just giving into the Jewish leadership's demands. First, he was impressed on how Jesus calmly remained silent midst all the hateful accusation. Next, he knew enough about what had been going on between them and Jesus to know "*they had handed Him over because of envy*" (27:18). Jesus entry into Jerusalem on a colt being hailed "*Son of David*" a term for Jewish royalty and His cleansing of the temple would have become known to him. Jesus was more popular with the populous than the Pharisees and the rest of the Jewish leadership. Another reason had to do with a message sent to him while still contemplating the charges against Jesus "*while he was sitting on the judgment seat*" (27:19a). "*His wife sent to him, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him'*" (27:19b). There is nothing to suggest this was a dream of divine origin. She too would have known of Jesus and Pilate rising early in the morning to judge Him. Romans were very superstitious when it came dreams. This would be enough to make Pilate more cautious and remind him of his role in ruling with Roman justice.

Pilate's wife was Claudia Procula. Marrying her was a wise political move for she was the

granddaughter of Caesar Augustus. According to the apocryphal writing called the *Acts of Pilate*, she became a convert. The Greek Orthodox claims her as one of their saints. Of course, there is no real credible evidence beyond this tradition.

Pilate was most likely surprised when he offered the people *"whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"* (27:17) and they chose Barabbas. But the Jewish rulers were not going to leave anything to chance. So they *"persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus"* (27:20) crying out concerning Jesus *"Let Him be crucified!"* His attempt to release Jesus has failed.

Pilate was not one to give up so easily. He *"sought the more to release him"* (John 19:11,12). However, instead of having the courage to release a man whom he had declared to be innocent three times (*"I find no fault"* -John 18:38; *"I find in him no fault at all"* -John 19:4; *"I find no fault in him"* -John 19:6), he instead gave into his fears. *"When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it'"* (27:24). Pilate was perhaps using a legal rule from the Law of Moses in an effort to show the Jews knew he was innocent of Jesus' murder. In Deuteronomy 21:1-9 a murder was to be investigated by the elders of the closest town. If no suspect could be found they *"shall wash their hands over the heifer... Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O Lord, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel'"* Pilate was far from innocent. He knew he was delivering up an innocent man to be killed. All the water in the world would not wash away his guilty conscience.

Pilate could not pass off his responsibility to do justice by simply saying, *"you see to it."* This is what the chief priests tried to do in telling Judas *"What is that to us? You see to it!"* (26:4). Pilate was indicating they take Him and just do what they wished.

The people responded with a rash vow, *"His blood be on us and on our children"* (27:25). Some forty years later at the fall of Jerusalem some thirty thousand young men would be crucified upon the walls of Jerusalem according to Josephus. This verse is not a prophecy of eternal condemnation upon all generation of Jews. Nor is it to be misused to support anti-semitic attitudes and violence.

Pilate was motivated to give up the fight and released Jesus when they called into questions this loyalty to Rome. *"If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar"* (John 19:12). *"Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified"* (27:26).

The first stage of crucifixion began with the Roman flagellation. This scourging was not a simple beating or whipping. A whip known as a flagrum was used. It had eight thick leather straps with two lead balls fastened to the ends of each, or three thick leather straps with several sharp pieces of bone fastened on to them. The prisoner's back is laid bare and hands tied to a post above his head. The heavy whip is brought down across his shoulders, back, and legs. It cuts the skin, then the skin. Then deeper into the flesh and to the bone, and arterial bleeding. What isn't cut is badly bruised. When at the point of death, the beating is stopped

Torture by the Soldiers, 27:27-31

From Pilate's Judgment Seat Jesus is taken to the Praetorium next to Pilate's residence and part of the Fortress of Antonia. This is named after barracks in Rome which housed Caesar's personal guard. Notice *"the whole garrison"* took part in abusing and mocking Jesus. The soldiers of Herod had done something similar to Jesus earlier that morning (Luke 23:11) and so did those servants of the High Priest. Roman soldiers mockingly threw a robe over His back. Matthew says it is "scarlet" while Mark calls it "purple." It could have been both plus another color (Ex. 26:31). Next they put a crown of thorns on his head and scepter in hand; mocking him as King of the Jews. Then, they struck him and drove the thorns deeper into His head. Tired of their sadistic sport, they tore the robe off his bloody clotting wounds as one carelessly removes a bandage. This abuse is all part of the fulfillment of prophecy (Is. 53:4; 50:6; Gen.

3:15).

Transporting the Cross, 27:32

Before heading off to be crucified the heavy patibulum or crossbeam is tied across Jesus' shoulders and He is made to walk the way to the cross, uphill. According to the Law of Moses executions would have been forbidden inside the city (Num. 15:35 Heb. 13:12). At first Jesus was able to carry it Himself (John 19:17). Since Jesus could not carry it having lost much blood and having pain caused to His back, the Romans compel Simon of Cyrene carry it. Roman soldiers had the power to enlist common people to assist them (Matt. 5:41). Cyrene a capital city of a Roman province west of the Egyptian city of Alexandria and on the coast in what is now modern day Libya.

According to the Gospel of Mark Simon was mentioned as the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark. 15:21). The only reason for this mention is they were known to the readers of the first century. Paul mentions Rufus and his mother in Romans 16:13. Perhaps, Simon witnessing Jesus crucifixion later became a Christian along with his family. Christians from Cyrus and Cyrene were said to have come and taught the Gospel in Antioch of Syria and establish the mostly Gentile congregation (Acts 11:20).

Tasting the Sour Wine. 27:33,34

The place of Jesus crucifixion was called Golgatha which is the Aramaic for "skull." The term "calvary" is from the Latin term *calvaria* meaning "skull". The place of the skull is not known. However, there is said to be a rock near the north entrance of the Old City which is said to resemble a skull. Others have claimed it was so named due to the executions by beheading.

Christ is offered wine mingled with myrrh (Matthew 27:34). This was a custom of the Jews. It was a mild analgesic mixture. It is a narcotic concoction and would have dulled the senses of the victim of crucifixion. It is said that the wealthy women of Jerusalem gave this as a means of showing mercy to those about to be crucified. Others claim that the Roman soldiers gave it for the purpose of calming the criminal. Thus making it easier for soldiers to nail them to a cross. *"But when He had tasted it, He would not drink"* (27:34). Christ was willing to suffer and do His Father's Will. He would not go to the cross for us in a drugged, semi-conscious condition.

This was another fulfillment of prophecy. *"They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"* (Psalms 69:21). Mark tells us that this mixture contained myrrh (Mark 15:23). Keep in mind the wisemen brought myrrh as a gift to the child Jesus (2:11) and He would be given myrrh for His burial and here it is offered as a gift for His crucifixion (John 19:39).

Taking the Garments, 27:35-36

After offering Jesus the potion of wine and gall *"they crucified Him"* (27:35a). Cicero called crucifixion "a most cruel and disgusting punishment...It is impossible to find the word for such an abomination...Let the very mention of the cross be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears" (Boice 614). As Cicero has alluded, the Romans did not crucify their citizens. This form of execution is said to be the most humiliating, painful, and torturous. The term excruciating is derived by the term crucifixion and literally refers to pain "from or out of the cross."

The Gospel of Matthew is not so much interested in the procedure of crucifixion as it focuses on the participants and their role. Again unwittingly the enemies of Jesus fulfill yet another prophecy. *"And divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: 'They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots'"* (27:35b). It is a fulfillment of Psalms 22:18: *"They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."* This is the tenth prediction focused on by Matthew using the phrase *"that it might be fulfilled."* John informs us the reason the soldiers did not divide the garment itself but instead cast lots or gambled was do to the fact it was *"without seam, woven from the top in one piece"* (John 19:23).

Jesus would have been led to the cross by a group of four soldiers called a *quaternion*. These same men would have saw to His crucifixion, divided up His possessions and then *"sitting down, they kept watch over Him there"* (27:36). They would stay till Jesus was determined to have died on the cross.

Their duties at this point would have been to keep friends, family members and even disciples from either rescuing Jesus or ending His suffering by killing him.

Titulus Over the Cross, 27:37

Often a placard was written with the criminal's name and crime. It was hung around his neck as he carried his cross to the place of crucifixion. Many times it was nailed to a stick and placed over the executed's head. It was called a *titulus* from which is derived the English word for "title." The Roman soldiers "*put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*" (27:37). All four Gospels mention this but none of them agree as to the wording. This is not a contradiction. It just means no one writer included the entire phrase. Taken all together the titulus would have read: THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Pilate was the one who determined the title. Ironically, he declared the truth about who Jesus was. The Jewish leadership wanted him to change it. He replied, "*What I have written I have written!*" (John 19:20-22).

Taunting of Jesus, 27:38-43

Romans liked to get as much of a deterrent and humiliation factor out of their crucifixions as they can. So the tittle was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek so nearly all Passover pilgrims would be able to read it. They also chose well traveled roads and entrances to cities for more exposure. "*And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'*" (27:38-40). The visitors to Jerusalem for the Passover were from about seventeen different locals around the Roman Empire (Acts 2). Others were from Jerusalem. They may have heard about what this criminal was guilty of by others who heard witnesses. Jesus' comment about destroying the Temple and raising it again in three days may have been circulated among the Jews. However, He was speaking about His body being the temple (John 2:19,21) and in three days it would be resurrected. Notice how they are tempting Jesus like Satan had tempted Him similarly in the wilderness. "*If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread*" (4:3).

The Jewish leadership would also get in on the taunting of Jesus. "*Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'*" (27:41-43). The reference to saving others is the miracles of Jesus as He saved them from terminal illnesses and demon possession. This is an indirect belief that Jesus did perform these great wonders. However, coming down from the cross and saving Himself would prove just the opposite. He was to be the King who died on the cross according to the will of God. His death and thus fulfillment of all these prophecies in fact proved Him to be the Son of God. Furthermore, those enemies of the Crucified King and Son of God are fulfilling yet another prophecy: "*All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'*" (Psalm 22:7-8). They are doing so with exacting detail.

Thieves Crucified with Christ, 27:38,44

Back in verse thirty-eight it is mentioned that "*two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.*" The term for "*robbers*" is the same Greek word used to describe the criminal activity of Barabbas. This crime is not mere theft, but theft involving violent crime such as murder. This has led to the speculation that these two were partners in crime with Barabbas and that the middle cross was originally intended for him and not Jesus.

These two criminals also taunted Jesus "*with the same thing*" (27:44). Later one of the thieves would repent and even rebuke his fellow thief. He would proclaim Jesus innocence and ask Jesus to give him a place in the coming kingdom. Jesus declared that he would be with Him that day in Paradise (Luke

23:39-43).

And once more we see the fulfillment in the crucifixion of yet another prophecy. *“He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”* (Is. 53:12).

Questions:

1. How did Pilate react to the silence of Jesus?
2. Who was Barabbas?
3. Why did Pilate offer the people the choice to release Jesus or Barabbas?
4. What things were motivating Pilate to seek the release of Jesus?
5. What do we know of Claudia Procula?
6. Why did Pilate give into the demands of the Jews to crucify Jesus?
7. Why did Pilate wash his hands? Why was this futile?
8. What is a scourging? Why did Pilate have Jesus scourged?
9. How did the whole Roman garrison mistreat Jesus? How did Pilate respond to this?
10. Why was Jesus crucified outside the city?
11. What part of the did Jesus carry?
12. Who carried Jesus' cross the rest of the way? Why?
13. How does Mark refer to this man? Why?

14. Why is the place of Jesus' crucifixion called "Golgotha" and "the place of the skull" and "Calvary"?
15. Why did Jesus refuse to drink the wine mingled with myrrh? What prophecy was fulfilled in this refusal?
16. How did the Roman soldiers fulfill the prophecy in Psalm 22:18?
17. What was a "titulus"? How was it used in Jesus crucifixion? Was its writing truthful?
18. How was the people's taunting of Jesus like the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4:1-11)?
19. Why couldn't Jesus prove Himself to be the Son of God by coming down from the cross?
20. How did the thieves who were crucified with Jesus treat Him?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain ways people today (including Christians) can be guilty of washing their hands of Jesus.
2. What do we have in common with Barabbas? (See Mal. 3:8,9; Ac. 2:36; 3:14,15; 5:28; Heb. 6:6; Matt. 5:21f ; 1 Jn. 3:15; 2 Pet. 2:19; Rom. 6:17,18; 3:23; 6:23).
3. Is it anti-semitic for Christians to point out that Jews and not just Romans were guilty of murdering Jesus? Explain. What is the best way to combat prejudice against those of Jewish descent?

Homework: Live each day so as not to crucify Jesus anew (see Heb. 6:6).

Death & Burial

Matthew 27:45-66

Darkness Over the Cross, 27:45

The first miracle of the cross was the darkness that started at noon (the sixth hour) and lasted till three o'clock in the afternoon (the ninth hour). This could not have been a sandstorm or a storm. It was not a mist or a fog. Many claim it was an eclipse. However, this event occurred at the Passover when there is always a full moon, making it impossible for an eclipse. Furthermore this darkness lasted about three hours and the longest eclipse has lasted less than one hour. Luke tell us that the sun's light failed (Luke 23:44,45). The eruption of volcanos can have this effect on the sky. But Israel has no active volcanoes. The only explanation for this event is that it was supernatural. The timing is too perfect to be anything other than that.

According to extrabiblical writings the Christian writer Tertullian said to non-Christians of the darkness "which wonder is related in your own annals and preserved in your own archives to this day." There is a letter from Pontius Pilate to the emperor of Rome claiming this darkness was over the whole earth.

Why the darkness? We are not specifically told. However, darkness has been associated in the Bible as a sign of Divine Judgment (Is. 13:10-11; Amos 5:20; Joel. 2:2; Zeph. 1:14,15). Before the very first Passover in Egypt there was three days of darkness (Ex. 10:21-23). This event is also associated with a prophecy in Amos 8:9: "*And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.*"

Crying Out On & At the Cross, 27:46-49

Just as the darkness was lifting "*about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'*" (27:46). This is a quotation of Psalm 22:1. There were seven sayings of Jesus upon the cross. Matthew only mentions this one, the Gospel instead focuses on the miracles of the cross.

This is not just a fulfillment of prophecy but an expression of prayer. As such it is the only time Jesus does not call upon God as "Father." It serves as a demonstration of the humanity of Jesus, as He felt abandoned at the hour of His death. And being surrounded by those who taunted and reviled Him. Death is a separation. Jesus was about to die and experience what all men must experience. Even on the cross Jesus "*offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear*" (Heb. 5:7). However, He would resurrect from death and then ascend to God.

This is not a literal separation and abandonment by the Father of the Son. Jesus told His disciples that even though they would desert Him, His Father would not. "*Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me*" (John 16:32; also see 9:28,29).

Those who were listening to Jesus did not think about the quotation from Psalm 22. They used this as a chance to mock Jesus further. Notice three hours of supernatural darkness did nothing to stop their taunts. "*Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This Man is calling for Elijah!'*" (27:47). When someone ran to get Jesus something to drink, others said, "*Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.*" The Jews of the day believed that Elijah had to come before Messiah could come. Therefore, Jesus could not be the Messiah. This was based on a prophecy in Malachi 4:5.

However, John the Baptist was Elijah who was to come (Matthew 17:10-13).

Mercy Shown at the Cross, 27:48

Although Matthew's Gospel does not record the fifth saying of Jesus. Shortly after Jesus quotes from Psalm 22:1 He says, "*I thirst*" (John 19:28). "*Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink*" (27:48). This is not to be confused with the offer of wine mingled with gall rejected by Jesus right before they began to nail Him to the cross. This is also call vinegar and was a watered down cheap drink of soldiers and was non-intoxicating. Therefore Jesus did drink of it and died shortly afterward. Perhaps He accepted it so He would have the ability to finish His final two sayings on the cross. After all this was the shortest of His sayings coming right after one of His longest saying. This event does not just demonstrate an act of mercy but also a fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 69:21: "*They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.*"

Death on the Cross, 47:50

After Jesus would speak His last two sayings on the cross He "*cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit*" (27:50). The term "*yielded up His spirit*" literally means to "let go or send forth the spirit." Jesus died because He chose to give up life and die. It was a conscientious, voluntary surrender of His life. As He had told His disciples during His ministry, "*Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father*" (John 10:17,18).

Miracles of the Cross, 47:51,52

At the moment of Jesus' death three more miracles occur to mark the significance of this event. First, the "*veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom*" (27:51a). The Temple building itself was comprised of the Holy Place and then an inner room called the Holy of Holies. These two were separated by the veil. Only once a year only the High Priest could entered the veil with a sacrifice for the sins of the nation on the Day of Atonement. This tearing of the veil was not an act of man but of God for it tore in two starting at the top.

The tearing of the veil represents the end of the Mosaical system of sacrifices. There is no need for the blood of animals to open the way to the Holy of Holies, all Christians can now have "*boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (Hebrews 10:19). There is no need for continual sacrifices because Jesus "*once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*" (Heb. 9:26). The Greek word for "*once*" is hapax meaning "once without need of repetition." No longer is there a need for a separate priesthood for all saints are priests under Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10). There is not need for a veil for Jesus is our veil (Heb. 10:19). The way to the Most Holy Place is open for all Christians to "*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16).

At the time the veil was ripped the priests were preparing the evening sacrifice. Many of them would have witnessed the miracle. Perhaps that is why sometime after Pentecost "*a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7),

The second miracle of the cross was "*the earth quaked, and the rocks were split*" (27:51b). When God gave to Moses the Law at Mount Sinai there was an earthquake (Ex. 19:16ff.). Now there is an earthquake when Jesus takes away the Law.

Was this a miracle? After all, earthquakes happen all the time as part of natural events. However, this one split rocks but did not destroy buildings or topple crosses. This earthquake is unique in that only the graves of saints were opened. Added to this is the unique timing of the earthquake, all showing this to be a supernatural event.

What does it represent? Great moving events are taking place. Perhaps it "*indicates the removal*

of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:26-27).

The third miracle did not occur simultaneously but come in two parts. First, *“the graves were opened; and”* later *“many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (27:52).* Why did the dead raise only after Christ’s resurrection? Because Jesus had to *“become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20).* After His resurrection He had the keys of death and of the grave (Rev. 1:18). This miracles also shows that God knows where all the saints are buried. And that death is temporary like a sleep. Finally, it show that one day all and not just some will be bodily resurrected when the Lord returns (John 5:28,29).

Confession at the Cross, 27:54

Perhaps there is another purpose the miracles of the cross could serve. They are evidence to produce faith in Christ as the Son of God. *“When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (27:54).* They would have witnessed the darkness, the sayings on the cross, the earthquake, and the opening of certain tombs. All this pointed to Jesus being more than just a mere innocent man being murdered on a cross. Unlike the soldiers who were guarding the tomb of Jesus when angels came and rolled back the stone, these soldiers did not play dead. They believed in the one who could give life. Amazingly, nothing is said of the faith and confession of those Jews who knew more about the teachings and miracles of Jesus. Did any of them see and believe?

Women At the Cross, 27:55,56

There were *“many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar” (27:55).* These were followers of Jesus who often supported him financially and in other ways (Luke 8:2,3). Although there may have been about a dozen women at the cross Matthew only mentions three by name. First there is Mary Magdalene who had been possessed by seven demons. Jesus had cast them out. There was *“Mary the mother of James and Joses.”* One o her sons was James the Less an apostle (Mark 15:40) also called James the son of Alphaeus (10:3). John calls this Mary the wife of Clopas (John 19:25). Another possibility is that this is a mention of Mary the mother of Jesus. After all, He had step-brothers with similar names. Next, is Salome (Mark 15:41) and the mother of the apostles James and John who were also known as the sons of Zebedee. John was the only disciple at the cross (John 19:35). John’s Gospel tells us that Mary the mother of Jesus was also at the cross (John 19:26). Other women who may have been at the cross were Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, and Jonanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward and Susaana.

Where are all the men? The disciples had fled. But God has another man who was about to step forward.

Joseph Removed Jesus from the Cross, 27:57-61

When God’s people were about to suffer with a great famine God rose up Joseph to save them. When God needed a man to protect His Son from the murderous scheme of Herod the Great, He planned for Joseph to be the husband of Mary and protect her son, Jesus. Now Jesus’ body is about to be taken from the cross and most likely cast into a garbage heap, another Joseph steps forward as another hero for God.

Not much is known about this Joseph who buried Jesus. This is the first time he is mentioned in the Gospel narratives and this is the last. He was a rich man. Thus he fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 53: 9. Joseph was from Arimathea, *“a city of the Jews”* in Judea (Luke 23:53). He had earlier become a disciple of Jesus, *“but secretly, for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38).* He owned a new tomb close by where Jesus was crucified. Joseph was a *“prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43).* Luke added that he was *“a good and just man. He had not consented to their*

decision and deed" (Luke 23:50,51).

Jesus had died that evening about three o'clock. The Law of Moses forbade a body to hang on a tree over night (Deut. 21:23). Jewish traditions required a body be taken down and buried before the Sabbath began at sundown around six in the evening (John 19:31). Joseph had limited time. He summons his courage (Mark 15:43) and asked Pilate for Jesus' body. The bodies of executed criminals and especially traitors were not often granted a burial. *"Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph"* (Mark. 15:44,45).

Joseph had some help with the burial from another council member of the Sanhedrin, *"Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds"* (John. 19:29). These two men risked the wrath of their fellow counsel men who have just condemned Jesus to death. They may lose their public office, reputation, and even wealth. Joseph was willing to pay for a new tomb and Nicodemus for the expensive burial spices. They also would be considered unclean for touching a dead body and not able to participate in the Sabbath activities and those surrounding the Passover.

Two women from the cross were there to *"observed the tomb and how His body was laid"* (Luke 23:55). Mary Magdalene was one and the *"other Mary"* here is the mother of James and Joses (27:56). They would know exactly where the tomb was, so they would know where to go when returning to add the additional spices and fragrant oils to His burial on Sunday morning. Plus John tells us this tomb was near a garden (John 19:41) giving the women a landmark to help identify the location of the tomb.

The burial of Jesus proves His death. The very character of the tomb in which Jesus' body was placed indicates that Jesus' body was not stolen, mistaken, misplaced or that He was merely in a coma, etc. Since it was a new tomb *"in which no one had yet been laid."* So there could be no error by seeing other bodies and other wrappings and bones (Luke 23:53; John 19:41). There was no other entrance to be gained into this tomb due to the fact that it was cut in solid rock (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46). Jesus would have been powerless to emerge, if still alive. The tomb was also sealed with a large stone (Mk. 16:3,4). Breaking of the seal would mean automatic crucifixion upside down. The three women who first came to the tomb could not have moved it. Jesus was not dead when placed in the tomb He could not have moved it from the inside. Furthermore, He was wrapped with one hundred pounds of spices. Harry Houdini could not have free himself from such.

Jesus Tomb Guarded, 27:62-66

Upon learning that Jesus body had been buried in a tomb the chief priests who are most likely Sadducees join with their long time enemies the Pharisees, yet again. They came to Pilate on the Sabbath. These hypocrites were so careful to keep the Sabbath and condemn Jesus for violating it by performing a miracle and now they violate their own rules by going into the residence of a Gentile leader. On the Sabbath During the Roman trial of Jesus they refused to go into it so as not to defile themselves. They said to Pilate, *"Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."* (27:63,64). They remember Jesus giving them the sign of Jonah (12:38-40). They claimed to be motivated by fear the disciples would come a steal the body to fake a resurrection. This would give the people cause to raise up and riot. Making things worse then when Jesus was alive. They had no reason to fear the disciples. They had deserted Jesus. They were in disbelief even at the empty tomb on Sunday morning. *"For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead"* (John 20:9). They did not fear the disciples, but the resurrection.

Pilate reminds them they had a guard themselves. The temple police or guards would have been what he was referencing. He gives them permission to *"make it as secure as you know how"* (27:65) However, if Jesus is to resurrect, they have no hope of stopping it. Instead of stopping the resurrection their actions would help prove the legitimacy of the resurrection. They secured it by sealing it. Pilate most

likely provided them with an official Rome seal that if broken would have merited the trespassers the death penalty. They set their guard til the third day -Sunday. Until then they were guarding a dead man.

Questions:

1. Explain why the three hours of darkness was a miracle and not just a common natural event?
2. Why did Jesus cry out "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*"
3. What did the people claim Jesus meant by this saying? What did they believe about Elijah and the Messiah?
4. Why do you think Jesus rejected drinking the first cup and accepted the second cup offered to Him at the cross? What are the differences in the content of the two cups?
5. What prophecy does this act fulfill?
6. Explain the meaning and importance of that Jesus "*yielded up His spirit*"?
7. What did the tearing of the Temple veil in two represent?
8. Was the earthquake a miracle? Explain.
9. Did the opening of the tombs and raising of the saints occur simultaneously? Explain.
10. What does the opening of the graves and resurrection of some saints indicate?

11. What effect did the events and sayings of the cross have upon the Centurion and the Roman guard?
12. List the names of the women we know supported the ministry of Jesus and were at the cross?
13. What do we know about Joseph of Arimathea?
14. Why wasn't Jesus' body to be left on the cross?
15. What did the Romans normally do with the bodies of their crucified victims?
16. Who helped Joseph and what did He provide?
17. What dangers and sacrifices were involved in burying the body of Jesus?
18. Why are two women mentioned observing the tomb?
19. Why did the Jewish leaders want a guard set at the tomb of Jesus? What did they really fear?

Application & Discussion:

1. What is the importance of the fact Jesus was buried in a new tomb?

2. What did women do for Jesus during His ministry and death? What can women do today in service of the Lord?

Homework: Share with someone the evidence of the cross showing the Jesus truly was the Son of God.

Resurrection & Commission

Matthew 28:1-20

The most important event of all time is about to be discovered by some female disciples of Jesus - the resurrection of the Son of God. All four Gospels speak of this great event from their own perspective. Many have attacked the Gospel record due to perceived contradictions between these writers. They will point out there were discrepancies in the time of day, disagreements in the number of women, and the variants related to the number of angels. The fact that the Gospel accounts vary is not evidence of contradictions but proof they were not in collusion but giving supplementary facts and not merely copying each other verbatim.

Women Commissioned by Angels to Proclaim the Empty Tomb, 28:1-8

The phrase *"after the Sabbath"* could be translated "well after the Sabbath had passed." The Sabbath would have ended at Sunset several hours before. This is the first Day of the week or Sunday. Coffman believes "Matthew in this place obviously used the Roman method of counting days, making the first day of the week begin at dawn, contrary to the Jewish usage which made it begin the night before at sunset" (Coffman 515). The first day of the week would become known as the "Lord's Day." The day saints would gather to partake of the Lord's Supper and give as one has been prospered. The day John would receive the Revelation on the Island of Patmos.

On their way to the tomb the women believed Jesus' body to still lay dead in the tomb. They would have wondered who was going to move the stone (Mark 16:3). After they arrived, they would question: "Who moved the stone?" *"And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it"* (28:2). The earthquake is not same one which had occurred at the moment of His death (27:51). The angel's appearance *"was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow"* (28:3). The first represents their glory and the snow white clothing indicates pure holiness.

This supernatural event had a profound effect on those guarding the tomb. They *"shook for fear of him, and became like dead men"* (28:4). They were totally impaired with fright. Human weapons, numbers and strength can avail nothing against even one angel of God.

The angel had a message for the women. It consisted of several commands. First, *"do not be afraid"* (28:5a). This is one of the most common commands in all the Bible. The angel gave them a very good reason for not being afraid. *"For I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said"* (28:5b,6a). These women are reminded of Jesus promise of His resurrection (16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19). Jesus is not in His tomb. He has arose. This is a message of great joy. Next, the angel command them to *"come"* (27:6b). Overcoming their fear they can approach. The seal is broken the guards are gone or playing dead. The third imperative given by the angel is: *"see the place where the Lord lay"* (27:6c). The angel did not come to remove the stone so Jesus could get out, He had no need. If He could pass through the grave cloths bound up with a hundred pounds of spices, a stone would offer no hindrance. It was rolled away for the women to see that it was empty. The fourth command was for them to *"go quickly"* (28:7a). Time is of importance. The news of the resurrection cannot be delayed. The first five of those appearances occurred on the day of his resurrection, Finally, they were to *"tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you"* (28:7b). Their message to the disciples were two fold. 1) tell them the joyful news of the resurrection and 2) remind them of their rendezvous at the pre-appointed location

in Galilee.

These women responded with exact obedience. *“So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word”* (28:8). Notice they still had fear but it was tempered by their overwhelming sense of joy. This time of joy is so great that one must share it with others.

Women Commissioned by Jesus With a Message to Disciples, 28:9-10

On their way Jesus meets them with a common greeting as if He just bumping into them at the market or passing by on the road. Recognizing Jesus they came and *“worshiped Him.”* Mere men who are godly reject worship by other men. Even the angels of Heaven refuse to be worshiped. Jesus never refused worship from man while alive and has never rejected it since He has resurrected from the grave. He is God and worthy of all worship (4:10). Jesus also gives them several of the same imperatives, they had received from the angel. *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me”* (28:10). Notice that Jesus now refers to the disciples as *“My brethren.”* The Hebrew writer explains, *“for both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying ‘I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You’* (Heb. 2:11,12).

Before this appearance of Jesus to the women, Mary Magdalene has already received the greatest of blessings in being the first to see the resurrected Lord (John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9). Now more women are so blessed. The first ones commissioned to share the Gospel are women. They were with Jesus and serving Him during His ministry. Women stayed with Him at the cross. They same women observed His tomb’s location. And they were the first to see the empty tomb as proof of the resurrection.

Soldiers Commissioned by Chief Priests to Lie, 28:11-15

As the women were carrying out their commission from the angel and Jesus, the guards were about to be given a commission by the chief priests to go and tell others a lie to cover up the real reason Jesus’ tomb is empty. Only Matthew tells us of the bribing of the guard concerning the events surrounding the empty tomb. The guards did not go to Pilate but to the chief priests. This seems to be more evidence that the soldiers were part of the Temple police under the authority the chief priests and not Roman soldiers.

Upon hearing of the events at the tomb the chief priests assemble the Sanhedrin for them to all hear about the angel and the empty tomb. Instead of believing in the resurrection of Jesus based on the evidence from the guards, they concoct a story. First, *“they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers”* (28:12). They first hired Judas to betray Jesus and now they bribe guards to lie about His body. They come up with a story for them to tell: *“His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept”* (28:13). They promise to keep them safe from Pilate. Their failure could mean the death penalty for them all. Later the soldiers who were to guard Peter were executed by Herod Agrippa I after an angel delivered the apostle Peter from jail (Acts 12:19). The guards took the money. *“And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day”* (28:15). This story has been in circulation ever since. Justin and Tertullian spoke about it being spread in their day. Mark Twain wrote, “A lie can travel around the world and back again while the truth is lacing up its boots.”

Could the body of Jesus have been stolen? Only if the disciples could steal it and successfully dispose of it (Matthew 27:62-66). Many would also lose their life for preaching the resurrection. Why would they die for a lie? Why did not one of them crack under the pressure of persecution and expose the deed? Why would the disciples steal it when they ran away in fear and did not even show any hope in the resurrection? Why would the disciples risk execution? A marble tablet called the Nazareth Decree because of where it was found warns of the death penalty for grave robbers. It is from the first century. How could the guards know what happened if they were all asleep? If they were asleep, how did the rolling away of the stone not awake at least one of them? The Jews would not have stolen it (Matthew 28:11-15). What motive would they have to steal it? Besides, they had every reason to keep Him in the tomb. The Jews were the ones who set up a guard and then paid them to promote the story of the stolen

body. Furthermore, if they did steal it, why didn't they produce the body on the day of Pentecost when the disciples were preaching that Jesus arose, thus silencing their claims forever. One more thing, what grave robber would stop and take the time to remove the grave cloths, unwrap the body with the spices, and fold the napkin used to cover Jesus. Was Jesus' body taken by a bunch of O.C.D. disciples who just had the leave the tomb neat and tidy? Over the millennia other attacks on the veracity of the resurrection have been argued. They likewise have no merit.

Disciples Commissioned by Jesus to Preach the Gospel, 28:16-20

Some time later, perhaps a couple of weeks, *"the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them"* (28:16). The exact location of this mountain is not disclosed. The number of disciple who may have met Jesus in addition to the Apostles is not shared. Some suggest it was the time when the resurrected Jesus *"was seen by over five hundred brethren at once"* (1 Cor. 15:6). When Jesus set this appointment up is not told. Nonetheless when Jesus makes an appointment, He will be there and expects His disciples to show up. So do not forsake such an assembling of the disciples with the Lord.

The reaction was mixed. *"When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted"* (28:17). Again, Jesus, the Son of God, accepts worship. However, some still had their doubts. It seems unlikely it would have been one of the eleven. After all, Jesus appeared to them and presented evidence. Thomas on a separate occasion having touched the hands and side of Jesus, *"answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"* (John 20:28).

This was not the time of the Ascension of Jesus. That would take place near Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).

■ **Universal Authority of Jesus**

Jesus began what is commonly called the Great Commission by declaring, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"* (28:18). Everyone is to submit to the authority of Jesus. He had authority given during His ministry to heal, cast of demons, control nature, forgive sins. etc. Now that He has resurrected from the dead, His authority is established in both Heaven and on earth. He has arose victorious over death. He will be the Head or authority over the church (Eph. 1:20,21). Therefore He has the right to delegate authority to the church through the apostles to carry out this commission. John R. W. Stott wrote, "only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ dare we go to all nations. And only because all authority in heaven as well is his have we any hope of success" (Boice 647).

■ **Universal Mission of the Church**

Often many claim the Great Commission requires everyone to participate in traveling to all the nations of the world. However, the Greek verb for "go" is a present participle and it means "as you are going." In other words, wherever a disciple happens to go in this world, the Gospel message is to be shared. "Go" is not a command but an assumption that disciples will be going here and there throughout the nations.

This mission to make disciples is not limited to the apostles, but to all disciples to make more disciples. Jesus called His disciples to make them fishers of men. They are to make more disciples. These disciples are to make more disciples and so on and on.

■ **Universal Inclusion of Humanity**

During Christ's earthly ministry a limited commission had been given to the Apostles where they went out only to preach the coming of the Kingdom to the Jews (10:1-15). This time all disciples are to share the Gospel with anyone they come in contact with. As Christ died for all men of all nations, He wants all men of all nations to be included in the making of disciples.

■ **Universal Salvation**

The purpose of baptism is well attested to in the New Testament. The Baptism of the Great Commission is the *"one baptism"* (Eph. 4:5). It is for the purpose of forgiving sins (Acts 2:38); saving from sin (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21); washing away sins (Acts 22:16), etc. No one is to be saved apart from

being baptized with this one baptism.

Others argue that one is made a disciple and then they are baptized. "The initial act of obedience to Christ after salvation is to submit to baptism as a testimony to union with Him in His death, burial and resurrection...the act of baptism has absolutely no saving...benefit or power...Baptism has no part in the work of salvation" (MacArthur 343). However, Matthew is telling us that one is made a disciple by baptism. Just as one is made a doctor by medical licensing. No one can become a Christian without baptism.

Those who are making disciples must do so by "*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (28:19). This is not a baptismal formula. Notice the term "name" is singular and stands for the members of the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God. It is by the authority of the Trinity one is saved at the point of baptism. When God created man it is said, "*Let us make man in our image*" (Genesis 1:26) the pronoun is plural. When God saves man and thus makes Him a new creation coming upon out of the water is it by the Godhead.

■ **Universal Obedience To Teaching**

All the disciples who are made from all the nations are not to be left dripping wet on the steps of the baptistry. The disciple-makers are to be "*teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*" The "*all things*" includes the Great Commission. It has been argued by some that the Great Commission has only been given to the Apostles. However, they are in turn here commanded to pass it all as a command to all their disciples.

■ **Universal Divine Presence**

The term "*lo*" is used to call attention to something of importance, so it is not missed. Jesus wants to make sure they hear: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (28:20a). The age is the Christian era which will last till Jesus comes again. "*Amen*" (28:20b) so concludes the first Gospel. Matthew begins by telling us about Jesus who is coming called Emanuel meaning "*God with us*" (1:23). And now ends with the promise from the resurrected Jesus of His continuing presence. As Paul was told by the Lord while he was working in Corinth, "*Be not afraid ... for I am with thee*" (Acts 18:9-10). Hebrews records the words of Jesus, "*For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'*" (Heb. 13:5).

Questions:

1. What is spiritually significant about the first day of the week, Sunday?
2. Why did the women come to the tomb? What problem were they contemplating?
3. Describe the appearance of the angels.
4. How did the guards react to the earthquake and angels?
5. What did the angel instruct the women to do?

6. Why did the angel move the stone from the tomb?
7. How did the women react to seeing Jesus?
8. What did Jesus instruct the women to do?
9. What special blessed role do women play in the resurrection of Jesus?
10. Who did the guards tell about the empty tomb? How did they respond?
11. What were the guards paid to say about the empty tomb?
12. Why does the Jewish leadership promise to protect them from Pilate?
13. Could the body of Jesus have been stolen by Jesus' disciples? Explain.
14. How did the disciples react to seeing Jesus on a mountain in Galilee?
15. What is the extent of Jesus authority?
16. Does the word "go" command all disciples to go to all nations? Explain.

17. Explain the relationship between making disciples and baptism.

18. Is Jesus requiring a baptismal formula to be spoken over the one to be baptized, such as, "I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the name of the Son and name of the Holy Spirit?" Explain.

19. Is the Great Commission a commandment to the Apostles only, are to all Christians throughout all generations? Explain.

20. What comparison can be made with the beginning of Matthew and with the ending of this Gospel? Is this an inclusio?

Application & Discussion:

1. Based on the evidence of the Gospels could Jesus have just swooned or been in a death like state or coma and had revived making it appear He had resurrected?

2. What things are involved in fulfilling the Great Commission?

Homework: Do your part in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Bibliography

- Barclay, William, The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958).
- Barton, Bruce B., Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1996
- Boice, James Montgomery, The Sermon on the Mount, Baker Books, 1972
- Coffman, Matthew
- Dummelow, J. R., One Volume Commentary (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937)
- MacArthur, John F., Matthew 8-15, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1985
- MacArthur, John F., Matthew 16-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1985
- McGarvey, J. W., The Fourfold Gospel (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Publishing Company), p. 283.
- Pope, Kyle, Truth Commentaries: Matthew, Guardian of Truth Foundation 2013
- Robertson, Archibald Thomas, Word Pictures in the New Testament Vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930)
- Swindoll, Charles R., Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-15, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 2020)
- The Teacher's Outline & Study Bible: Matthew 2
- Vincent, Marvin R., Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977)
- Weber, Stuart, Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew
- Wiersbe, Warren W., The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Vol. 1, Victor 2001

Matthew 24:36-51:

- Boice Matthew Vol. 2 515f
- Weber Holman Matthew
- Kyle Pope Truth Matthew
- Dub McClish, Studies in Matthew
- Warren W. Wiersbe, Matthew
- Standard Bible Comm. 1999/2000, 205f.