

*Studies in the Gospel of*  
**Matthew**



**The Forum Terrace Church of Christ**  
**Teen Bible Class Wednesday Evening - Summer Quarter 2023**

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# Introduction to Matthew & Arrival

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## Matthew 1:1 - 2:23

The Gospel of Matthew was the most often quoted book of the New Testament by early Christian writers. It was also likely to have been the most read Gospel among the four. Today, it remains widely read and quoted.

### Authorship

The early Christian writers never wavered in their acceptance of the Gospel of Matthew within the New Testament canon as the inspired writing of the apostle. Many early Christian writers attest to Matthew as the author: Ignatius (bishop of Antioch), Papias (the second-century bishop of Hierapolis), Irenaeus (the bishop of Lyons), Origen (third century), and Eusebius (fourth century). In addition to these writers The Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas also support the authorship of the first Gospel to Matthew. Most early manuscripts have the following heading: "Gospel according to Matthew". Papias (ca 65 - 150 AD) writes: "Matthew has written these words..."

### Matthew, the Man

Matthew is called "*Levi, the tax-gatherer*" in the Gospel of Luke and in the Gospel of Mark he is referred to as "*Levi, the son of Alphaeus*". His name means "gift of the Lord." Some believe this was a name conferred upon him by Jesus.

Jesus called to be one of the twelve apostles (Mt 10:2-3) while he was sitting at his table collecting taxes. This would have most likely have been near Capernaum. He immediately left all to follow Christ (Luke 5:27-28). This would have been a great sacrifice as a publican or tax-gatherer he would have made good money. However, it was at the expense of working for the Romans and being seen by fellow Jews as a collaborator with the enemy: Rome. This made Matthew lower in Jewish society than that of a Gentile. However, Jesus accepted him and Matthew hosted a dinner for all his friends and colleagues to meet him (9:9; Luke 5:29).

Being an apostle of the Lord would have given Matthew an opportunity to witness many of the things from the Ministry of Christ first hand. He would not have to rely on second hand accounts like Mark or Luke. As a publican he would have the skills to keep records concerning Jesus and become a journalist of the group as he traveled with Jesus.

After the resurrection there is no other mention of him in the New Testament. "Tradition holds that he preached the gospel for eight years throughout Judea and then traveled to Persia, Parthia, and Ethiopia, where he died as a martyr in about AD 62" (Osborne xiv).

### Date of Writing

Although it is popular today for some to claim that Mark's Gospel was written first, Clement of Alexandria wrote "the gospels containing the genealogies (Matthew and Luke) were written first" (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 14). Irenaeus, a bishop of Lyons (cs. 130-200 AD): "Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome" (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1). This suggests a date of 61 AD. Eusebius suggests a date of about AD 41. The weight of the evidence seems to consider sometime between AD 40 and AD 55. It most definitely had to be written before 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. After all, there is not one mention of such a cataclysmic event in the Gospel. More importantly Jesus Himself prophesied of the coming event in chapter 24.

## Purpose and Audience

The evidence that Matthew had mainly a Jewish audience in mind is based on the overwhelming Old Testament themes and content in the Gospel. Jerusalem is called “*holy city*” (4:5; 27:53) and “*the city of the great king*” (5:35). Note the Gospel’s emphasis on religious defilement, Jewish customs ceremonial cleansing (15:2), keeping the Sabbath Day, the Temple, David, the Messiah, fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and Moses. The fact that Matthew does not explain Jewish culture like the other Gospel writer shows the Jews to be the target of his Gospel (cf. Mark 7:3, John 19:40).

Other aspects of Matthew’s Gospel that would have appealed to Jewish readers would be:

### ■ The Kingdom

It had been some four hundred years since Malachi closed out the Old Testament with his final prophecies. Now both John and then Jesus come break the centuries of silence by prophesying that the “Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The Jews were want to know: “If Jesus is the King of the Jews, then where is God’s promised kingdom?”

The kingdom theme makes up a major part of the Gospel of Matthew (4:17,23-25; 5:17-20; 9:35; 11:1-19; 12:22-37; 13:10-52; 16:24-27; 18:1-6; 19:13-20:16; 21:28-22:1). “The kingdom of Heaven” (lit. “kingdom of the heavens”) is mentioned thirty-two times in Matthew. He is the only author to use this phrase. In addition, “the kingdom of God” is mentioned five (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). Jesus uses several parable to explain the heavenly nature of the kingdom: the weeds and the tares (13:24-30, 36-43); the mustard seed (13:31-32); the leaven (13:33); the treasure in the field (3:44); the pearl of great price (13:45-46); the fishing net (13:47-50); the unforgiving servant (18:23-35); and the workers in the vineyard (20:1-16).

### ■ The Son of Man

The title “*the Son of Man*” is found thirty times. This is more than any other gospel. The Jews knew that the “*Son of Man*” was promised an “*everlasting kingdom*” in Daniel 7:14.

### ■ Fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew quotes from or alludes to or mentions almost every book in the Old Testament. He is demonstrating to his readers that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. There are sixty-two direct quotes from the Old Testament with the addition of seventy-six allusions. This is more than any other Gospel. He identifies the fulfillment of prophecies on over a dozen specific occasions (1:22-23; 2:5-6; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 11:10; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 21:42; 26:31; 27:9-10).

### ■ Son of David

Eight times the Lord Jesus is called the “*Son of David*” (Matthew 1:1; Matthew 9:27; Matthew 12:23; Matthew 15:22; Matthew 20:31; Matthew 20:31; Matthew 21:9; Matthew 21:15). Matthew begins his Gospel proving through genealogy that Jesus is heir to the throne of David. This would appeal to the Jews due to the Covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7.

### ■ Kingship of Jesus

If there is a theme for the Gospel of Matthew is would most likely be: “Jesus, King of the Jews” (1:1-2,12; 8:1-10; 42; 11:20-12:13; 14:13-36; 15:21-28; 32-39; 17:1-13; 21:12-17; 23-27; 27:37; 28:16-20). God was to raise up a Messiah-King to sit upon the throne of David.

### ■ The Messiah

Jesus as the messiah is found in many sections of Matthew’s Gospel (2:14-15, 21-23; 3:1-4:11; 4:13-16; 12:15-21; 13:13-15; 16:1-4, 13-20; 20:29-21:11; 22:41-46; 24:1-35; 26:1-27). The Jews long for the coming of the Messiah.

## Jesus’ Birth & Childhood

### ■ Validation of Jesus by Genealogy, 1:1-17

Matthew introduces “*Jesus Christ*.” “Jesus” is from the Greek *Iesous* which is a translation of the Hebrew name *yehosua* being translated in English as “Joshua.” It means “Jehovah saves”. The title given Jesus by Matthew is “Christ” from the Greek *Chrestos* meaning “anointed one.” The Hebrew term

is *masiah* or Messiah. Jesus was of the seed of Abraham. God told Abraham, *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice"* (Gen. 22:18). He was also to be of the seed of David. *"Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations"* (Ps. 89:4). And the "Son of David" therefore in line to be king. "Son of David" was considered by the Jews of Matthews day to be a Messianic designation.

For a millennia Jews have been awaiting the fulfillment of these promises. What right and proof did Jesus have to claim the Throne of David and bless mankind. Matthew begins with a genealogy to offer documented proof.

Matthew could have compiled his genealogies from public records kept by Jews to help determine who was qualified to be priests or marry a priest. Most Jews maintain family trees for the purpose of inheritance and tribal identity. Since the destruction of Jerusalem all such public records have been forever lost.

Matthew's genealogy is different from that of Luke's. Whereas Luke's family tree for Jesus ranges from Adam to Jesus, Matthew begins with Abraham. Luke begins with Jesus and lists his genealogy in descending order. The biggest difference is Matthew is dealing with Joseph's side of the family tree while Luke focuses on Mary's side. "Matthew's genealogy traced the line through Solomon, while Luke's traced it through Nathan, another one of David's sons" (Wiersbe).

Matthew arranges his imperfect genealogy into three groups of fourteen. This may have been used as a memory device. It was also for the purpose of organizing them into three distinct historical periods. The first fourteen were about patriarchs to the first King in the line of Judean kings related to Jesus, thus the mention of King David. The monarchy is the focus of the second set of fourteen. The third group of ancestors covers the period of history beginning with the captivity, exile, return and right up to the Roman period.

Matthew does not mention everyone in his genealogy. He cites those of importance to his message. The mention of Judah is of prophetic importance. *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people"* (Gen. 49:10). David's father, Jesse, also figures in Messianic prophecy (Is. 11:1,10).

In the first section of Jesus genealogy Matthew mentions some of his more famous or infamous grandmothers: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Tamar was guilty of prostitution and incest with Judah. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lied. Bathsheba was an adulterous. Ruth was a Moabite widow and grandmother of David.

In the second grouping of fourteen generations Matthew leaves out four kings: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and Jehoiakim.

The list of the many known ancestors of Jesus with hard to pronounce names are by no means listed here for the Bible student to explore the lives of them one by one. However an argument could be made that this list represents not just proof of Jesus claim to royalty but a genealogy of grace. Abraham did not trust in God when he left for Egypt or took Hagar as a second wife in hopes of helping God fulfill his promises. David was not a stellar father, committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and gave into the Devil's temptation to number the people. Solomon married many forbidden foreign wives who turned his heart from God to idolatry. All the men and women in the list were sinners on need of a Savior. Even Mary (Luke 1:46-48) and Joseph needed a Savior. Jesus came from a long line of sinners and came for the purpose of saving them from their sin.

Joseph did not *"begat"* Jesus Christ. The term *"begat"* (Greek, *gennaō*) means "fathered" or "fathering". Joseph is not said to have fathered Jesus. But to have been married to Mary who gave birth to Jesus. Joseph is therefore not listed as a biological father of Jesus. This is in keeping with the fact that the prophecy that Jesus was to be born of the seed of woman. *"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"* (Gen. 3:15). Biologically it takes the seed of a man and a woman to produce a baby. Jesus was born without male seed. *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law"* (Gal. 4:4).

## ■ **Virgin Birth of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, 1:18-25**

Several awesome births are found in the Bible. Isaac being born to 90 year old barren mother, Sarah. Manoah's barren wife given birth to Samson. Hannah having Samuel. John the baptist being born to Elizabeth. Yet all fail to come close to the spectacular virgin birth of Jesus.

Matthew has shown the biological lineage of Jesus. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows..." (1:18b). The term "birth" is from the same Greek term used for genealogy. Now he shows the divine/supernatural lineage of Jesus by way of the virgin birth.

Joseph was betrothed to Mary when it was discovered she was with child. He was in a quandary in that he knew it was not his child. He would have suffered from a broken heart and devastated by the idea of painful betrayal. However, he must have respected and loved Mary and did not wish to publically humiliate her or have her stoned to death for adultery (Deut. 22:23-25). One must understand that betrothal was a phase between engagement and marriage. Couples were engaged, that is had the marriage arranged by parents. Once a dowry was paid to the bride to be's parents a betrothal period set in for one year. During this time they were as good as married but no sexual relations occurred. If she turned up pregnant or either proved to be unfaithful, the marriage was off and the betrothal ended with a divorce. If all went well the couple would be married in a public ceremony.

While Joseph was contemplating whether to put her away (Greek *apoluo*, divorce) quietly, an angel appears to him. In a dream the angel tells him what is really going on with his bride. Mary was not pregnant or fathered by the Holy Spirit in a carnal like since. "Mary's conception was not a divine seduction, but a miraculous conception" (Pope 44).

This is not just a random miracle but a fulfillment of prophecy. The phrase "that is might be fulfilled" introduce the first of many prophecies fulfilled in Matthew giving proof to the King-Messiahship of Jesus. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 concerning the virgin birth of Jesus. It is a prophecy with a dual fulfillment. The first fulfillment was in the days of King Ahaz when Isaiah assured him with a sign of a virgin giving birth to a son. This was to prophesy that the Kingdom of Judah and David's royal lineage would not be wiped you by the enemies of the day. Matthew uses this to explain the virgin Mary is pregnant.

There has been some question whether of not the Hebrew word *alma* means "virgin". "Alma" (Hebrew) is a more general term which refers to a young unmarried woman, while *parthenos* (Greek) speaks more directly to the virginity of the one in question. The fact that the LXX translated *alma* with *parthenos* (in Isaiah 7:14) shows that the ancients understood *alma* to be a "virgin" (Pope 48,49).

We do not know a great deal about the character of Joseph except that he is called a "just" or "righteous" man. But notice when he is told something by an angel he responds immediate with obedience. He marries Mary. And he also protects her and God's son. Joseph will have to endure the criticism of others by not putting Mary away, tolerate the judgmental comments about his and/or Mary's premarital sexual relations, forego sexual relations with his new bride, and support and protect a child that is not his.

Joseph follows the angel's command to name Mary's son, "Jesus." By doing so he was publically and legally accepting Jesus as his own son.

Jesus was also to be known as "Emmanuel" meaning "God with us". With the incarnation God is literally and physically with them in the first century.

The Bible does not support the Catholic doctrine of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. Joseph and Mary began sexual relations after the birth of Jesus. Furthermore, sex between a husband and wife is honorable (Heb. 13:4) and no child can inherit sin from their parents. Mary went on to have children after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 12:46; 13:55-56; Mark. 6:3).

Jesus was most likely not born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Since Mary was six months pregnant when she visited her cousin Elizabeth. And Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah was taking his turn as a priest to serve in the Temple, it is most likely that Jesus was born September or between mid-March and the first week of May. This is further support by the fact that the shepherds were out in the fields with their sheep at that time of Jesus' birth.

## ■ **Veneration of Jesus by Wisemen, 2:1-12**

Who were these wise men seeking to worship the young King of the Jews? First of all, many



legends are to be debunked by the facts before understanding who they were. We do not know specifically where they were from. Legends has it from the Middle ages that they were from India, Persia and Arabia and named Dasper, Balthazar, and Melchoior. Their bones are said to be buried in Cologne, Germany. We do not know how many of them came. All we know is that they were bringing three types of expensive gifts: gold (a valuable metal), frankincense (burned with the grain offerings and used in embalming the dead) and myrrh (a resin made into perfume and used for anointing at burials).

They were not kings. Only two king appear in chapter two: Herod and Jesus. They were called *Magoi* or *Magi*. These were not necessary pagan astrologers. Daniel himself was made the leader of the magi by King Nebuchadnezzar. They could have been Jews of the Diaspora. Coming from the area of Babylon or Persia where many settlements of Jews were still known to exist. They believed and followed God. God communicated with them and they obeyed Him. This explains how they would have known about the coming of the “King”. They were following a “star”. Many think this could not have been an actual star because it had recently appeared in the heavens (2:7); moved in the sky (2:9); and settled over the tow of Bethlehem. In historical records found in China there as a “comet” which appeared for several weeks in about the year 5 B.C. Others look to Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 24:17 being fulfilled with this cosmic sighting by the Magi: *“A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel,”*

Calling upon the Chief Priests and scribes to help locate this little king, Herod is informed of the prophecy found in Micah 5:2: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”* “Ephrathah” is an older term for the area and by including it Micah distinguishes this Bethlehem from the one in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15). Bethlehem had been the place Jacob buried Rachel. Ruth met Boaz here. David grew up and tended sheep in this town near Jerusalem.

The wise men found the house where Jesus lived with his parents. It is to be noted that regardless of how they set up modern day nativity scenes, they did not go to a manger to see a newborn baby.

Herod the Great was not willing to give up the title “King of the Jews” without a fight. A religious/political party of the Jews looked to him and later his son Antipas to be the Messiah. He ask the wise men to find Jesus and return, so he too could worship Jesus. But God warned them to return home instead.

## ■ **Violence Against Jesus by Herod, 2:13-18**

When the magi did not return Herod felt mock. Although that was not the intention of the wise men. They are simply obeying God. Yet Herod was enraged he lost control of his emotions over this young rival. Herod was an Idumean (from Edom) and had no real claim to the Jewish throne.

The reaction of Herod the Great was just the opposite of that of the wise men. He did not want to worship Jesus, he wanted to wipe him out. Having the children two and under killed in Bethlehem was in keeping with Herod’s violent, murderous ways fueled by paranoia. He had his wife’s brother the high priest, Aristobluos drowned. He had his sons Aristobulous and Alexander strangled. He killed his wife, Mariamne and her mother Alexandra. Some three hundred members of his government were stoned to death at his command. Even five days before his death Herod had Antipater, the oldest of his sons, executed. As he lay dying, he called for all the nobles of Jerusalem to be shut up in the Hippodrome and killed upon his death, so there would be great mourning at the time of his death.

The slaughter of innocent babes in Matthew narrative is hard to take when God spared his own son. But “the infants of Bethlehem died for the safety of him who was destined to die for the safety of all” (McGarvey).

The genocide of the Bethlehem babies also fulfilled another Messianic prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15: *“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”* Ramah was the gathering point of Jews by the Babylonians as they planned to carry them off into exile. Rachel is figuratively seen as the mother representing all those mothers who sons were being carried off into Babylonian captivity.

Matthew records a second proof of Jesus’ being the promised Messiah in verse thirteen. Joseph

and Mary fleeing with Jesus to Egypt from Herod fulfills Hosea 11:1: *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”* It is believed that they may have settled for a time in the city of Alexandria where there were an estimated one million Jews living by AD 40. The gifts from the magi would have helped finance this trip to Egypt and back.

In fleeing to Egypt they would have to live as fugitives (flee come from *pheugo* from which we get the English term “fugitive”). In a few months to a year, God sent yet another dream to command Joseph to return home. Herod the Great had died in 4 B.C. Archelaus took his father Herod’s place. He was fashioned in the same mold as his father. So Joseph moved back home to Nazareth (Luke 2:4). This was also a proof of Jesus identity. He would be called a Nazarene. However, there is no such specific prophecy in the Old Testament. Nazarene is close to the Hebrew word *netzer*, which means “a branch or shoot.” Several prophets apply this title to Jesus (see Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12–13). Perhaps these are the prophets Matthew has in mind. Some Jews sarcastically questioned Jesus coming from Galilee: *“Will the Christ come out of Galilee?”* (John 7:41b). Even Nathaniel said, *“Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46). The term “Nazarene” was applied both to Jesus and His followers (“sect of the Nazarene”, Acts 24:5), and He was often called *“Jesus of Nazareth”* (Matt. 21:11; Mark 14:67; John 18:5, 7). This was not done as a compliment. In subsequent centuries Christians were mocked as Nazarenes in the prayers offered by Jews in their synagogues.

“Matthew focuses on two features through all of this narrative: (1) divine revelation as indicated by angelic instruction for ever more, and (2) the fulfillment of a divine plan revealed in the Old Testament” prophecies (MacArthur 47).

#### **Questions:**

1. What is the external evidence for Matthew being the author of the first Gospel?
2. How do most manuscripts of this Gospel begin?
3. What names does Luke and Mark give Matthew?
4. What does his name mean?
5. Where was Matthew at when Jesus called him?
6. Why is it necessary that Matthew's Gospel being written before 70 AD?
7. Who was most likely Matthew intended audience?
8. How many times does Matthew use the phrases *“Kingdom of Heaven”*?
9. How many times does Matthew use *“Son of Man”*? Where is this from?

10. Why would Matthew's focus on Jesus being the Son of David, Messiah and King?
11. What does "*Jesus*" mean?
12. What does "*Christ*" mean?
13. Why do you think Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus?
14. What is the difference between Matthew's genealogy and Luke's? Why?
15. How does Matthew divide up his genealogy? Why?
16. Why are the mention of Jacob and Jesse important to this genealogy?
18. What five women are mentioned in Jesus genealogy? What do they have in common?
20. What prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled in Matthew 1?
21. How did Joseph plan to deal with Mary's unexpected pregnancy? Why didn't he?
22. What does it mean that Joseph did not know Mary until Jesus was born? Why?
23. Which prophecy tells us where Jesus was to be born?
24. Why did God warn the wise men to go home a different way?

25. Why did Joseph flee to Egypt? What prophecy did this fulfill?

26. Why did Joseph and his family return to Nazareth?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Why would this be considered a genealogy of grace?

2. Contrast the three different reactions of the wise men (magi), Herod the Great, and the Chief Priest and scribes to the news of the coming of the King-Messiah.

**Homework:** Wise men worshiped Jesus. They travelled far, brought gifts, and obeyed God's will. If you are wise do the same.

# **Ministry Begins, Kingdom Announcement**

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## **Matthew 4:1-25**

### **Jesus' Temptation, 4:1-11**

Twice in the history of the world the destiny of humanity has hung in the balance depending on the will and action of two men: Adam and Christ. The first yielded to Satan's temptation (Rom. 5:19). The second did not yield, ever. The contrasts and comparisons between these two is striking. Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden; Christ struggled in a lonely wilderness. Adam was at his best when tempted; Christ was hungry. Adam was the king of the old creation (Gen. 1:26); Christ is King of the new (spiritual) creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Adam sinned and lost his dominion (Heb. 2:6-9); Christ obeyed and regained what Adam lost and more (Rom. 5:12-21). Adam was defeated and brought death to humanity; Christ was victorious and brought life to all who will trust Him.

#### **Background**

##### ◆ **Temptation after Exaltation**

Immediately after John baptized Jesus, the Spirit descended and the Father spoke His approval from heaven, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. Mark 1:12 says that this occurred "*immediately*" after His baptism. Satan's temptation came immediately after the high and holy experience of Jesus' baptism. Yesterday, the voice of the Father and the witness of John the Baptist; today, loneliness of the wilderness of temptation.

##### ◆ **Led up of the Spirit**

"*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*" (Mt. 4:1). It was not done by presumption on the part of Jesus, nor was it for the mere display of His power in resisting temptation.

##### ◆ **Alone in the Wilderness**

Wilderness indicates country destitute of inhabitants. The area was called *Jeshimmon*, which means "the Devastation." Surrounded by such dangers, the temptations offered by Satan were made more intense. Amid want and perils, Satan might suppose that Jesus would be more easily seduced from God.

##### ◆ **Temptation**

We do not know what form the devil took in the wilderness when he tempted our Lord. Both Mark and Luke's account tell us that He was tempted for forty days prior to these three temptations. Remember, temptation is in no sense sin; for Christ was tempted, yet He was sinless (Heb. 4:15). Thus sinlessness does not preclude temptation. It is the yielding of the will to temptation which constitutes sin. Christ never yielded. Not to these three temptations. Not to the forty days of temptations. Not once in all of His thirty-three years upon the face of the earth.

#### **First Temptation: Stone To Bread**

##### ◆ **Ripe for Temptation**

Christ had been fasting for forty days. This fast was total abstinence from food for Luke says explicitly, "*he did eat nothing.*" Next, is found one of the greatest understatement of all time: "*He then became hungry.*" It is difficult for some of us to go one hour and forty minutes without eating, but what about forty days. Two other men fasted for forty days: Moses (Ex. 34:28) and Elijah (1 Ki. 19:8). There was probably no other time in Christ's earthly life when He was more susceptible to temptation. He was physically weak and thus extra vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. Satan came to entice Christ to sin. Sin would render Christ useless as a Savior for mankind. No temptation could have been more plausible or more likely to succeed than this one.

Satan's temptations appear reasonable. They often seem to be only urging us to do what is good and proper. They seem even to urge us to promote the glory of God, and to honor Him. There was no sin in being hungry. Yet Satan suggested that, if Christ were God's Son, God should not let Him hunger.

##### ◆ **Temptation to Doubt**

Basically, Satan is saying: "*If You are the Son of God*", he was trying to cast despairing doubt in the mind of Christ. Evidently, Christ's belief in His Deity was a point of attack by Satan. When Jesus Christ came to earth He did not give up His deity, but He evidently chose not to express them and use them as a man. He had to learn

and grow just like all men born into this world (Luke 2:52). Christ did not know He was the Son of God through omniscience, but through the Law and the Prophets, the witness of John the Baptist, and the voice out of the heavens at His baptism, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"* (Mt. 3:17). He believed Himself to be the Son of God based on this evidence. Satan was trying to get Him to sin by causing Him to doubt God. His sin would not have been preforming the miracle, but doubting Divinely revealed evidence about His deity. The tempter's whole object was to get Him to distrust the heavenly testimony borne to Him at His baptism as the Son of God.

"If" played a significant role in this temptation. "If" is a small word with a big impact. It is powerful. Throughout Jesus' life on earth all the way to the cross. *"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly"* (Jn. 10:24). On the cross, *"If you are the son of God come down from the cross"* (Mt. 27:10). The Roman soldiers, *"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself"* (Lk. 23:37). Even one of the thieves, *"If you are the Christ, save yourself and us"* (Lk. 23:39). Satan set the condition that Christ prove His son-ship by turning stone to bread. God set no such condition.

#### ◆ **Temptation to Trust in Self**

Would Jesus accept the will of His Father that this was a period of privation designed for His spiritual profit, or would He take matters into His own hands and use His own powers to meet His needs? To have yielded to Satan's suggestion would have shown distrust in the Father; for the Father, by the Spirit, had brought Him to this point; therefore the Father was able to provide for His needs at the proper time. Today, Satan would have us be like the Pharisees, *"Who trusted in themselves that they were righteous"* (Lk. 18:9). In this temptation of Christ is was a question of putting immediate needs ahead of eternal purposes.

#### ◆ **Lust of the Flesh**

Satan uses three main temptations as His weapons in battle against mankind. He fashioned these temptations out of this world. *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."* (1 Jn. 2:16) These are the three main methods Satan uses to tempt man to sin. He used them first with Eve in Genesis 3:6 and he has used them ever since. He was successful in using these on all men until the day he met Christ. Satan was following the pattern introduced in Eden; He appealed to Eve by presenting the fruit of the tree in such a manner that she saw it was good for food.

As yet He had performed no miracle. Was He really the Messiah? Essentially Satan was saying, "Jesus, You have the right to meet Your God-given needs when You deem appropriate. you're hungry now, so eat!" Christ could have rationalized that there was nothing wrong with eating bread to appease His hunger, and therefore nothing wrong with turning stone to bread, but He knew there was much more involved. It would have been the misuse of His powers given for one purpose to gratify another. Jesus expounded upon the principle in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34.)

#### ◆ **An Appeal to the Authority of the Scriptures**

How did Christ deal with this? Did He perform a miracle to fill His stomach and prove Satan wrong? No. He used the written Word as the lamp for His feet (Ps. 119:105). He said, *"It is written"*. He appealed to the authority of the scriptures to answer. Eve also started with *"God hath said"* (Gen. 3:3), but she was not constant in her adherence to God's Word. Christ knew that man needed first to sustain spiritual life. In this Jesus identified Himself with the human family - Man shall not live by bread alone. Men who put the securing of bread first in their lives will be malnourished spiritually. Eve's biggest mistake was talking things over with Satan. She should have repeated back to him verbatim what God had commanded her to do and then just walked away.

Jesus quoted a portion of the last words of warning from Moses to the Israelites before they entered Canaan. Moses had reminded the Israelites that God had led them for forty years in the wilderness to humble and test them and to discover whether they would obey Him or not. God tested them with hunger and then taught them to rely upon Him to care and provide for them. He did not provide them bread, but He gave them manna from heaven to sustain their lives. He gave them instructions as to how much they could gather for a day's provision and said if they gathered any more that it would breed worms and stink. Some gathered more manna and that is exactly what happened. Yet the Israelites were not just sustained by the manna they gathered, but by obeying the voice of God. Moses concluded explaining that God's lesson was: man does not live by the mere satisfaction of His physical needs, but Man lives by the care and provision of the Lord (Deut. 8:1-3). If Israel spent, not forty days, but forty years in a waste, howling wilderness, where there were no means of human subsistence, not starving, but divinely provided for, on purpose to prove to every age that human support depends not upon bread, but upon God's unfailing word of promise.

Jesus was confident God would provide for Him, too. Satan was tempting Jesus to take things into His own hands. Jesus' response brought to light the motive behind Satan's request. In essence He said, "My ultimate responsibility is not simply to satisfy My physical needs, but to obey My Father in heaven." Jesus established His Sonship, not on Satan's terms, but on the Father's.

## Second Temptation: On The Pinnacle Of The Temple

### ◆ Location of Temptation

The temple was built atop a small mountain, Mt. Moriah. The royal portico of Herod was akin to the Temple. It would have been a 480 foot drop into the Kidron valley below. According to Josephus, it was "vastly high" in elevation while the valley immediately below was "very deep, and its bottom could not be seen." An immense tower built on the very edge of this precipice, from the top of which dizzy height Josephus says one could not look at the bottom (Antiquities, 15,11,3).

### ◆ Quoting Scripture out of Context

Satan knows the Bible. He can quote it. Satan supported his dare with an "edited" quotation from Psalm 91:11,12 concerning the protection of God over his children. The context of the Psalm teaches that the Lord protects those who love, follow, and obey Him (see Ps. 91:1,9,14). *"To keep you in all your ways"* which suggests one who has his feet in the ways God has directed. It is true, indeed, that God aids those of His people who are placed by Him in trial or danger; but it is not true that the promise was meant to extend to those who wantonly provoke Him and trifle with the promised help.

Satan was asking Jesus, "Since You believe the Word of God, then why not prove one of God's promises?" Beware of taking promises out of their context or claiming promises when you have not met the conditions. Satan arrays scripture against scripture; he would misapply it. Christ knew His Bible and would not allow this.

### ◆ Temptation to Test God

Christ was to prove His deity to Satan by testing the love of God and making an unnecessary show of God's power. He would not put the love of God to the test by a needless miracle. Miracles were preformed by the Lord to produce belief (Jn. 20: 30,31). Jesus was constantly urged to do miracles to satisfy curiosity. Satan along with all the other devils already believed. *"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder"* (Jn. 2:19). As a matter of fact, some the best confessions concerning Jesus as the Son of God came from demons.

### ◆ Sin of Presumption

The first temptation was one of doubt, the second was one of over trust. The first temptation was under-confidence, now it is over-trust and presumption. If He trusts God, then the devil challenges Him to act on that trust. Often men start by doubting salvation from sin, and end recklessly presuming salvation in sin. Christ would never fall into either category.

### ◆ Pride of Life

This temptation was an attempt to puff Jesus up with pride to "prove" Himself. Satan tempts those who profess faith to let their "faith" lead them forward and expect God will follow them. Such religion is done to be seen of men. Jesus said those who sound a trumpet when giving alms are hypocrites (Mt. 6:24). So are those who pray long and loud in public places (Matt. 6: 5-7). Our lights must shine so others can see our good works and glorify the Father, not us. *"You stand by faith. Be not highminded, but fear"* (Rom. 11:20).

### ◆ Harmony of the Scriptures

Christ replies, *"it is written, again"*, thus showing the harmony of the scriptures. To get a right understanding of God's Will we must compare Scripture with Scripture. The Bible is not made up of isolated texts. The context of His quote is Deuteronomy 6:16. Obviously Moses was reminding the Israelites of a former occasion when they had tried God at Massah. In the wilderness the Israelites camped at a place where there was no water and they tempted or put the Lord to the test saying, *"Is the Lord not among us?"* (Ex. 17:1-7). The people were thirsty and murmured (Ex. 17:7). The Israelites saw the plagues God brought upon Egypt. They saw God divide the waters of the Red Sea while His pillar of fire stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians. He had enabled Moses to sweeten the waters of Marah and had fed the children of Israel with manna, but these were not sufficient grounds for faith for the Israelites. For them, God must needs continually prove Himself.

By the use of the word *"again"* Jesus is show that God does not contradict His Word. Scripture is harmonious. One verse is not to be used to nullify another or to counteract the whole tenor of Divine truth. God does not give us conflicting duties. For instance, God specified vocal music in New Testament worship (Eph. 5:29; Col. 3:16). Satan will say, "David played on a harp," implying that if David did, it is scriptural for us to do so in New Testament worship. Satan's message is: "If you believe John 3:16 you cannot believe Ac. 2:38; Mk. 16:16; Rom. 6:1-6; I Pet. 3:21."

## Third Temptation: The Kingdoms Of The World

### ◆ World Tour

In Luke's account of the temptation of Christ he says it took place *"in a moment of time"* (Lk. 4:5). *"In a moment of time"* was some supernatural operation. In neither of these last two incidents are we told how Jesus was transported from one to the other.

Also, suddenness aids temptation. When crude business men make a fast deal and make everything look

real good at first, the people who see it may jump right in and grab what they think is a great deal.

◆ **The Temptation to Compromise**

Now Satan has resorted to a blatant temptation. There was no deceit and no mention of Jesus' Sonship. In fact, he has ceased now to present his temptations under the mask of piety, and he stands out unblushingly as the rival of God Himself in his claims on the homage of men. Despairing of success as an angel of light, he throws off all disguise. Satan promised Christ all the kingdoms of the earth, but it would cost Him. Christ would have to worship Satan just once. Satan shows some generosity in this temptation, but it has its price tag. Satan is slow to show generosity and to give anything. Most will sell out to him for nothing. Any compromise with Satan puts one in the position of being his slave.

This temptation offered an easy path. The devil is offering Jesus a short cut to the achieving of His objective. God's way led to the cross (Mt. 26:39). The Son of man would not take the easy way out. Satan's sweetest temptation was the most repulsive to Christ.

However, Satan's promise is faulty. Three times he is called by our Lord Himself, "*the prince of this world*" (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul calls him "*the god of this world*" (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan rules over the world because of his control over the men in it (1 Jn. 5:19). *Jesus called him, "the ruler of this world"* (Jn. 12:31). Regardless of all this, the world is ultimately God's.

If we are to have God's promise, it must be obtained God's Way. To seek a right thing in a wrong way is still wrong. Jesus had come to establish a kingdom, one consisting of people from all nations. Satan would give a speedier possession, but God a more lasting one. Satan's offer to surrender was not unconditional. It was a surrender on Satan's terms rather than in God's way. Christ wasn't willing to make a treaty, but conquer Satan's kingdom. Good ends do not justify evil means, for evil means bring evil ends. To establish a Messianic kingdom by worldly means would produce a worldly kingdom. Satan obviously did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom.

God is God, and right is right and wrong is wrong. There can be no compromise in the war with evil (Dt. 6:13; 10:20). Satan may offer a Christian a "better" job for just the small price of missing some of the worship services of the Lord. He may offer a preacher a continuing paycheck for just the small price of remaining silent on a matter that needs to be preached.

◆ **Appeals to the Lust of the Eyes**

Many things look good to us, but they are not good for us. Eve saw the forbidden fruit was appealing. Such offers may be large to the world, but are small in the eyes of Jesus and Christians. According to Psalm 2:6-9, God had already promised these kingdoms to Christ. God had promised Jesus "*the nations for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*" (Psalm 2:8).

◆ **Proper Application of Scripture**

Then Jesus said to him, "*Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'*" (Mt. 4:10). For the third time Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy (6:13). The scripture was written to the end that all might only worship God and serve Him. This text refers back to the incident of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6).

Christ would worship and serve only the Lord. Whatever we worship is the god we serve, we cannot do both God and the world (Mt. 6:24). Only by worshiping and serving God can a right end be attained. Jesus knew that by doing so, He would not only obtain all earthly authority, but all authority in heaven (Mt. 28:18).

## **Victory Over Temptation, 4:11**

◆ **By Remembering Who You Are**

Jesus came into the world to save the world. His major obstacle to fulfilling His mission was the ruler of the world, Satan. Twice Satan tried to cast doubt as to His identity. All three quotes are drawn from a section of Scripture that opens with these words: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*" (Dt. 6:4-5). Christ later called this "*the first of all the commandments*" (Mk. 12:29). When facing Satan's temptations remember that you are a child of God, who does not listen to strangers.

◆ **By Knowing and Using God's Word**

One reason why Jesus never sinned is that He was not ignorant. He always did what He knew was right. The Son of God recognized the binding authority of scripture, the harmony in what God said, and the proper application of it. Jesus verbally confronted Satan with the Truth; and eventually Satan gave up and left. Christ is the "*Captain of our salvation*" (Heb. 2:10-18). He shows us, His soldiers, how to use the Sword of the Spirit to defeat Satan's weapons of temptation. You will see that the three pronged pitch fork of Satan (consisting of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life) was no match for the Word of God.

◆ **By Exposing and Deposing the Devil**

Finally, Jesus replied, "*away with you Satan.*" Christ knew that Satan's short-cut would not be lasting.



In the first two temptations, Satan was subtle, as if disguised. In the third he was proud and vain. Jesus now tears off his mask, calling him by name. Satan had no right or place in the presence of Christ. When Peter tempted Jesus, the Master also called him by name, but He told Peter to get behind Him, for the proper place of a disciple is in the rear or behind the one he follows. Satan was His adversary, not a helper.

Temptation must be promptly rejected. Notice, Jesus didn't stop to weigh the matter. We have this choice. We can tell him to "get" or we can invite him into our heart and give him a comfortable seat. *"Resist the Devil and he will flee from you"* (Js. 4:7).

◆ **It Is but a Temporary Victory**

Satan only left *"for a season"* (Lk. 4:12). Certainly Jesus faced many other occasions of temptation (See, Jn. 6:15; Lk. 22:28; Mt. 27:39-44). Forty days of victory did not preclude future temptations. We must always be alert for the Devil's return, no matter how victorious we've been.

◆ **Victory Celebration**

Angels came to Jesus to serve Him, possibly to provide Him the sustenance as one did for Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8) and the support that He had denied Himself during the forty days of His fast. Remember there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. God is there through it all. He is faithful. We may feel alone, but we are not alone.

Satan is the strong man; Christ is the stronger than he (Mt. 12:29; Lk. 11:21f). Jesus showed us the way to handle Satan. Temptations are not sins, but they are the battles we all must fight. They will leave the victor stronger and the vanquished weaker. If we, like Christ, resist the devil, he will flee from us for a season.

## **Jesus' Ministry Begins, 4:12-25**

Matthew's narrative of the life of Jesus picks up with Jesus returning from the wilderness having been tempted by the Devil to Nazareth and on to Capernaum. The time is set when John the Baptist is in prison. However, according to John's record a great deal more took place and is covered in John 1:19 through John 3:36.

At this point Matthew does not tell us why or how John ended up in prison. He does explain later in Matthew 14:3-4: *"For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'"*

◆ **Calling Galilee to Repent, 4:12-17**

Jesus was to work in the region of Galilee it is about 59 miles long and 28 miles wide. It was the area originally given to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Now it was controlled by the Gentiles: Romans. It was densely populated with several cities around the Sea of Galilee which is actually a lake. The Jewish population of Galilee were more the working class and not considered as sophisticated as those in Jerusalem and Judea. These Jews even had their own accent (Matt. 26:73). However, according to the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1,2 this is where the light of the Messiah was to dawn.

The preaching of Jesus was the same as that of John (3:2). *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (3:17). Repentance requires a change of heart that results in a change of behavior. The phrase *"at hand"* means "has come near" (Pope 112) and proclaims the closeness of the kingdom's arrival.

◆ **Calling Fishermen to Fish for Men, 4:18-21**

Jesus seems to relocate his hometown from Nazareth to that of Capernaum. The name "Capernaum" means city of Nahum, perhaps, named after the minor prophet. Although it is now but a collection of ruins, in the time of Christ it had a substantial synagogue, military presence, and tax office. It was situated on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sea was important to the commerce of the area. Although this lake was only about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide and several hundred feet below sea level. It supported many fishermen. Some of these fishermen used lines and hooks on the shore. Those with boats used a net pulled between two or more boats to catch fish in the deep.

Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to *"follow me."* So they immediately followed Jesus. Without information from the other three gospels it would appear they just dropped everything and blindly followed a stranger. At the time of this meeting on the shores of Galilee, Jesus had already met this two brothers. John the baptist had pointed out to Andrew and John that Jesus was the lamb of God. Andrew spent time with Jesus and was convinced He was the Christ. He immediately finds Peter and brings him to Christ. In fact, every time Andrew is seen in the Gospel narrative he is bringing someone to Jesus. Here he brings his brother, later a little boy with a sack lunch, and finally Gentiles seeking Jesus.

Down the shoreline they find James and John. They two immediately leave their father Zebedee with his servants and follow Jesus. They also knew Jesus being his cousins through Mary's sister. These men may have been disciples of Jesus in the recent past but now He calls them to leave all and follow him full-time.

Notice Jesus likes to call busy men and women to follow Him. Fishermen knew hard work and the need to stay busy. In fact, fishermen possess many characteristics needed in becoming fishers of men. Fishermen must

fish out of faith. When he casts the hook, he does so not by sight but by faith. The fisherman normally cannot see the fish in the water. They must be very patient. Fish seldom bite the moment the bait hits the water. He must learn to be selective. Not all fish are caught the same way. Persistence is key to success. The good fisherman does not want to quit until he makes his catch. The fisherman of fish must have courage. The water is not always shallow and tranquil. A good fisherman is alert to the best time to fish. He knows that there is a time to cast and a time to look for better fishing spots. Finally, he takes care of his catch. He carefully preserves his fish.

◆ **Calling All to Hear and Be Healed, 4:23-25**

How did Jesus bring this Light to Galilee? First, by his teaching in the local synagogues. These synagogues were found in every town and city of Galilee where they had at least a population of ten male Jews of age. The ruler of the synagogue would often turn their services over to a visiting Rabbi for the public reading and exposition of the Torah. Both Jesus and Paul took advantage of this in order to spread the good news (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:15-16). Jesus' message consisted of preaching the Gospel or Good News of the Kingdom. Second, Jesus let the light shine by His many miracles which were the certification He was the Christ. His miracles were performed as a means of Good News and blessings to the people of Galilee.

Jesus healed everyone from every malady. He took away the symptoms - like pain. Jesus helped the demoniac by casting out the demons who possessed them. He cured the epileptics who were suffering from central nervous system disorders. The Greek word here literally means "moonstruck" hence some translations say lunatics. Jesus healed those with handicaps of the feet and legs called "paralytics". No matter what the illness Jesus healed them without exclusion or without restricting the number of those healed. He healed them instantaneously, directly and completely. Also of note, this passage distinguished between physical and mental illness and demon possession.

It seems the Jesus did not turn anyone away. The more He healed, the more His "fame" spread. The more people came to be healed and to hear the preaching of the Gospel. The crowds started pouring in from Galilee and Jerusalem and Judea, but also from "*Decapolis*" which was the area of the ten Greek cities on the east side of the sea of Galilee and from "*beyond the Jordan*" which was known as Perea.

**Questions:**

1. Contrast the temptation of Christ to the temptation of Adam.
2. T F Jesus was only tempted three times in the wilderness.
3. What was Satan's objective in the first temptation to get Jesus to sin?
4. How did Jesus respond to this first temptation?
5. What was the second temptation of Jesus in Matthew's gospel?
6. How did Jesus respond to this second temptation?
7. What did Satan offer to do for Jesus in the third temptation? What was the price tag?
8. Why would Satan's plan not work for Jesus?

9. How did Jesus respond to this temptation?

10. " \_\_\_\_\_ the Devil and he will \_\_\_\_\_ from you" (James 4:7).

11. T F Satan left Jesus never to return and tempt Him.

12. Match the temptation on the right and the scripture on the left with love of the world in the middle.

Turn stone into bread	pride of life	Deuteronomy 6:13
Jump off the pinnacle of the Temple	lust of the flesh	Deuteronomy 6:16
Worship Satan for all the kingdoms	lust of the eyes	Deuteronomy 8:3

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Jesus has been tempted just like we are. What things can be learned from Him to aid us in resisting temptations?

2. How does the timing of the temptation increase the potency of the temptation? How can a Christian counter this?

**Homework:** List several passages of scripture you should memorize to help you battle temptation.

# Authoritative Message

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## Matthew 5:1-16

### Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, 5:1-2

The Sermon on the Mount can be read in just fifteen minutes, but forms the core of Christ's teaching throughout his three and a half years of ministry on earth. This sermon was radical and revolutionary. Matthew 5:17-20 gives the theme of the Sermon: the righteousness of the citizen of the Messianic Kingdom versus the failed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Paul Earnhart said, "the Sermon on the Mount is the best known of all the teachings of Jesus — it is also the least understood and the least practiced."

### Beatitudes: the Quest for Happiness

Happiness is not found by merely looking for it in the perfect happenstance. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are they that seek happiness." Through these Beatitudes Jesus shows that happiness is a quality of spirit rather than a set of circumstances. In the text "blessed" comes from the Greek word *makarios*. It is found fifty-five times in the New Testament. In the context of the New Testament *makarios* is more than just a great state of being but is based on a condition of the spiritual heart and spiritual relationship with God.

To correctly interpret each beatitude one must understand they are constructed of three parts: a blessing ("*Blessed are...*"); a character trait ("*the pure in heart,*"); and a promise ("*for they shall see God*"). The term "beatitude" comes from the Latin *beatus* meaning blessed or happy.

### Blessed Are The Poor in Spirit, 5:3

Jesus promised, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3). There are two Greek words for "poor". *Penes* represents the man who has nothing to spare, whereas *ptochos* describes the man who has nothing at all. In this passage *ptochos* is not concerned with what a man has, but what a man is. Jesus does not have those in mind who have a poor self-image and who self-pity or the assumption of voluntary poverty.

Poor in spirit are contrasted with rich in self: the self-made vs. those spiritually bankrupt; self-conceited vs. the selfless; self-sufficient vs. helplessness; self-serving vs. self-denial; and the self-glorifying vs. self-aborrent.

The promise or reward for having this character trait: "*theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" Not just anyone can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God has entrance requirements. This beatitude is first because it describes the attitude one must have toward self. Until he can be emptied or be totally impoverished of self, he can never be filled with comfort, mercy, inheritance, etc.

### Blessed are Those Who Mourn, 5:4

The next beatitude from Jesus is a certainly paradoxical. "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*" (Matthew 5:4). Mourning is something that we wish to avoid. Comfort detached from mourning is our aspiration. The word translated "*mourn*" is the strongest Greek term for the utter sorrow of a broken heart. This beatitude is key to helping us become better Christians instead of bitter critics. "It's not what happens to me that matters most; it's how I react to what happens to me." "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is the wrong question. Instead we should be contemplating:

“What happens to good people when bad things happen to them?”

The mourner’s reward: “for they shall find comfort.” The word “*comfort*” comes from the same root as the word “fortify”. “Com” means “with”. God gives us strength with which we can fortify our weakness. As the Shepherd’s Psalm reads: “*Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*”

### **Blessed are the Meek, 5:5**

Jesus wants us to be meek. “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5). People generally have the idea that a “meek” individual is one that is extremely quiet, withdrawn, timid.

Cowardice or spiritlessness have also been referred to as meek. The meek are akin to the Milquetoast. A popular saying is “Meek as a mouse.”

The word for “meek” is translated from the Greek word *prautes*. The word was “...used of animals which have been tamed, and which have learned to accept discipline and control...A horse obedient to the reigns, a dog trained to obey the word of command...” (Barclay, pp. 113,114). Meekness is like a horse once wild, but now obedient to the bridle and bit and thus, of service and value to its master. Therefore, it is not the absence of strength, but strength brought under control! Instead of “meek as a mouse” we should say “Meek As A Horse”.

The characteristics of meekness are god-controlled strength. Meekness is the opposite of one being out of control. Someone who is teachable. You cannot teach a man who is self-assured that he knows it all. Those who humbly submit to God. And the meek are gentle toward all men.

The promise that the meek will inherit the earth goes back to the Old Testament (Ps. 37:11). They used it as a proverbial expression to denote any great blessing, perhaps as the sum of all blessings. The meek inherit the earth in that they receive the richest, fullest, and most satisfying life that this earth can give.

### **Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst, 5:6**

The words used by Jesus describe a man who is painfully hungry and agonizingly parched. The Greek terms mean “to suffer hunger, to be famished, to crave after” (Liddell-Scott) and “to suffer thirst, suffer from thirst” (Thayer). Hunger and thirst are possibly the two strongest feelings in the human experience.

Healthy Christians should also have a strong baby-like appetite (1 Pet 2:2). The Psalmist captures the meaning well “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God*” (Ps. 42:1) and “*O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water*” (Ps. 63:1).

The blessing for having such a hunger and thirst: “*for they shall be filled.*” The term “filled” is a very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall. The root of the Greek term means “fodder” or “grass”. We will become so spiritually satisfied that we will be like hefty, well-fed cattle. It implies a complete satisfaction. One who is filled to the point of having to loosen their belt or not able to take another sip. “*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:19).

### **Blessed are the Merciful, 5:7**

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” is the next Beatitude. The terms “grace” and “mercy” are not synonymous. Grace is kindness given to those not deserving. Mercy is kindness given to those in need. Trench wrote “...in each of the apostolic salutations where these words occur, *grace precedes mercy, an order that could not have been reversed*” (R.C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 184). Thayer defined *mercy* as “kindness or goodwill toward the misery of others, joined with a desire to relieve them.” When ten lepers called out, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*” (Lk. 17:3), they did not want the Son of God to simply become aware of their circumstances. They wanted healing.

Mercy is extended when we help others with their needs. “*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in*

him?" (1 Jn. 3:17).

The end result of this character trait is the promise of obtaining mercy. A spiritual axiom found throughout the scriptures is "...for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). If we sow mercy, we will reap mercy.

### **Blessed are the Pure in Heart, 5:8**

The next beatitude has been considered the most important of all eight: "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8). With our heart we think (Prov. 23:7), obey (Rom. 6:17), love (Matt. 22:37), and understand (Matt. 13:15). The word for "pure" is translated from the Greek *katharos* from which we have the word "catharsis." The term means "unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed" (Barclay) or "without the admixture of any element" (Vine). In the matter of one's spiritual heart no wickedness or duplicity of purpose is present.

Purity in heart involves pure inwardly, being pure in motive. Purity in action and word begins with purity in thought, deed and speech.

"*Shall see God*" is the Beatitude's promise. Just how can one see God? If your vision of God is not clear, it is not because God cannot be seen. It is because your heart is not pure. To clear the eye we must cleanse the heart. (Ps. 24,3,4; 17:15; 41:12; 63:2; 140:13).

### **Blessed are the Peacemakers, 5:9**

The seventh beatitude is: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*" Just who or what is a peacemaker? First, let us look at the mean of peace. Someone had said, "peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload." The world would define it as the absence of conflict or war. Peace is not the absence of something, rather it is the presence of something.

Peace is the presence of God in our lives and in our hearts. The Hebrew word for "peace" is *shalom*. It means the presence of all good things. It means everything which makes for a man's highest good. The Greek word *eirene* is found about eighty-eight times in the New Testament. The concept behind the term "peace" is that of harmonious relationship. So a peacemaker is one who makes for peace not by removing turmoil but by creating good relationships.

A good peacemaker will have peace with God (Is 59:1-2). He will be forgiving and practicing the Golden Rule with regard to others (Matt. 7:12). A Peacemaker will share the Gospel leading others into a relationship with the "*Prince of Peace*" (Isa. 9:6). Christ established a Kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17) with the Gospel of peace (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:15).

What is the reward for being a peacemaker? It is to be sons of God. Why? Because we look like our Father, the God of Peace. If the peacemakers are blessed, it necessarily follows that cursed are the "peacebreakers". "Woe to the troublemakers, for they shall be called the children of Satan." Are you a son of God or is Satan your father? Are you a peacemaker or a troublemaker? Are you a bridge-builder or bridge-destroyer?

### **Blessed are the Those Who are Persecuted, 5:9-11**

Finally, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Why would someone who has all of the seven previous virtues of being poor in spirit, meek, a peacemaker, etc. be persecuted? Because these character traits run contrary to the very spirit of an evil world, provoking a response of the sinner toward the saint.

Those blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Some Christians suffer because they have violated the civil laws of society (1 Pet. 2:20). Suffering with asthma or chronic pain is not persecution "*for righteousness sake.*" Kingdom citizens should expect persecution because some men love darkness more than light (Jn. 3:19,20). Jesus warned, "*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18).

"Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven" is the resulting reward. The blessing for being persecuted for righteousness' sake is possession of the Kingdom of Heaven. Notice this last Beatitude reverts to the

first. The first Beatitude states the condition of becoming a citizen of the kingdom, and the last describes the character of one who has become a citizen. Tribulation is necessary to enter into the kingdom (Ac. 14:22). Persecution is a means by which the kingdom will grow. As it has been said before, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"

The addendum to this beatitude is dealing with the reaction a Christian is to have toward being persecuted. The one persecuted for Christ must *"rejoice and be exceedingly glad."* Our joy is focused on the fact that our "reward in heaven is great." *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:18). *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,"* (2 Cor. 4:17).

These beatitudes tell us the character of the citizen of the Kingdom and the standard of righteousness to which he must aspire. The citizens of Christ's kingdom have a powerful and positive impact on the world around them.

### **You Are the Salt of the Earth, 5:13**

Possessing all eight of these beatitudes a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven will let his righteousness found in these character traits influence the world like salt and light.

Saints need to understand the properties of salt and how it is such a powerful influence in this world. Salt is valuable. The Romans would say, "there is nothing more useful than sun and salt." Salt preserves and prevents. It preserves meat and prevents foods from spoiling. The salt-like saints of the world have had a preserving and preventing influence. Salt purifies. Drink hydrochloric acid or ingest sodium hydroxide and these chemicals will likely end your life. Put these two chemicals together and you have sodium chloride or salt. Without salt the body would not survive. Salt creates thirst. We are to thirst after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). Salt gives flavor. Nothing brings out the natural favor in food like salt. Salt has the power to take a bland dish and make it palatable. Salt is penetrating. Sprinkle a little salt on your grits and it finds a way of permeating the entire bowl. Salt is conspicuous. The absence of salt in one's vegetables is readily noticed.

If, however, you can live this world as a Christian inconspicuously than you may be worthless salt that has lost its savor. Salt can lose its positive properties. Pure salt does not lose its savor. Instead salt becomes contaminated. Just as a salt-free diet is no fun, nor is a salt-free world. Contaminated salt is useless. The only positive use for such salt is to be thrown down on paths to be trampled on.

### **You Are the Light of the World, 5:14-16**

Salt is a hidden but a powerful influence. Light is a visible and revealing influence. Light reveals and illuminates. The light of the Christian shows the beauty of Jesus which can be seen in him. Light banishes darkness. Light comforts and cheers. The light of the saints can bring comfort to a world that has lost its joy due to the misery of darkness. Light guides. We must always remember to *"shine as lights to the world"* (Phil. 2:15). Light protects from evil and warns of danger. Light awakens. Light is pure. Light and darkness do not mix. God's purity from all sin is why He is light. Light too is conspicuous.

The smallest of light can then be seen even in the darkest of rooms.

However, our light can be hindered. Putting a lamp under a bushel is very wasteful. Some Christians will hide their lights by being ashamed of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; I Pet. 4:16),

Citizens as "The light of the world" must be visible to the world.

Light is reflective. The moon has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the sun in the darkness of night. When we reflect the light of Christ through our lives in this dark world God is given the glory. God alone gives light. God is glorified when men see the good works in our life. Godly living makes God look more attractive.

## Questions:

1. In your own words what is the theme or objective of the Sermon on the Mount?
2. What is a beatitude?
3. What are the three parts of a beatitude?
4. Which of the two Greek words for poor is used in this verse? What is the difference?
5. Why do you think it is important Jesus listed "*poor in spirit*" first among the beatitudes?
6. How is the second beatitude paradoxical?
7. What is the world's view the character trait: meek?
8. What is the proper definition of the Greek term translated "*meek*"?
9. How powerful of a hunger or thirst is represented by the Greek terms used in Matt. 5:6?
10. What does the word "*filled*" mean in this context?
11. List some ways we are to show mercy to others?
12. What is the reward of being merciful?
13. What is the "*heart*" in Matthew 5:8?
14. What does "*pure*" mean in this context?



15. How is it that man can see God who is invisible, that is, not flesh and blood?
16. What does the Greek word *eirene* mean?
17. What is involved in being a peacemaker?
18. What is the reward for being a peacemaker?
19. What is the reward for those who are persecuted for righteousness sake?
20. How should not a Christian react to persecution?
21. How valuable was salt in the ancient world?
22. What are some of the attributes of light and how do they compare to the Christian life?
23. What is meant spiritually by the hiding of a lamp under a bushel?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. What are some ways to can shine and make God look good?
2. Give an example of how you are able to demonstrate meekness as a Christian?

**Homework:** Influence the world around you this week by exemplifying all eight character traits found in the Beatitudes and see how blessed you can be.

# Ministry & Mission of the 12

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## **Matthew 10:1-23**

This chapter focuses on the mission of the Twelve. They will first go to the lost children of Israel but it does look down the road to the time when their mission scope enlarges to include the Gentiles. After all they did not raise the dead till after the day of Pentecost.

Some of the specifics Jesus taught in Matt. 10 applied only the apostles, yet in principle they apply to His witnesses in every generation.

### **Selection of the Twelve, 10:1-4**

As Jesus' ministry increased His humanity began to show more and more. He was at this point a "one man show." The territory to cover was too great for the Son of God who was subject to the limitations of being human. He could only be at one place at a time. Furthermore, as word spread about His compassion and power in healing, the mass of crowds continued to swell. He saw this as a great harvest. But a bumper crop requires more workers.

#### **Jesus Prayed for Them**

To solve this problem for the need of assistance in the work Jesus *"said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'"* (9:37,38). According to Luke, before He selected these men He prayed to God for wisdom and for the men who were about to be selected. *"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God"* (Luke 6:12). When selecting men to serve the needs of the widows in the Jerusalem congregation, the Apostles prayed (Acts 6:6). Before selecting Barnabas and Paul for their missionary journey, the Church at Antioch prayed (Acts 13:3).

#### **Jesus Called Them**

Jesus had already called these men to follow Him. Now He calls them to go out and represent Him and assist in spreading the Good News that the Kingdom was near.

#### **Jesus Trained Them**

First, Jesus calls them *"disciples"* and then *"apostles."* His trainees were about to get a promotion. This by no means indicates that their period of training has been completed. The disciples still showed signs of immaturity and carnal-mindedness. They would lack the patience to fast and pray to cast out a demon. They failed to understand many of Jesus teachings, even the parables. When it came to their deficiency in humility, they often argued over who would have a greater position in the coming kingdom. Peter even refused to wash Jesus' feet. Jesus would rebuke them for having *"no faith"* or *"little faith."* Peter and the other disciples forsook Him after the Garden. None would follow Him to the cross except John. Peter would go on to deny Him. Judas would betray Him. Jesus even had to continue to teach them during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension.

#### **Jesus Sent Them**

Jesus took the disciples whom He called follow Him wherever He went and trained them. Now He was sending them out as apostles to represent Him wherever they went.

#### **Jesus Equipped Them**

Later in the chapter Jesus would discuss what they were to bring with them. But Jesus was more concerned about equipping them with the authority from God to cast out demons, heal every form

disease and sickness among the Jews. By this they demonstrated their credentials as apostles of Jesus Christ and confirmed the Word they preached concerning the coming Kingdom.

□ **Jesus Knew Them**

The list of men are not from the ranks of the Pharisees with their brand of devotion to the Law. Jesus did not pick political men from the Herodians. He did not have any priests among the twelve. The Sadducees were not represented among the Twelve. There were no well learned scribes who were picked to be ambassadors of Jesus. These men were by no means wealthy. Jesus knew what He was doing and knew exactly the type of men He was sending out. Instead of yacht owners He sent out four fishermen. He knew they could learn how to apply their skills to fish for men. He selected a tax collector knowing how the Jews hated publicans. Simon who was a zealot was among the Twelve even though Jesus' Kingdom was not of this world and His disciples did not fight with carnal weapons. He even knew that Judas Iscariot would one day be a traitor to the cause and betray Him.

### **Principles for Sharing the Good News, 10:5-15**

◆ **Authority to Preach the Gospel, 10:5a**

Jesus has the authority to command this Twelve as He sends them out. The Greek *parangello* used for "commanded" is a military term which demands obedience to a higher authority. The word was also equivalent to a subpoena in legal settings. Jesus would use the word to command unclean spirits.

For companionship and help with trials and temptations He sent them out in pairs (Mark 6:7).

◆ **Audience Needing the Gospel, 10:5b-6**

The apostles were only to preach to Jewish people. But why? First, Jesus "*was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matt. 15:24). Jerusalem and Judea were to be the starting points for the spreading of the Gospel and Kingdom. No one can do everything at once. They had to start somewhere. And the message was tailored to a Jewish audience.

Jesus did have contact with several Samaritans and Gentiles during his ministry (Matt. 8:4-13; John 4). The Gospel has the power to save "*everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek*" (Rom. 1:16). Today, the Gospel is to be taken to all nations.

◆ **Apprehensible Message, 10:7**

The Jews would welcome the good news that the long awaited Kingdom was "*at hand*", that is soon to be set up. However, it was not to be a geographical area with a local king of the Jews. It clarified that the Kingdom had not yet come but was yet in the near future.

◆ **Affirming Credentials, 10:8a**

Many professions such as doctors and lawyers display diplomas to certify their qualifications and authority to practice. The Twelve were not theologians like the scribes or the priests. Their credentials would be the miracles they performed. Today, our affirming credentials are not miracles but the New Testament. Miracles were used in the apostolic age until the perfect or complete revelation of God's Will (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

◆ **Announce Freely, 10:8b**

What did Jesus mean when he commanded them, "*freely you have received, freely give*" (10:8b). Perhaps, they were not to charge anyone for the miracles they were to perform. Not like men who performed before a crowd for money like Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8. Miracles were not for their personal gain or prosperity. It would also imply they were not to charge for the Gospel message like the wandering and nomadic-like philosophers among the Gentiles. The Good News is offered without charging. This would help deal with the temptation of greed. Even elders in the church would be warned to serve "*not for sordid gain*" (1 Peter 5:2). Greediness would eventually claim the heart of Judas

◆ **Acquire Necessities, 10:9-10**

The restrictions above did not mean they were not to provide for their daily needs while on this limited and short mission. Jesus wanted them to keep their preparation time and baggage to a limit. They did not need to spend months raising funds. They should expect that those who were fed the Good News would feed them in return "*for a worker is worthy of his food.*" They left on their mission with no money in their belts, a sack lunch, barefooted, without staff, and carrying only one coat (cf. Luke 22:35-36). Although they did not demand payment, it is clearly implied they were not to refuse food and lodging.

Does this command to the Twelve apply to preacher's today. First, preachers are not apostles. Furthermore, this was a commission which was limited in scope and duration. Also, they were not locally situated in their work for extended periods of time. Elders who labor are worthy of "double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Preacher were to be giving wages like Paul had received. This was based on the concept of not muzzling and ox while it was working. Paul said that the "*Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*" (1 Cor. 9:14).

◆ **Association With the Reputable, 10:11**

There were very few places to stay in first century Palestine which were like motels. The disciples were to stay with only those in town who had a reputation of being "*worthy.*" Who they stayed with would reflect upon the messenger and his message. So they needed to avoid ungodly homes with bad reputations.

Neither were they to wander from house to house constantly being on the move. Again this was a method employed by itinerant false teachers. They should find a good place and be content to stay there until they were ready to move on to the next town or village.

◆ **Applaud the Receptive, 10:12-13a**

Jesus added, "*and when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it*" (10:12, 13a). The greeting is the Hebrew word *shalom* meaning "*peace.*" Meaning the total well being and wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

◆ **Abandon the Rejecters, 10:13b-15**

Jesus goes on to explain who they are to deal with those who are not receptive or "*worthy*". First, they were to withdraw favor or blessing (2 John 10-11). Next, they were to shake or dust off their feet as they left the house or city. After visiting Gentile country Jews of Jesus day would literally do this so that the soil of the pagans would not contaminate the land of God's people. So the disciples were in effect treating these homes and cities as if they were Gentile in attitude toward God. In Pisidia Paul and Barnabas "*shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium*" (Acts 13:51).

Dust off ones feet was nothing compared to the reaction of the Lord. He also is not tolerant of those how reject the Truth. These homes and cities would be worse off receiving greater Divine Judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah. Today no certain trace of them has het been found by archaeologists.

Anne Graham Lotz wrote, "If God doesn't judge America, He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology." God did judge Sodom and will judge them. Just as certain He will judge all the cities who reject the Good News. However, they did have a chance to hear it.

### **Warning the Disciples, 10:16-23**

A variety of slogans have been used to encourage enlistment in the US Army. Shortly after the US entered WW I Uncle Sam posters were seen everywhere. When the draft was announced at the start of WW II, these posters and slogans became less effective. But in 1971 a new slogan appeared. "Today's Army Wants to Join You." (I never got that one) In 1981 "Be All You Can Be" became the new catchphrase. Then in 2001, despite much criticism from Army command, "An Army of One" was promoted. More recently, during the war on terror, "A call to duty" has seemed to resonate. But Jesus said, "*I send you a sheep among wolves*"

God is able to use our persecution for several ends. How one handles persecution can even be a positive influence on the persecutors. By it one can learn of God's care and protection. Believers can mature to the point of trusting in God. Trusting God to deliver from even death (2 Cor. 4:17). Our example of enduring persecution will motivate fellow saints to remain faithful in tribulations.

● **Be as Sheep Among Wolves, 10:16a**

A Jesus begins a new section in His message on the requirements of true discipleship. He commands them to "*Behold.*" This is a warning for them to be on guard when it came to what they say and the reaction others have to their message. Shepherds do not send their sheep out where they know there will be wolves However, Jesus is sending them knowing the dangers.

These disciples are like sheep. Jesus often used this metaphor. He called the multitudes "*sheep without a shepherd*" (Matt. 9:36). In the animal kingdom domesticated sheep are among the most

unintelligent and vulnerable creatures. They require a shepherd who is alert and able to protect them.

The wolves come in the form of false teachers. *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matt. 7:15). Paul warned the Church at Ephesus, *“for I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock”* (Acts 20:29).

- **Be Wise as Serpents, 10:16b**

In order to counter the threat Jesus said they first needed to *“be wise as serpents.”* In Egyptian hieroglyphics serpents symbolize wisdom especially the python. According to Genesis 3:1 Satan appeared as a serpent which was “cunning” or smart or shrewd. Snakes move around with a planned caution. They are smart at hiding, quick to see danger and more apt to make a run for it than strike. Snakes are well adapted by nature to hide and to preserve itself. The disciples needed to learn from snakes. They needed to know what to say and when to say. When to strike and when to run and hide.

- **Be Harmless as Doves, 10:16c**

The second requirement to help the disciples safely carry out their commission is to be *“harmless as doves.”* The dove is a very gentle species of bird. They are a symbol of purity and peace. The Greek for harmless is “without horn.” The dove is without horn. They offer no harm and are not offensive in their nature.

This harmlessness is seen in their message and how they present it to others. Paul and his companions suffered much but when *“reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now”* (1 Cor. 4:12-13). Jesus Himself behaved in a similar way. *“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 Peter 2:23).

Thus they are to guard against being wronged and they are to do wrong to no one.

- **Be Aware of Men, 10:17a**

Jesus ends His metaphorical menagerie. Literal wolves will not be their problem. Jesus is going on to identify the real wolves who will persecute them: These men will use both the Jewish religious authorities and government authorities of the Romans to afflict them. Jesus does not promise them easy and safety in their mission. After the Allies were forced to evacuate Dunkirk in 1940 Churchill said to his fellow Englishmen, “All I can offer you is blood, sweat and tears.”

- **Be Beaten by Religionists, 10:17b**

They would often be Apostles arraigned before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:18; 12:1). Those who reject their message will attack the messengers having them scourged. A scourging consisted of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. One less than the maximum of forty stripes allowed by Mosaic law (Dt. 25:3). Paul wrote, *“from the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one”* (2 Cor. 11:24). Referring to the time when Paul himself persecuted Christians he said, *“Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You”* (Acts 22:19).

- **Be Brought Before Government, 10:18**

It was not long until the pagan governments became involved in persecuting Christians. Herod *“killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also”* (Acts 12:2). Roman Governors like Pilate, Felix, and Festus would persecute the bearers of Truth.

Jesus gives the reason behind such persecutions: *“for my sake.”* It was not because they were sheep it was because they followed the Shepherd. The world only attacks when they see Christ in us.

The end result of being persecuted was *“as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.”* The truth of the Gospel shines a light on those living in darkness as it testifies of Christ. Many persecutors like Paul of Tarsus would see how Christians taught, behaved and react to their suffering and switch sides. Godless government have always sought to suppress the righteousness of religion.

- **Be Prepared to Speak by God, 10:19-20**

This is a promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it would inspire these apostles with words from God. The Word preached originates in the Will of God and not in the hearts of these men. Jesus would later promise: *“when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come”*

(John 16:13).

- **Be Betrayal by Family, 10:21**

Perhaps the greatest and most painful warning of all is that Jesus warns them that not only will some of their family members reject the Gospel, they will persecute fellow family members. Later Jesus would warn in verse thirty-five: *“A man’s enemies will be the members of his household.”* In certain religious cultures a funeral service is held for a family member who becomes a Christian, because in the eyes of his relatives he is no longer alive.

- **Be Faithful Unto Death, 10:22**

The disciple’s work on earth will never be finished until his rest from His labors in death. Hate will come from every class of man on earth, even from family members. A disciple who is not hated is a disciple who is not sharing the Good News and letting his light shine. Persecution has a way of showing to the world and God who is a true disciple and who is perfunctory in their professing of Christ.

The Hebrew writer has his readers look to Jesus and *“consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls”* (Heb. 12:3). Enduring to the end is a common command throughout the Word of God (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13; 1 Corinthians 13:7; Revelation 3:11).

The end of the faithful’s endurance of persecution is salvation. Persecution is temporary. Salvation is eternal. *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him”* (James 1:12).

- **Be Ready to Beat A Hasty Retreat, 10:23**

Jesus does offer to them a sort of route of escape from persecution which results in fringe benefits for the Gospel. As they are chased from city to city they can keep spreading the Gospel message. Persecution inadvertently spreads the very message he strives to quell. *“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles”* (Acts 8:1).

Running away from dangers of death and harm and imprisonment was not cowardly for the saint. It allowed them to live and be free to preach another day. Christ does not want to send His disciples out on suicide missions. He has not blood lust for His servants. He does not one them to be reckless with their lives. Martyrdom may become a reality for many, but they do not have to look for it or wait around for it.

The assurance of Jesus: *“you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes”* is a difficult one to understand. Is it speaking of the second coming of Christ or His judgment upon Jerusalem and Judea in 70 AD or the coming of His Kingdom? The later is preferred in this context.

### Questions:

1. True False Jesus teaching in chapter ten only applies to the mission of the apostles before the death of Jesus.
2. Why did Jesus need the Twelve to help with the ministry?
3. What is the difference between an apostles and a disciple?
4. What did Jesus equip the apostles to do?
5. Why did Jesus send the Twelve only to the Jews and not to the Gentiles?

6. What did the command "*freely you have received, freely give*" (10:8b) mean to the Twelve?
7. Why did Jesus tell the Twelve to take limited supplies with them?
8. How should they treat homes or towns which were not very receptive to their message?
9. What can positively result when saints are persecuted for the cause of Christ?
10. Who are the wolves?
11. How are serpents wise?
12. How can disciples be harmless like doves?
13. Show from the New Testament the righteous being beaten.
14. Give New Testament Example of Christians be persecuted by the Roman Government.
15. Who helped them speak to the authorities?
16. Should Christians ever run away from persecution and persecutors? Explain.

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Are you hated by the world for Christ's sake? If not, why not?

2. What are some fringe benefits from running from the persecutors?

**Homework:** Prepare yourself to go out and share the Good News while being aware this by bring upon you persecution and rejection.



# Experiencing Opposition

## Matthew 12:1-32

### Explaining the Sabbath to the Opposition, 12:1-8

The Ten Commands include a prohibition against working on the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8-10). The word *sabbath* means “cessation” or “rest.” The term is first used in the Bible in Exodus 16:23. Therefore the Law of Moses forbade work on this day under the penalty of death (Ex. 31:14-15). Sabbath violations was one of the reasons given for the Babylonian exile (2 Chron. 36:20,21; Jer. 17:27).

Breaking the Sabbath was considered a serious offense. The Pharisees had set up a series of Laws to keep fellow Jews from breaking Sabbath. Spitting on the ground would turn over a bit of soil which is plowing. To plow on the Sabbath was wrong. Carrying clothing was work but getting dressed on the Sabbath was not. If one’s house was on fire, he could not carry out his clothing. But he could wear several layers of clothing out of his burning home. No one could travel more than two fifths of a mile from home on the Sabbath. Soon these safety rules became traditions and then equal to the Laws of Moses.

Several times Jesus would come into conflict with the Pharisees and the scribes, because of what He did on the Sabbath Day. In this passage Jesus is rebuked for “*doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!*” (12:2). This same event is also recorded in Luke 6:1-6 and Mark 2:23-28.

When the disciples out of hunger “*began to pluck heads of grain and to eat*” (12:1) the Pharisees viewed this as Jesus permitting His disciples to reap, thresh, winnow, and prepare a meal. Jewish rabbi Maimonides said, “To pluck ears is a kind of reaping.” The Talmud said, “If a person rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is sifting. If he rubs the heads of wheat, it is threshing. If he cleans off the side adherances. It is sifting. If he bruises the ears, it is grinding. And if he throws it up in his hand, it is winnowing.”

Jesus defends Himself against this serious accusation by giving six arguments to show that the Pharisees, not His disciples are in error with regard to the proper use of the Sabbath.

#### ► **David and His Men Eating the Shewbread**

To begin His first argument Jesus starts with a rather cutting sarcasm: “*Have you not read...?*” This is a rhetorical question. Of course the Pharisees of all people have read these passages. But did they really understand them. He goes on to remind them of an event in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 in regard to David did when he too was hungry. “*...he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?*” (12:3,4).

David and his men were running from King Saul. They came to the village of Nob about a mile north of Jerusalem to the tabernacle. It is here that David asked the priest Ahimelech for the twelve loaves of shewbread to feed him and his men. The bread was holy and only to be eaten by the priests (Lev. 24:9). However, the Pharisees did not condemn David’s actions or Ahimelech’s. Joseph Fletcher author of *Situation Ethics*, explains, “The plain fact is that love is an imperious law unto itself. It will not share its authority with any other laws, either natural or supernatural. Love is even capable of desecrating the Holy of Holies, the very tabernacle of the altar, if human hunger cries for help...The periscope Matt. 12:1-8...left no doubt about Jesus’ willingness to follow the radical decisions of love. He puts his stamp of approval on the translegality of David’s ...act” (Fletcher 85).

Fletcher believes that hunger outweighs the Laws of God. This same argument of necessity of the situation over the Law could be used to justify fornication, murder, lying, abortion, adultery, instrumental music in worship to God. But there are several problems with this interpretation of David’s actions. First, Jesus was not supporting David’s choice by way of situation ethics. He claimed his

disciples were “*guiltless*” because they did not break the Law of Moses. Furthermore, the old shewbread was removed and replaced with fresh every Sabbath Day. And consider the time when the priest Samuel gave his portion of a sacrifice to King Saul to eat (1 Sam. 9).

“The Jews did not criticize David for eating the shewbread under such trying circumstances, why criticize the disciples when they were but breaking the Pharisees interpretation of the Sabbath law?” (RC Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, 457). But they were not breaking the Law of Moses.

▶ **The Priests Work on the Sabbath**

While on the subject of the priests Jesus focuses the Pharisees’ attention on another argument. “*Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?*” (12:5). Every Sabbath in the tabernacle or the Temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law of Moses, Priests had to work harder than on any of the other days of the week. They had burn incense (Lev. 24:7), change out the old shewbread for the new (Lev. 24:8), and sacrifice a double brunt offering (Num. 28:9,10); etc. The essence of Jesus argument: if you do not condemn God servants the Priests for working on the Sabbath in Temple service, why rebuke me for having my servants working for Me - the Messiah, the Son of God.

▶ **Jesus Is Greater Than the Temple**

The previous argument about Temple service by the priests on the Sabbath enables Jesus to smoothly transition into His next defense. “*Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple*” (12:6). Since the only one greater than the Temple was the one who “dwelt” in it, Jesus is clearly claiming to be God (Matthew 23:21). Jesus had His servants just like the Temple in Jerusalem. They are serving something greater than the Temple. If the priest could work on the Sabbath, the disciples should be able to serve as well.

▶ **Hosea 6:6 -“I desire not only sacrifice but also mercy.”**

Jesus once again uses sarcasm to point out their failures to understand basic well-known passages like Hosea 6:6. God has said, *‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’* (12:7a). Sacrifices were connected with God’s mercy. To show mercy to others was to be like God who shows mercy to those who sacrifice. Jesus along with His disciples were out and about showing mercy to the sick, possessed, sinners. The Pharisees were not will do show mercy to the hungry disciples on the Sabbath day.

▶ **The Disciples were Guiltless**

If the Pharisees truly understand Hosea 6:6, they “*would not have condemned the guiltless*” - disciples of Jesus (12:7b). The Law of Moses provided for the poor to pick grain from their neighbor’s fields when hungry (Lev. 19:9-10). The Law even made a distinction between using a sickle to harvest the grain in their neighbor’s field and just plucking a few grains with their hands (Deut. 23:25). Reaping was forbidden on the Sabbath day (Ex. 34:21), but Jesus’ disciples were not reaping grain they were plucking grain. The disciples were only guilty of violating the traditions of men.

▶ **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath**

Jesus final argument is rather bold: “*For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath*” (12:8). First, He is greater than the Temple and now Master over the Sabbath day. Jesus was on a equal footing with God. He had the right or authority over the Sabbath and how it was observed. He made the Sabbath Laws as God. Just as a police officer can direct a parade going the wrong way on a one way street, so Jesus can direct men on what is permissible on the Sabbath.

As if these six arguments are not enough, in Mark’s gospel in includes a seventh. “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:27).

Jesus did not violate the Sabbath. Jesus did not let His disciples violate the Sabbath. Jesus’ disciples were guiltless. Jesus did not approve of Situation Ethics. The Pharisees do not respond. The debate is over! Or is it?

### **Exposing the Hypocrisy of the Opposition, 12:9-14**

After debating the Pharisees in the grainfield, Jesus later goes to the synagogue. Luke 6:6 indicates this was on another Sabbath. The Pharisees have set up a trap for Jesus with a local man with a withered hand who attends the synagogue. Wanting to find something with which to accuse Him they ask, “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*” (12:10). They did not wish to learn but to continue the debate.

Staying true to His pattern, Jesus does not offer a simple “yes” or “no”. But puts forth an rhetorical question. *“What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”* (12:11). Other places Jesus uses an ox in a ditch for His illustration (Luke 13:15-17; 14:5). The Jews accepted showing mercy and assistance to an animal on the Sabbath based on their understanding of the Law of Moses (Ex. 23:4,5 and Deut. 22:4).

If they can rescue a little lamb and it not violate the Sabbath, what about helping their fellow man. Men are indeed more valuable than sheep, flowers, little birds, etc. Animals were not created in the image of God and do not need to be rescued from sin. Jesus could have waited to heal the man on Sunday but instead said to him, *“Stretch out your hand.”* (12:13a). The hand was instantly healed and restored to perfect health. The Pharisees did not come denying Jesus could perform miracle, their question assumes He can. Now this miracle not only proves His authority from God to heal, but authority to heal on the Sabbath.

Mark says Jesus’ opposition was silenced by this and they consulted with the Herodians (Mark 3:4,6). After this one might think the Pharisees would concede the debate concerning their rules about working on the Sabbath, but instead *“the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him”* (12:14). How hypocritical of them. Jesus could not heal on the Sabbath according to man-made traditions, but they could plot on the Sabbath to have Him murdered,

### **Escaping the Treats of the Opposition, 12:15-16**

- **Jesus Withdrew**

Jesus knew what they were up to (12:15a). He could perceive the thoughts of men (John 2:25). Jesus is not desiring to engage in public conflict with the Pharisees before the right time. To avoid a premature arrest and interruption of His ongoing ministry, He moves on to work elsewhere (12:15b). This seems to be the pattern employed by Jesus. He would go to a town and teach and heal. Some would accept. When opposition grew He moved to the next town and continued the cycle of His ministry. Sometimes He withdrew to be alone with the Father (John 6:15).

- **Jesus Worked**

The Pharisees left Jesus to plot, but the *“great multitudes followed Him.”* Jesus did not discontinue His work, but *“He healed them all”* (12:15). Why was Jesus going to the sick and poor and not the affluent and those in position of power?

- **Jesus Warned**

Next, He warns the crowd not to give Him publicity. It was not time for Him to be forced into a head on conflict with the Jewish and Roman authority and be prematurely executed.

### **Explaining His Reaction To Opposition, 12:17-20**

- ▶ **Prophecy Fulfilled**

Jesus’ withdrew and warning were not just His personal choices on how to fulfill His mission. He was fulfilling prophecy - the plan of God. Matthew quotes or better paraphrases Isaiah 43:1-4. This is the longest quote in the Gospel. This is from Isaiah’s first song of the Suffering Servant.

- ▶ **Picked as God’s Servant**

Jesus has been chosen by God not self-appointed (12:18a). God the Son had His role to play in the scheme of redemption.

- ▶ **Pleasing God**

Jesus is described as, *“My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!”* (12:18b). God would announce such from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism and at the Transfiguration.

- ▶ **Presented the Spirit**

God said He would put His *“Spirit upon Him.”* Perhaps referring to the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism. Also Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:20). *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him”* (Acts 10:38).

- ▶ **Proclaiming Justice to All**

Paul told the Gentiles *“that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”* (Eph. 2:12). But Isaiah promised that Jesus would *“declare justice to the Gentiles.”*

▶ **Preaches in a Quiet and Calm Manner**

When Jesus preached He did *“not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets”* (12:19). He did not go about like a rebel or politician stirring up the masses in a insurrection against the authorities. Jesus did not hassle and brawl with people or go about shouting and screaming. After all, Jesus was *“gentle and lowly in heart”* (11:29).

▶ **Practicing Compassion**

Jesus was also fulfilling prophecy concerning the compassionate treatment of the weak. Isaiah uses two illustrations. First, *“a bruised reed He will not break.”* Reeds were used to manufacture all sorts of ancient products from parchment paper, flutes for playing music, ink pens or walking sticks. However, if the reed was damaged, it was thrown out. Jesus will not break the broken, but find a way to use them. Second, a *“smoking flax He will not quench.”* Oil lamps if running out of oil or had an improperly trimmed wick would offer little light and emit smoke irritating those in the house. The logical thing to do was to snuff out the fire. Instead, of quenching Jesus is said to fan the flame back to life. Jesus practiced mercy on those who may have been deemed useless or beyond redemption.

▶ **Pursuing Victory**

Jesus must continue His just work *“till He sends forth justice to victory”* (12:20). His ultimate victory is over death which is the wages for man’s sins (Rom. 6:23). This will be accomplished in His resurrection.

▶ **Providing Hope**

Jesus sums up the rest of the quote from Isaiah with *“and in His name Gentiles will trust”* (12:21). Jesus included the Gentiles in the Great Commission when He sent the apostles out to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus came to give hope to all.

### **Execrating Attack by the Opposition, 12:21-32**

To the Pharisees Jesus said, *“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come”* (Matthew 12:31,32).

No words of Jesus seem to have stirred more interest than the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Before anyone can learn just what this sin entails they must first investigate the context. According to Mark, scribes or experts in the Jewish law came down from Jerusalem to Galilee to access the work which, as they heard, Jesus was doing there, and especially His ministry of exorcism. Jesus had cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb. People were amazed and said, *“Can this be the son of David?”* They saw the miracles as evidence that Jesus may be the Christ who was to be of the lineage of David.

The Pharisees and Scribes, however, were quick to derail this Messianic speculation by the people. Although they could not deny that Jesus performed a miracle they could cast doubt as to the source of His power. By accusing Jesus of working by the power of Beelzebub they could seem justified before the people in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

Simply stated the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of being in league with the Devil or Beelzebub. “Beelzebub” had once been the name of the Canaanite divinity, “the lord of the heavenly dwelling”, but by this time it was used by Jews to denote the ruler of the abyss, the abode of demons or literally, “lord of the flies” originally the name of the Philistine deity.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and therefore showed by way of several arguments that this could not be true. First, if Satan were using Him to destroy another part of his dominion than this would be self-destructive. Satan would be instituting a civil war within his own kingdom. No kingdom could survive such an internal war. Next, Jesus warned that their own sons (or relatives) would judge them because some of them cast out demons. The Jews could not really cast out demons but made a pretense at doing so (cf. Acts 19:11-20). Although, it could be that some of the 70 disciples that Jesus

sent out two by two could cast out demons and were related to some of the Pharisees. Nonetheless, to accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the Devil would also indite their sons or at least display their inconsistency. Third, if Jesus does not cast them out by the power of the Devil than He must be casting them out by the Power of God, since there is no other alternative. Fourth, the only way for a strong man (Satan) to lose some of his goods (demon possession of the man) in his house ( the body of the demoniac) would be if a stronger man defeated him. Jesus was saying that the only way He could have cast out this demon was to overpower Satan. This in turn demonstrates that the Kingdom of God is coming and He really is the Messiah. Finally, Jesus tells of the parable of the good tree. Good fruit comes from good trees. Thus, the good deed of casting out the demon comes from a good source, Jesus through the Holy Spirit cast out demons and not from evil, Satan. In contrast, the Pharisees spoke evil of Jesus and have an evil heart, just as an evil tree will produce evil fruit.

The evil produce of the Pharisees' evil hearts was blasphemy. The term "*blasphemy*" comes from the two Greek words "blapto" and "phemi"; "blaptoi" means "to hurt", while "phemi" means "to speak," hence "to blaspheme" means "to speak to hurt," to Speak against." It means to "speak hurt", "speak evil of" or "rail upon" or "to offer intentional indignity to God or sacred things." Blasphemy was a very serious charge. In Old Testament times was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16).

Note, Jesus says they have not blasphemed the "Son of God", but God the Spirit or the Holy Spirit. To speak evil of Jesus (Son of Man) while He lived in His flesh was done many times by the people, a thief on the cross, the Pharisees, Sadducees and so on. However, Jesus warns that they are going too far with this blasphemy. They have deliberately and maliciously defamed the power of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit was to produce miracles allowing Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God (Jn. 20:30,31). By attributing the power behind this miracle to the Devil they not only rob the Holy Spirit of His due glory, but they also discredit Jesus of being the Son of God.

Jesus warned them about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. "*He said this because they said...*" Now, what they said was directed at Him: "*This man cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub*". This was not an offhand remark, but an intentionally speaking out against the Holy Spirit. It might have been argued by the Pharisees, "What do you mean we blasphemy the Holy Spirit. We did not say any thing about the Holy Spirit. We are saying that this miracle of yours was done in league with your master, the Devil." Jesus was telling them there is no logical way He could have done this miracle by the power of the Devil. Therefore, they are attributing the true power behind the miracle (which is the Holy Spirit) to the Devil. This is blasphemy against the Spirit.

"*Jesus knew their thoughts*" (Mt. 12:25). He could identify the source of this blasphemy: an evil heart (33-37). Jesus described them as corrupt trees, an offspring of vipers, having evil hearts producing evil fruit and speaking words by which they would be condemned. Blasphemy like all sins begins in the heart before it ever pours past the lips. This heart disease is fatal because it rejects the only witness to the truth of Christ's identity.

So what is this sin? Perhaps the best answer is by J.W. McGarvey who wrote: "*Blasphemy against the Son may be a temporary sin, for the one who commits it may be subsequently convinced of his error by the testimony of the Holy Spirit and become a believer (1 Tim. 1:13). But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is in its nature an eternal sin, for if one rejects the evidence given by the Holy Spirit and ascribes it to Satan, he rejects the only evidence upon which faith can be had; and without faith there is no forgiveness..*" (The Four fold Gospel, p. 303).

### **Questions:**

1. Why did the Pharisees condemn the actions of Jesus disciples?
2. Does Jesus approve of Situation Ethics when referencing David eating the showbread? Explain.
3. Was it proper for Priests to work on the Sabbath Day? Explain.

4. How is Jesus greater than the Temple?
5. How does Hosea 6:6 apply to the Pharisees?
6. Why did Jesus consider His disciples guiltless of a Sabbath violation?
7. How does Jesus being Lord of the Sabbath factor into this argument that the Disciples are guiltless?
8. When Jesus heals the man's hand on the Sabbath, how does He imply the Pharisees are hypocritical?
9. Was it a Sabbath day violation of the Law of Moses to help an animal? Explain.
10. What three things did Jesus continue to do after escaping from the opposition?
11. In your own words list Jesus' explanations for His reaction to the growing opposition.
12. Who was Beelzebub and why did the Jews' leaders accuse Jesus of being in league with him?
13. Sum up the four arguments used by Jesus to explain that He is not in league with the Devil.

14. What does "*blasphemy*" mean?
  
15. What is the consequence of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Why?

**Application and Discussion:**

1. Is Sunday the New Sabbath day? Should Christians keep from working on the Sabbath (Col. 2:16-17)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does Jesus argument prove that animals, good deeds of men and human needs are more important and supercede the rules of Divine religion? Are there such things as "excusable violations" of God's law based on the situation(Matthew 5:17). Explain.

**Homework:** When you experience opposition to the Truth try to apply the reactions of Jesus.

# Kingdom Parables

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## **Matthew 13:1-52**

On the same day that Jesus was visited by His mother and brothers, he went out from the house and down to the seaside. He entered a boat which became the platform from which He would speak while the people stood on the shore of the sea of Galilee. Jesus began to tell them seven or eight parables about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. These stories were based on simple every day objects with which the people would be very familiar. Perhaps while Jesus was telling them the parable of the Sower there was off in the distance an actual sower in his field broadcasting the seed.

This is one of the few parables in the New Testament where Jesus gives a full explanation of what He meant. When His disciples asked him why he taught in parables He unfolded the meaning of the soils to them. This parable helps serve as a key on the proper way to interpret other parables of Jesus. Mark 4:3-9; 14-26; Luke 8:4-15

### **The Parable of the Sower, 13:1-23**

- **The Seed**

The Parable of the Sower contains three basic elements: the sower, the seed, and the soils. Jesus explained to His disciples, *"the seed is the word of God"* (Luke 8:11). The Word of God is that seed which produces spiritual life. In real life there are good seeds and there are bad seeds, but in Jesus' parable there is nothing wrong with this seed.

According to Galatians 6:7, all seed is designed by God to reproduce after its kind. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."* This is a fact of nature which is still true regardless of how many thousands of years the earth has existed. It is still true even though man has learned to clone trees and breed new species of apples, pecans, etc. When a walnut seed is planted everyone knows to expect a walnut tree to be reproduced. One does not plant corn seed and expect to harvest bananas. Likewise, when the pure seed, the Word of God, is planted into the hearts of men, it produces a true citizen of the Kingdom or a New Testament Christian.

All seeds are powerful regardless of their size. In another parable Jesus will note the power of the very small mustard seed as it produces a tree large enough for birds to land. Have you ever seen a sidewalk cracked and broken because of seed? Or a watermelon seed produce not just one but many melons 200,000 times its size and filled with seeds all potent enough to reproduce more watermelons with more seeds? The seed in this parable is powerful enough to reproduce children of God among both the Jews and the Gentile nations. Paul said of the Gospel, *"for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). Every time it is planted in good soil it produces.

- **The Sower**

What is the purpose of this parable? Some believe it should be called the parable of the seed, others the parable of the soil, however Jesus called it *"the parable of the sower"* (Matt. 13:18). As sowers of His seed the disciples needed to realize that not everyone was going to accept the message in their heart and even those who did may later reject it. They needed to be prepared for the day when Jesus and His message would not be popular among the masses. Jesus wanted them to understand they would not always have a welcome reception.

Who is the sower? Jesus was the original sower of the seed which would be called the Gospel. God has always used men (prophets) to broadcast His message. The sower in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the *"Son of Man"* (Matt. 13:37). However, there is no need to assume that in this parable it refers only to Christ. The sower would be anyone commissioned to sow the seed of the



kingdom. When one becomes a Christian, they become responsible for sowing the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

What is the duty of the sower? He must sow the seed among the nations of men (Mark 16:15). He has no right to withhold the seed from certain races of men. He is not at liberty to mix the seed with any other seed. The Bible makes it clear that God gives the increase, not the sower. Paul told the Corinthians *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:6). He must patiently for the seed to do its work in the soil.

What if the soil is defective? Since there is no problem with the seed and if the sower sows only the pure seed, the Word of God, the effectiveness of the sowing depends largely on the condition of the soil. The object of the seed is to produce fruit. Yet some soil is not as good as other soils. Once the sower has done his duty, it is the duty of the hearer to listen and accept the message of the Gospel into his heart. Faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). When the seed fails to take root it does not mean that it was because of a lack of effort, ability, knowledge, fervor, etc. on the part of the sower.

What if the seed is still in the barn? Many congregations will bemoan the lack of conversions among the community where they live. The seed will not leave the barn and sow itself in the soil. The sower must take the seed and go forth, for the soil will not come to him. And all the farming equipment in the world will produce nothing until it is used.

- **The Soil**

In this parable there is but one seed, but it can be sown on four different kinds of soil.

First, there is the **wayside soil representing the hard heart**. In Palestine the land was divided up into small tracts. There were no fences or walls to separate the parcels of land, only narrow paths that were accessible to everybody. Some of these became well worn and compacted. The sower would broadcast the seed and some would likely bounce upon the hardened pathway. These seeds had about as much of a chance of growing on these pathway as they would on a sidewalk made of concrete.

Often it is sin which has seared the conscience and hardened the heart (Heb. 3:13). The human heart can be hardened like pavement by persisting in wrong and rejecting the right. Each refusal to do God's Will is like ten thousand steps on the human heart.

In the parable the seed which fell on the hard ground of the wayside was devoured by the birds of the air or *"the wicked one"*, which is the devil (Matt. 13:19). He still uses many means to neutralize the effects of the Word of God on the hearts of men.

The second type of soil is the **rocky soil representing the shallow heart**. The rocky soil was not earth mixed with countless small rocks, but soil which lay one or two inches deep upon a ledge of submerged stone. The plant may begin well just as any other, but the tender roots will not penetrate the rock and when the heat of summer come they will wilt and die.

This type of soil may come to represent the emotional hearer who lives by their feelings rather than by their convictions. When John the Baptist came preaching the common people heard him and were baptized. When Jesus came preaching and healing, they were all excited and Jesus was popular. Their faith was shallow like a thin layer of soil over solid bedrock. Thus, their commitment to Christ was "easy come, easy go."

Next, is the **thorny soil representing a crowded heart**. Surely the sower did not broadcast seed into the thorns. Instead he cast them into soil which had an abundance of thorn seeds which he could not see. When the thorns and briars grew they often develop more rapidly and robbed the good seed of light, moisture, nutrients, etc. As a result they do not grow to maturity and produce fruit.

Jesus says these thorns are *"the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches"* (Matt. 13:22a). Mark adds *"the lust of other things"* (4:19) and Luke, *"pleasure so this life"* (8:14). These consist of the pernicious p's of the pre-occupied hearer: profession, position, power, prestige, profits, possessions, pastimes, pleasure, projects, or politics.

The cares and worries of this world leave no room for the Word to develop and grow. The English word "worry" is derived from the old German word *wurgen*, which means "to choke." So this type of hearer is suffering from a type of mental strangulation. When one is so busy with the cares of this world so as not to be concerned about the Words of eternal life He is choking out the seed.

This soil lacks room to the seed which is the Word of God. If it does produce any fruit it will stop soon. Thorns and weeds can be weeded out. All they need to do is repent and have a thorn pulling day in their heart and make room for the Word to grow.

Finally, there is the **good soil representing the fruitful heart**. The best soil to receive the seed is fertile and loose. It is able to receive good seed without interference by weed seeds. It is deep enough to allow the roots to go down.

The Bible speaks of various types of hearers. This soil represents the good hearers. The first soil produces nothing. The second produces some roots but withers away. The third produces even some fruit but is choked out. Only good soil brings forth fruit in abundance for harvest. The crowds were filled with these various types of hearers. The hope is that enough seed will fall on good ground.

What is the fruit? Bearing fruit would equate to simple obedience to the Word. Notice that the soil brings forth fruit *"with patience."* The sower does not expect a harvest overnight.

Three things are important for a good harvest: 1) the seed must be unadulterated; 2) the sower must be faithful; and 3) the soil must be good. The most important thing for good soil is for the hearts of the hearers to truly listen to the Word. Nineteen times in Matthew 13, Jesus used the word *"hear."* To be fruitful and more fruitful hearers of the Word should take soil samples to see what kind of heart they possess.

### **The Parable of the Wheat & the Tares, 13:24-30, 36-43**

Matthew 13 is called by some as the *Sermon on the Sea*. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares is only found here. This parable appears to pick up where the Parable of the Sower has left off. However, it must be noted that in the Parable of the Sower, there was one sower, one kind of seed, and four results. In contrast, there are two sowers, two kinds of seed and two harvests in the Parable of the Tares and Wheat .

The explanation to this parable is given by Jesus in response to the disciples' inquiry (13:36). It is one of the few in which we have Jesus' own explanation.

- **Field = the World (13:38)**

The field is the world, the human race or society. The place where the Gospel is preached to men. In that world of humanity the Lord Jesus has scattered His own.

- **Good Seed = Children of the Kingdom (13:38)**

Notice that Jesus uses the same metaphor: seed to represent two different things in two different parables. The disciples are those who compose the *"good soil"*, in which the seed has been sown in the Parable Of The Sower. In contrast, in the Parable Of The Wheat And Tares, the disciples are the *"good seed"* themselves. Thus, when one receives the "seed" of the kingdom (the Word of God), they become "good seed" (a son of the kingdom).

- **Tares = Children of the Wicked One (13:38)**

The servants of the owner were dismayed to find that weeds, that is, darnel or "false wheat" growing among the wheat. Darnel is "a troublesome weed in the grainfields, resembling wheat" (Arndt and Gingrich 340). Thayer says it resembles "wheat except that its grains are black" (272).

This parable explains that there are children of the kingdom in contrast with the children of the wicked one. This children produced by the false seeds of the Devil are false disciples or brethren though not limited to them. *"He who commits sin is of the devil"* (1 Jn. 3:8). They would compose any soul who is not a child of God. Perhaps unfaithful Christians who have gone back out into the world. The tares have the ability to mimic the appearance of wheat, the good seed. However, when the head of grain is formed the tares have black kernels whereas the good wheat has golden heads. As Jesus said, *"by their fruits ye shall know them."*

- **Sower of the Good Seed = Christ (13:37)**

In this parable the sower is clearly identified as the Son of Man, that is, Jesus Christ. It is His seed (faithful Christians) versus the Devil's seed (his children). He owns the field, the good seed and controls the servants and the harvesters and the time of harvest.

- **Sower of the Tares = the Devil (13:39)**

The enemy of the Son of Man is Satan. Notice he is a coward and does his diabolical work at

night when the servants are asleep. In Ireland, an outgoing tenant, in spite, sowed wild oats in the fields which he was leaving, and it was next to impossible to exterminate them. Rome had a law forbidding such activity. The enemy has sown tares in the world (field) in an effort to confuse the reapers and destroy by imitation. This adversary is seek to destroy faithful Christians (1 Pet. 5:8).

- **Reapers = Angels (13:39)**

When Jesus comes again it will be harvest time. He will be accompanied by His angels *"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (2 Thess. 1:8,9).

- **Harvest = End of the World (13:39)**

The harvest is the end of the world (verse 39) or the Judgment Day. The word *"harvest"* is an Old Testament metaphor for judgment (Jer 51:53; Hos. 6:11). In Matthew 3:12, John the baptizer said that Christ will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat in His garner; He will burn up chaff with unquenchable fire. *"God hath appointed a day in which He [Jesus Christ, drv] will judge the world"* (Ac. 17:31). This punishment of the wicked and reward of the righteous is a recurring theme in several of the parables (Mt 13:49-50; 18:34-35; 25:41, 45-46).

### **Parable of the Mustard Seed, 13:31,32**

In the parable of the Sower, the disciples had heard that only a fourth part of the seed sown had prospered; in the Tares, they had heard of the hindrances which beset even the part that remained. Now Jesus gives two parables for their encouragement. Both address the small beginning and rapid growth of the kingdom. First, the parable of the Mustard Seed prophetically addresses the rapid growth of the Kingdom.

- **Small Beginnings of the Kingdom**

The growth of trees is slow, but that of a herb, like mustard seed, is abnormal, developing without the strong wood-tissue of a tree, and living only long enough to develop flowers and seed. *"Mustards have notably small seed, and under favorable conditions grow in a few months into very tall herbs - 10-12 ft."* (ISBE).

The mustard seed was proverbially small. Although it was not literally the smallest seed known, but "small as a grain of mustard seed" was a proverbial expression among the Jews (Lk. 17:6). It was symbolically small.

Jesus had small beginnings. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem and the son of a carpenter of Nazareth. Sometimes His disciples must have despaired. Only twelve of them, let the world was so large. Their faith began unnoticed, like a tiny mustard seed, but nevertheless has gone around the world.

Beginnings are important. Little beginnings have great potential. When we are tempted to complain, "the job is too big; it won't do any good to start it" let us remember the mustard seed.

- **Great Growth of the Kingdom**

Great things come from growth. The difference between a small mustard seed and large mustard tree is growth. Like the mustard seed the kingdom began to grow rapidly (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:4-6; 11:21; 12:24).

Christianity has altered the course of human history and survived the passing of two millennia. H.G. Wells has said, "his is easily the dominant figure in history...a historian without any theological bias whatever should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth."

### **Parable of the Leaven, 13:33**

This parable, while it teaches the same general truth as the previous, holds forth the inward growth of the kingdom, while "the Mustard Seed" seems to point chiefly to the outward growth. In the parable of Leaven the King of kings informs His disciples of the transforming power of the Kingdom.

- **Transforming Power From Without**

Generally, leaven has been a symbol of evil's corruption (Mk. 8:15). Our great-grandmothers would have had a different image from the parable: a small container on the back of the kitchen range

containing a piece of dough rescued from a loaf of bread before it was baked, bubbling in a nutrient solution of potato water or a flour mixture. This "starter", as it was called became the leavening agent for future batches of bread. The parable's leaven was probably a piece of fermented dough kept over from a former baking.

- **Transforms Silently and Slowly Within**

Leaven works from within. We cannot see the leaven working. Bread is set aside to rise for several hours. Naturally, the Gospel of Christ has an inner influence. It must work within man's heart (Mk. 7:21-23). The process of conversion is gradual, but thorough. It is silent, for it operates silently within the heart. Sin is forgiven at once, but growth is gradual.

The Kingdom works unseen. No troops or tank movements or planes flying overhead. The Kingdom did not appear all at once. Yet, the soldiers of the cross following their marching orders transformed the world.

- **Transforms Quality**

Leavened bread is not like the dull, tasteless unleavened bread. Yeast makes bread raise, light, and tasty. Nor does it make sourdough Christians.

Christianity transformed life for the individual man (I Cor. 6:9,10). When Christ comes new deeds (Col. 3:5-17). He has new thoughts (Col. 3:1-4). He is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

The early Christians exerted a powerful influence in the pagan world of the Roman Empire. The critics of Christianity complained: "*They are disturbing our city*" (Ac. 16:20). and "*These people have turned the world upside down*" (Ac. 17:6).

- **Transforms Completely**

Although speaking of leaven as a negative influence in a congregation, Paul wrote, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (I Cor. 5:6). The process is complete - "the whole is leavened." It has a contagious characteristic. Leaven is aggressive. Truly, the leaven like influence of the Kingdom has transformed all aspects of life in all the kingdoms of the world.

### **Parable of the Hidden Treasure, 13:44**

Some have trouble with the man who finds the treasure purchasing the field while withholding from the owner the presence of the treasure. However, this is entirely in accordance with Jewish law which entitled the buyer of a crate of fruit to have ownership of anything found in the fruit. Furthermore, the parable was given to spotlight the man's delight in and his desire to obtain the treasure and not to imitate his every action. It is a mistake to carry each detail of a parable too far.

- ◆ **The Treasure**

The kingdom is the most glorious of all treasures. Yet, if one does not see or comprehend its value they will not pursue its purchase.

A geologist sees a precious stone where others see only a rock. An antique dealer sees a priceless one of a kind chair while a mere shopper sees only a old piece of junk. An admirer of art sees a pretty picture while an art critic sees a priceless painting by a master. The first thing necessary in making the sacrifices to purchase an expensive item is to first see its true value. Jesus uses this parable to focus our attention on the great value of the Kingdom. Once we have seen how grand it really is we will stop at nothing to make it ours.

- ◆ **The Sacrifice**

Once he has felt the shear delight of his valuable find, the man will sacrifice anything and everything to make the field his own. Legally, if he buys the field he inherits the fortune. Being a citizen of the Kingdom demands that one count the cost to see if the sacrifice for salvation is real worth it all (Luke 14:26-33).

- ◆ **The Joy**

The man has no regrets in parting with all that he has. Joy of obtaining the treasure replaces and justifies all his loss. He makes no complaints. The buyer sheds no tears. The joy over the buried treasure buries the pain of parting with his possessions. He has not lose everything. Instead, he has gained everything. It is like the joy of Paul who found Christ. "*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the*

knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7,8).

### **Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, 13:45,46**

#### ◆ **The Pearl**

The pearl is the most unique gemstone due to its origin. A grain of sand or some other foreign substance invades the shell of an oyster. By way of protection, the oyster secretes a coat of calcareous matter in thin layers over the intruder. Eventually, it enlarges and hardens into a beautiful sphere. The pearl's value is determined by its shape and size.

The pearl adequately represents the kingdom. Both the pearl and the kingdom are not made by the hands of men, but by God. The pearl is produced by God's laws of nature and the kingdom by His spiritual laws. The kingdom is not found without effort.

#### ◆ **The Merchant**

The merchant's business involved finding and investing in gemstones. Such a wise business man would always be on the look out for the perfect pearl. His traits of ambition, vigilance, and determination are characteristics which Jesus esteems. This is how to seek for the Kingdom of God.

#### ■ **The Quest**

The merchant is not out searching for the second best pearl. He wants the most perfect one that can be found. They give their time and effort to the pursuit of the mundane worldly goals which are of very little value to their souls. Jesus tells us to "*seek first the kingdom of God*" (Matt. 6:33).

#### ■ **The Price**

The merchant knows a good value when he sees it. No matter what it takes he is prepared to pay the cost for this perfect pearl. The price paid for this pearl could have required the man to sell all his other gemstones. Is Christ and His kingdom worth the sacrifice of your job, your family, your friends, your money, your car, yes, and even your own life?

### **Parable of the Dragnet, 13:47-50**

In Galilee, the most effective means of commercial fishing was to use a large net which was weighted on the bottom with lead weights and on the top of the net, it was supported by floats. Two boats were used to encircle a large area and capture every fish, creature, trash, etc. This dragnet could corral a large catch of fish which would then need to be sorted.

#### • **The Sea = World of Lost Sinners**

In the previously studied parable the field was the world but in this parable the sea is the world. In the sea there are all sorts of fish. The Kingdom is composed of all kinds of people and sinners.

#### • **The Fisherman = Preachers of the Gospel**

Even in the Old Testament God's fishermen were soul-winners. "*Behold, I will send forth many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them*" (Is. 19:8). When Jesus called His disciples He said, "*from henceforth thou shalt catch men*" (Lk. 5:10) and "*follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17). The job of a fisherman is to catch fish. Likewise, the duties of the soul winner is not to judge which fish can come into the net. A fisherman of men must proclaim the Gospel message to all the world. The Gospel is for all not just the select few.

#### • **The Net = Kingdom or Church**

Those taken by the dragnet in this parable do not represent all men but those specifically drawn in by the Gospel into the kingdom. All types of men and woman obey the Gospel.

#### • **The Fish = Good and Bad Christians**

All congregations are composed of good and faithful brethren and those who have denied the faith. There are men like Judas, or Demas, or Hymenaeus, or Diotrephes, as well as men like Aquila, James, and Barnabas. The church at Corinth with its immorality and carnal divisiveness. The churches of Galatia with Judaizing teachers of righteousness by the law. Five of the seven churches of Asia were plagued with idolatry, immorality, false teaching, loveless and smug complacency. The church at Laodicea was lukewarm, but they no doubt reasoned that they were not doing any great sins. Of course,

mere church membership is no proof of Christianity.

- **The Separation = Judgment Day**

Not all the fish in the net were worth keeping. Some would be too small. Others were considered unclean. The judgment under consideration is not corrective discipline. Instead it is speaking of the final judgment. Sometimes the contents of the net can not be sorted while it is being drawn. At other times the sorting takes place after the boats arrive back on the shore. If the parable of the tares emphasizes the waiting, the parable of the net emphasizes the careful sorting.

- **The Casting Away = Hell**

The bad fish would be thrown out to have either rotted under the hot sun of Galilee or they were burned in a large fire. The oft-used expression in scripture, "cast away" or "cast out", denotes a state of condemnation: "cast out from the presence of God."

Weeping speaks of remorse and sorrow. Gnashing of teeth speaks of frustration and hostility and anger. Jesus is speaking of the horrors of Hell. The cast-away fish of the parable are the "wicked," and those who remove them are the "angels," and the time is "the end of the world."

The net or kingdom is now filled with all kinds of souls. Truly Judgment Day is coming. There are only two kinds of fish: good and bad. If one is not good he will not be cast into the fire and eternally rejected.

### **Parable of the Householder, 13:51-53**

This final parable of that day can be compared with the first Parable of the Sower. Both parables speak of the treatment of God's Word by the individual hearer. In the first parable the Word of God comes into the good heart and bears fruit. In this final parable the Word is given to others. In The Sower, fruit bearing is shown to be understanding, receiving and keeping the Word. In the Householder we are taught that the best way of keeping the Word is to transmit it to others.

In this short parable Jesus pointed out five responsibilities that Christians have toward God's truth.

- The Duty of Ascertaining the Truth That Is Taught**

There are two groups involved in this parable. First is the scribe or *gramma* in the Greek which is the source of our English word, *grammar*. The scribe was one whose job was to write down the Law for others to have a reliable copy. They were the human xerox machines of their day. Because they dealt with the scriptures on such a constant and intense way every day, they were well instructed, and learned men of the Law of Moses. A scribe's work was to examine the Law and discover its teachings.

The second group here in the parable are the disciples. The disciples of Jesus are to be the next generation of scribes or teachers of Truth. All scribes or teachers must be trained. Like Mary, they studied in the College of the Feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39).

- The Duty of Apprehending the Truth of What Is Learned**

Learning must produce understanding. The instruction given to the scribes was scholastic. They were taught in all the wisdom of the rabbis. Their exposition of Scripture consisted of citing a text and then quoting the opinions of the Rabbis. This is not understanding.

Jesus asked his disciples, "*Have ye understood all these things?*" Whether they fully understood all the implications of His teaching in the seven previous parables is to be doubted. A disciple of Christ must learn with a view to understanding what He has taught.

- The Duty of Applying the Truth to One's Life**

A sermon is prepared to prick the heart of a certain man in the worship services. The man comes out and vigorously shakes the preacher's hand and tells him what a good job he did getting after those in the congregation that need to be awoken to their failures and duties. The man listened, but he failed to apply it to his own heart. Teaching must be applied in order for faith to grow.

Ezra was "*a ready scribe in the Law of Moses*" He "*prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord*" (Ezra 7:6,10). A disciple means a "learner," or one who follows another's teaching, and who is not only a pupil, but an adherent and imitator of his teacher (Jn. 8:31; 15:8). A true scribe of God lives what he has learned and practices what he teaches.

- The Duty of Accumulating the Truth in Time**

The scribe not only deals with the truths of old, but he mines the scriptures to find new treasures. All true students of the Bible are ever learning. They may even find new insights into old lessons learned years ago. This is true not because of the failure of any teacher but because the Word of God is given by the omniscient mind of God.

The Law is old, and the Gospel is new, yet the latter came as the development of the former. The teaching of the Kingdom, for instance, was a well-known doctrine taught by the prophets of old. It has been said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed while the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

□ **The Duty of According the Truth to Others**

A householder was a “house-despot.” It is the word that shows one’s authority. He was the head of his house, with authority to control his treasured store, and who brought forth the right kind of food at the right time, suiting meals to eaters.

The treasure is the same as treasury or a place of deposit. Two different words are used for “treasure” in the New Testament. The one means to lay up and keep. The other word implies that which is spent. The first insinuates a tightwad, the second, a extravagant spender. As householders, teachers have vast treasure in the Scriptures. These must not only be hidden within the heart but scattered lavishly to the hearts of others.

Teachers of the Word in a way are accumulating by giving away. This is a paradox. It is those who obey God’s Word who learn the most of God’s Word and have the most to share.

**Questions:**

1. Who is the sower in the parable?
2. What does each type of soil represent?
3. What is the seed? After 2000 years what does the “seed” of the Gospel produce?
4. Give examples of thorns in the hearts of men which choke out the seed.
5. How many sowers are in parable of the wheat and the tares? Who are they?
6. When does the second sower come to plant the bad seed? What does this tell us about his nature?
7. What do the two types of seeds represent?
8. When is the harvest?

9. What will happen at Judgment to this world filled with saints and sinners?
10. What do the parables of the Leaven and the Mustard Seed teach about the Kingdom?
11. Give examples of how the Gospel (leaven) transforms the quality of the person?
12. What is the main purpose in the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price?
13. How can the man be joyful over his treasure when it has cost him everything?
14. How is the Kingdom like a priceless pearl?
15. What is the merchant willing to pay such a great price for the pearl?
16. What does cast away refer to?
17. How did a dragnet work? How many workers would be needed?
18. What does the sea represent?
19. Who do the fisherman represent?
20. Who are the fish and what does the net represent?
14. What happened to the fish that were cast away?
15. The word used for "scribe" in the original text is the source of what English word?
16. What must teachers of Truth be trained in and study?



17. What had happened to scribes during Christ's time of teaching this parable?
18. What are two meanings of the word "treasure" in the New Testament? Which meaning is used in the parable and why?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What are ways we can we take a personal spiritual soil sample? How can we fix bad spiritual soil? Are these soil conditions permanently set or can they be changed?
2. What are some things people need to be willing to give up in order to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven?
3. What does the parable of the Householder teach us about how to treat the truth?

**Homework:** Examine how much you truly value the kingdom of God.

# Messiah's Identity

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## Matthew 14:1-33

### John Loses His Head, 14:1-12

John had an unwavering commitment to preach repentance. His courage did not waver when criticized, rejected by the religious establishment; or faced with governmental powers. He called the Pharisees a *"generation of vipers"* (Luke 3:18-19).

The greatness of his courage is seen in he rebuking of Herod, *"It is not lawful for you to have her"* (Matt. 14:4). As the fame of Jesus spread throughout Galilee and Perea during those early days of His earthly ministry, it was inevitable that news of Him should reach the ears of the governor of the region, Herod Antipas. *"Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, 'John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets.' But when Herod heard, he said, 'This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!'"* (Mark 6:14-16). Herod's guilty conscience compelled him to make this assertion. As if trapped in a Shakespearean tragedy Herod feared John even though he was beheaded.

Why was John the Baptist feared so much by Herod? It was not simply because he had beheaded an innocent man. Another Herod beheaded the apostle James without any appearance of regret. Perhaps, Jesus' estimate of John can shed some light on this. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Mt. 11:11).

Before looking at John let us take a look into the background of Antipas and Herodias who were involved in John's death. Herodias, therefore, had married her uncle Herod Philip I, who was disinherited by Herod the Great, and lived as a private citizen in Rome. Antipas on a visit to Rome stopped to see his brother. During that meeting, Herod proposed marriage to Herodias; Herodias agreed to the proposal on the condition that Herod should divorce his first wife, the daughter of Aretus IV, king of Nabatean. So Antipas, sent her back to her father at Petra for the sake of Herodias. Herodias was actually his own niece as well. Josephus tells us that Herodias's daughter was named Salome; she was both the niece and great-niece of Herod Antipas

John opposed the marriage of Antipas and Herodias as unlawful for three reasons: 1) The husband of Herodias was still living. The Mosaic law forbade the marriage of a brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except for levirate marriage (Dt. 25:5). Since Antipas's brother had a daughter Salome, and more importantly, his brother was still living, levirate marriage did not apply. 2) The lawful wife of Antipas was still living. And finally, 3) Antipas and Herodias, being nephew and niece, were related to each other within the forbidden degrees of blood relationship. But keep in mind Herod was a Idumean not a Jew.

Today, many have the concept that "we will live together so long as we both shall love", instead of "so long as we both shall live". When any trouble comes in the marriage, the two parties throw up their hands in disgust, get a no-fault divorce, and go their separate ways. Modern type preachers flatter the great and honorable ones of the earth to secure their favor. Faithful preachers need to preach the same message as John preached. John the Baptist had condemned the marriage of Herodias and Herod Antipas by proclaiming to Herod, *"it is not lawful for you to have her"*.

Notice how Herod responds to John's preaching. He shut up the preacher by shutting him up in prison. Herod wanted to please his wife, but killing John would displease he people. Herod seems to have a respect for John. He knew John was right.

Drinking dulls the ability to reason and stay focused on what is right. Herod had drank freely and was soon freed from his faculties. A drinking king is not a good judge.

During a party for his lords Salome danced. Oriental dancers were immodest and lascivious in movement. She danced in such impressive way that Herod momentarily "lost his head," and made the rash vow.

Herod soon regretted his rash vow. If the making of the oath was wrong, it was a greater sin to perform it. Two wrongs do not make a right. It merely doubles the wrong. Sinful oaths must be repented of, not performed. He had promised a dancing girl up to half of his kingdom rashly motivated out of his own lust. The mother of Salome told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod should have refused Salome, telling her that John's head was not in the half of the kingdom he promised her.

Herod was led on step by step from one degree of wrong to another. Herod lusted after Herodias and was in an adulterous marriage. He threw John in prison to stop his preaching. Next, Herod's lust for Herodius' daughter caused John to lose his head. When Herod lost his head over lust, John lost his head. John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

### **Jesus Five Thousand Fed, 14:13-21**

After hearing about the martyrdom of John, Jesus leaves the west coast of Galilee and by boat travels to the northeastern side and lands near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). The boat most likely followed the shore. The people followed Him. They ran ahead (Mark 6:33) and were waiting by the thousands when Jesus made land fall. Only the number of men are mentioned. If each man was married and had two children we are look at about twenty thousand people making it indeed is a "*great multitude*."

Jesus wanted some time alone perhaps to rest, mourn the loss of John, be with His disciples and/or commune with His Father. However, He put those desires on hold when He saw the multitude. Like several other times in the Gospel Jesus was moved with compassion. The term literally refers to movement in one's bowels. The bowels not the heart were considered the seat of ones emotions. So Jesus resumed His work among the masses by healing those in need. Jesus cares (1 Peter 5:7).

It was already evening when the disciples came to Jesus with a problem they observed. The people needed supper. They had run after His boat all day. Whatever limited supplies they brought were long gone. The disciples pointed out the serious nature of this problem. It was late, evening is between three and six. Too late to do much about that many hungry mouths. It was a "*deserted place*" this does not mean a place without water. After all there was "*green grass*" (Mark 6:39) and "*much grass*" (John 6:10). The time of the year was spring. John's account tells us it was around the time of the Passover (John 6:4). This was not a desert but an unpopulated area. So the disciples resolved the problem: Jesus should send them away so the masses could buy their food.

Imagine their utter shock when Jesus said, "*They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat*" (14:16). The term "*you*" is emphatic meaning "YOU need to take care of this problem." John tells us this as said in order to test the disciples. "*He said to test him [Philip], for He Himself knew what He would do*" (John 6:). This was not just an opportunity for a great miracle before the people and a show of Divine compassion, Jesus turned this into a teaching moment for the Twelve.

In response to Jesus command, they countered with another problem. "*We have here only five loaves and two fish*" (14:17). In the other accounts, Philip points out the 200 denarii is not enough to bother trying to buy enough bread.

The disciples failed the test. They had enough evidence that Jesus could deal with the issue. He had demonstrated the power to turn water into "wine" (grape juice) at the wedding in Cana (John 2). They were too focused on the lack of food, the little bit of money in the treasury, the late hour of the day, and distance to the nearest food source. Instead they should have focused on Jesus who had the power to solve the problem without losing an audience. They needed to trust Jesus with the impossible. "*Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You... 'Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?'*" (Jer. 32:17;27). In the hands of the disciples it was indeed impossible to feed the multitude. But when they turned over the little they had to Jesus the impossible became possible with miracle of duplication and multiplication.

Jesus needed the masses to stay to teach with an objective lesson. The lesson to both the twelve and the multitude was the miracle of how Jesus fed the five thousand. It is the only miracle by

Jesus found in all four gospels demonstrating how important it is (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:35–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:4–13). Jesus would later feed four thousand in a similar manner (15:32-39).

After the disciples bring Him the boy's sack lunch "*He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes*" (14:19). Jesus used His excellent managerial skills to have the people sit down in fifties and hundreds. The apostles were the distributors but not the manufacturers. They were the waiters and Jesus was the chef. Jesus took the little boy's lunch and prayed a prayer of thanks giving. Imagine that, Jesus the creator thanking the Father who was the creator with Him from the beginning. Jesus stilled thanked the Father. This is not to be compared with the Lord's Supper. It is true Jesus broke the bread. But breading of bread is the act and description of a common meal.

The results of this miracle were amazing. The people "*all ate and were filled.*" The term "*filled*" means they were stuffed the were complete satisfied to the point they could not eat one more bite (see 5:6). Jesus is not stingy. He gives abundantly. "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10; also see Eph. 3:20). This single meal turned out to be 20 or 30 thousand meals. With "*twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained*" (14:20b). That is one basket for each disciple. This also may be representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The people wanted Jesus to be like Moses according to John's account and continue to feed them manna from Heaven. Jesus would not. His mission was to supply their spiritual needs not to solve world hunger. Unfortunately, the multitude left having tasted the bread without having an appetite for The Bread of Life (John 6:27). A way to a man's soul is not through his stomach.

### **Peter On Water Thread, 14:22-33**

Seeking to find some alone time, Jesus commanded His disciples to leave to the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee by way of their boat, Meanwhile He went alone to the mountain to pray.

#### **◆ Faith Big Enough To Obey the Lord**

Notice Jesus compelled or made the disciples leave (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45). Obeying Jesus is not without difficulty. He sent them into a storm. If you are going to be following Jesus you need to obey Him, but do not expect smooth sailing. The first time they were caught up in a storm which tested their faith, Jesus was asleep in the boat, but at least He was with them (Matt. 8:23–27). Now they are alone.

#### **◆ Faith Big Enough to Overcome Fear**

The multitudes were fed earlier in the evening. The disciples were sent away by Jesus in the later part of the evening between seven and eight o'clock. Jesus did not come to them until the fourth watch of the night. Whereas in the Old Testament the Jews had three watches in the night, in the first century they went by the Roman method which called for four watches in the night. These watches started at six in the evening, the second started at nine, and third at midnight. The fourth watch would have been some time between three and six o'clock in the morning. Therefore, he had been on the mountain praying for several hours, while they were on the sea rolling against the wind and waves for about the same amount of time.

After several hours fighting the waves and rowing against the wind the disciples were only three or four miles across the lake. This would have put them right in the middle of the sea in waters about two hundred feet deep and far from any help from land. Although there were twelve in this boat. Only four were experienced fishermen. The boat would have been large enough. A boat about eight feet wide and over twenty-five feet long was found preserved in the mud along the shore of the sea in the mid-eighties. However, their faith in the boat would have been waning at this point. Perhaps all twelve where bailing water and rowing as fast and hard as they could hoping just to stay afloat long enough to last out the storm.

The Twelve would have had a good reason to be afraid. The worst part of the storm was that Jesus was not with them. Where was He when they needed Him most. He commanded them to get into the boat and sent them into a storm only to be absent when they needed Him to command the winds and the waves to be still. He was miles away on the mountain. Jesus making intercession for them in prayer was all the help them needed. Despite the distance He knew their plight. No matter what the distance,

Jesus is near and He can hear our cries for help. No matter what the storm, He can calm it .

Why did Jesus not come earlier? Did He not care about their plight? The purpose of sending them into the storm without His physical presence was to strengthen their faith. Fear and faith do not go well together. Fear stunts the growth of faith. Yet to get past their fears, they had to face the storm. Faith is victorious, only when fears are conquered. They saw the storm as the means of their destruction, Jesus used it was a means of instruction. They were getting no where on their current course in the storm, though Jesus used the waves as a path to walk to them.

When Jesus did come to them by walking upon the water in the middle of the night, they were even more afraid. They thought Jesus to be a ghost. The Greek term for “ghost” is *phantasma* from which is derived the English terms “phantom” and “phantasm.” They were being attacked by the physical storm and now a spiritual attack forewarning of their imminent doom. Fortunately as He came nearer, they were able to see and hear His voice.

#### ◆ **Faith Big Enough to Trust in the Power of the Almighty**

As Jesus approached the boat, He encouraged the disciples by calling out three statements of comfort: “*Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.*” To “*be of good cheer*” is the opposite of “*do not be afraid.*” Fear was robbing them of joy. However, the basis of being cheerful and not fearful is found in who was speaking to them. He is the great I Am not a ghost. The literal translation of the Greek is “I Am” which is more accurate than the English rendering of “*it is I.*” It is not just their Teacher and Master, Jesus. The one coming to them upon the waves of the sea is God. The great “*I AM*” (Ex. 3:14). He is the Almighty One who has authority and might over the wind and the waves.

Recognizing Jesus, Peter longs to come to Him. So he requests in faith that Jesus ask him to come out upon the water. If Jesus is really the Almighty One, Peter can do anything. After all, “*with God all things are possible*” (Mat. 19:26b) and “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Phil. 4:13). One might think that Peter was expressing a bit of doubt when he asked Jesus: “*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water*” (Matt. 14:28). James Coffman explains what the statement really meant: “Peter’s ‘if’ in this place is not a word of doubt but an argumentative ‘if’ such as Christ himself used when he said, ‘if I go, I will come again.’ The true meaning is, ‘Since it is you...’”

#### ◆ **Faith Big Enough to Get Out of the Boat**

Big faith required Peter to get out of the boat. He needed to have more trust in Jesus power to keep him safe on the waves and in the wind, than the trust he put into the boat. Jesus was not in the boat.

Faith is often demonstrated by taking risks. We are not talking about the risk of sky diving or bungee jumping. Peter had the risk stepping out of the logical place to be and onto a raging sea. It is impossible enough to walk on the waters that are still and the wind is calm. Peter got out of the boat onto waves that would toss him around and wind which would blow him over. Life is risky. Eighty percent of all accidents take place within a mile of home. When I told that to my neighbor he moved.

The failure of Peter was not getting out of the boat. The failure is seen by the other eleven who stayed in the boat. They are not noticed in the story, because they did not even try to get out of the boat. Peter is the only other man (except Jesus) to walk upon the water. He alone experienced the glory with the Lord. However, you will never experience the joy and trill of walking on the water with Jesus until you are brave enough to get out of the boat. Never play football and you will never suffer from getting tackled, however you will never know the trill of making a touchdown.

Did Peter fail? Yes. But he alone could learn from the failure, because he alone got out of the boat. He was the only one who could experience the joy in Jesus being there to pick him up out of the water. Peter, not the other eleven, would demonstrate what a “*little faith*” could do. Anyone can sit in the safety of the boat and watch. Peter had enough faith to get out of the boat and do with God’s help what no other man has ever done.

#### ◆ **Faith Big Enough to Stay Focused on Christ**

Peter’s failure was when he took his eyes off of Jesus and started to focus on the waves and the wind of the storm. The sinking feeling came over him when he forgot about the presence and power of the Lord out of the fear of the storm. France wrote, “true faith is single-mindedly focused on Jesus”. Big faith keeps one focused on Jesus in the storms of life.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Look Jesus for Salvation**

Peter's faith may have been paralyzed by the winds and the waves, yet this was only for a moment. He still believed in Jesus' power to save. He cried out, "*Lord, save me!*" He did not turn back to the boat or cry out to the other disciples to rescue him. His request showed even more faith. Even in his failure Peter's faith could still grow bigger.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Overcome Doubts**

Jesus' saving of Peter came with a scolding: "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" (Matt. 14:31). Jesus did not rebuke Peter for getting out of the boat or even sinking, He noted his little faith which led to doubt. Bengel put it this way: "he was not blamed because he came out of the ship, but because he did not remain in the firmness of faith."

Did Peter have "*little faith*"? Yes, but look at what he could do with the little faith he had. Jesus did not reject Him for his little faith and doubting, but saved him. Peter's faith was not enough to get him across the waves to Jesus but Jesus was willing to come to Peter. Peter means "rock." Peter sunk like a rock because of his "little faith." The Lord is able to take that rock and build upon it a big faith.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Understand the Truth**

After Peter and Jesus got into the boat the storm suddenly ceased. As a result of the three miracles of Jesus and Peter walking upon the water and the immediate calming of the storm, the disciples were amazed. Before they witnessed these events "*they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened*" (Mark 6:52). Now they know the truth. Jesus is able to do anything because of who He is: "*the Son of God.*"

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Worship Christ**

With Jesus in the boat, the disciples no longer feared Him as a ghost. They did not see Him as a great prophet who happened to do great wonders by God's power. They worshiped Him, because He is God.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Confess Jesus as the Son of God**

Although God and demons have addressed Jesus as deity in the past, the disciples as a whole proclaim: "*Truly You are the Son of God.*" When He had calm the sea before the disciples merely asked, "What manner of man is this?" (Matt. 8:23-27). Now they recognize this man was the Son of God.

This event has more than just one miracle. First, Jesus even at a great distance knew of the disciples plight as they suffered in the storm. He walked upon the water to them. Jesus enabled Peter to walk upon the water. He was able to stand on the water and save Peter. The storm ceased when they entered the boat. Finally, they were transported in the boat "*instantaneously*" to the shore (John 6:21). All these were faith builders.

**Questions:**

1. Why was it not lawful for Herod Antipas to have Herodias?
2. Who did Herod think Jesus was?
3. What request did Salome make of Herod? Why do you think he granted this request?
4. What problem did the disciples notice with the 5000? What solution did they propose?

5. How did Jesus feed the 5000?
6. What is unique about this miracle in the Bible?
7. Did anyone go away hungry? Explain.
8. Why did the disciples cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee?
9. Did the disciples know they were heading into a storm when they got into the boat? Did Jesus?
10. What happened during a previous storm (Matthew 8:23-27)?
11. List the various fears and difficulties that the disciples had to contend with in crossing the Sea of Galilee that night.
12. What did they believe Jesus was when He came walking to them upon the water at night?
13. What three things did Jesus say to the disciples to give them courage?
14. Did Peter express doubt in His ability to come walking on the water to Jesus? Explain.
15. How would you evaluate the faith of the eleven other disciples?
16. What benefits did Peter receive from getting out of the boat?

17. What was Peter's failure?
  
18. Instead of crying out to "*Lord, save me!*" when he was sinking ,what could have Peter tried to do?
  
19. Why did the disciples worship Jesus in the boat?
  
20. What are the various miracles which take place in our texts?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. When we are faced with the impossible and have very little in our possession to resolve the problem, what should we do?
  
2. What can be done to grow our little faith today?
  
3. What are the fears which hinder our faith today?

**Homework:** Would you have had a big enough faith to get out of the boat and walk upon the water to Jesus? Better yet, do you have enough faith to get out of your comfort zone and walk to the water to be baptized into Christ to wash away your sins?



# Community of the Kingdom

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## Matthew 19:10 - 19:30

To be a part of the Kingdom requires the ability to accept or make room for the kingdom requirements in a disciple's life. Jesus first speaks of those disciples who can accept a life of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. Next, although rejected by the apostles, Jesus accepts the little children whose characteristics all are required to have in the Kingdom. The rich, young ruler comes to Jesus and cannot accept Jesus' answers concerning his soul's deep need. Jesus warns that the rich cannot gain acceptance into the kingdom but by the power of God.

### Jesus' Teaching on Celibacy, 19:10-12

The word "case" is translated "cause" in the King James version in verse 19:3. Can a man divorce his wife for just any cause or in any situation? Jesus has said "NO!" Therefore the disciples are overwhelmed. Marriage is permanent and an divorce is not a easy out. Only in the situation or for the cause of adultery can a man divorce his wife. If so, they concluded, "*it is better not to marry*" (19:10b). The term "better" is not a comparison. Celibacy is not being exulted over marriage. The American Standard Version translates "*it is not expedient to marry.*" In the minds of the disciples a man may be benefitted by making a wiser choice by not getting married than to live the rest of his life in a bad marriage.

Remember the twelve would have been taught that marriage has an easy out: divorce for any reason. "Among the Talumdic writings of the rabbis is the statement, 'A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy.' Another rabbi wrote, 'if a man has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her'" (MacArthur 172). Although the Old Testament encourages a man to value a good wife (Prov. 5:18,19; 18:22; 19:14), it does not support the idea of ending a marriage in divorce (which God hates) for the simple reason a man does not think he has a "good" woman.

When Jesus responds with "*All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given*" (19:11), He is not suggesting that a disciple has the right to accept or reject His teachings on this matter. The term "accept" means to make a space or provide a place. This is used in the metaphorical since of making room in one's heart (John 8:37; 2 Cor.7:2). Not all will have the heart or strength of mind to be able to remain celebrate.

Jesus lists three categories of eunuchs who will not marry. First, there are those "*who were born thus from their mother's womb*" (19:12a). These have not made a choice on their situation any more those born blind or without limbs. Second group involves those "*eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men,*" (19:12b). Ancient kings often had men who served in the royal courts and in protecting their harems to be castrated. Others were made eunuchs in service to pagan gods. Finally, "*there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*" (19:12c). This final groups is not hindered from marrying due to some physical malady but by their choice not to marry. The motivation for not marrying is "*for the kingdom of heaven's sake.*" This does not mean some form of self-mutilation.

Paul may have been in this category. "*For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*" (1 Cor. 7:7). He saw this as a gift but not in the sense of a gift from the Holy Spirit or a gift given by means of prayer. He goes on in this chapter to mention the benefits of those who are able to live the single life. This in no way has Paul or Jesus commending celibacy as being a superior situation for a Christian over marriage.

This third group of men and women who chose to remain unmarried do so because they would

rather not involve a family in the dangerous missionary work they have volunteered to do for the God's kingdom. Or they may not be able to remarry after they have committed adultery against their spouse and have been put away (divorced). Or they have divorced without a scriptural reason and must "*remain unmarried or be reconciled*" (1 Cor. 7:11). Or they are the innocent spouse divorced by an spouse who simply wants out of the marriage. Finally, there may be one who has to end an adulterous marriage (5:32; 14:4).

Although eunuchs may have had limitations placed upon them under the Law of Moses (Deut. 23:1) Christ's kingdom is wide open to them. This is seen in the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion recorded in Acts 8.

Jesus concludes with a challenge "*He who is able to accept it, let him accept it*" (19:12b). This is not to be viewed as a allowance to opt out of this commands. Jesus is saying "take it or leave it, it is up to you." The strict marriage rules in the Kingdom may be too hard from some to take to heart. In the end it is a matter of total commitment to whatever Jesus has taught or total rejection of the Kingdom.

All the more reason Christian should not enter marriage in haste without counting the cost of a life long commitment with only one exception for divorce. But remember remaining single has it risks of temptations and loneliness which can also be just as hard to bear. So choose celibacy or marriage but in doing so choose always to follow Jesus' commandments with regard to which ever you choose.

### **The Kingdom of Children, 19:13-15**

What follows the discussion on celibacy is one of the most endearing stories about Jesus as He is not too busy for "*little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray*" (19:13a).

- **Attitude of the Parents**

In this context parents are coming to Jesus bringing their children. Whereas the general term for children (*paidia*) is use by Matthew, Luke uses *brephos* meaning babies who had to be carried. This corresponds with Mark 10:13 which says the parents "*brought*" means "to bear" or "carry". It was customary for fathers to bring their some child to a local synagogue to have an elder or rabbi hold the child and pray. Christian parents have an obligation to so care for their children (Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5).

- **Attitude of the Apostles**

However, "*the disciples rebuked*" these parents. Had the apostles already forgotten Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom and their need for a childlike attitude in regard the nature of the Kingdom (18:1-4)? Was it still a sense of pride causing they to chase away these parents with their children? Jesus had previous held a child while teaching this lesson. Perhaps they were concerned about their over worked Rabbi or their need to help Him in his mission by not being interrupted by this nuisance of praying for little children when He had much bigger issues to contend with. The rebuking was an ongoing action. They kept up rebuking as the parents kept on bringing their children. Jesus' time was being wasted by these inconsiderate parents.

- **Attitude of Jesus**

Whatever their attitude or motive may have been, Jesus becomes angry and sharply scolds them for this (Luke 18:15b). Jesus said, "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (19:14).

Jesus shows the proper attitude toward the parents and their children. "*And He laid His hands on them and departed from there*" (19:15). He hugs them or that is He enfolds his arms around them. Next He prays. What this prayer consisted of one can only guess. It does show Jesus elevating the children above the view of the disciples. The Bible teaches children are a blessing (Ps. 127:3-5a) and should be blessed (Luke 9:48). At one time Jesus had been a baby and was a blessing to the world and received blessing by others.

- **Attitude of a Child**

The nature of the kingdom is a key element of the teaching of Jesus. He proclaims here that a child is a good representation of a kingdom citizen. The ideal citizen who enters the kingdom will possess these childlike qualities. Children are submissive, receptive to rebuke, teachable, innocent, dependent and trusting, and as stated before have the humility it takes to be great in the Kingdom of

God. A child has nothing which will hinder them in coming to the King, but all men will not come to the kingdom unless they come like a child.

### **Rich Young Ruler, 19:16-22**

Each of the first three Gospels records story of the rich, young ruler. Each one adds details. Luke calls him a *"ruler"* (Luke 18:18). Perhaps he was a ruler of a synagogue. Thus, making him a religious leader. Matthew tells us he had great possessions and was young. Therefore, he is the rich, young ruler.

He seemed to have no ulterior motive and was willing to listen and learn. His question was: *"Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* (19:16). He was seeking a single act or good deed which would procure him eternal life. There is not one thing to do or his need to focus on limiting the requirements.

The phrase *"eternal life"* is found some fifty times in the New Testament. In Matthew it is found here and in verse 29. It is equivalent to *"kingdom"* in verse twenty-three and *"saved"* in verse twenty-five.

Notice Jesus does not say to him, "There is nothing for you to do. I will do all that needs to be done. Salvation is a gift." The Law of Moses still required obedience to God's commandments. God's part is grace, man's part is obedient faith.

Jesus does not answer his questions right away, but first deals with the issue of the meaning of *"goodness"*. Jesus answers his question with a question. *"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God"* (19:17). "The Good" is a Jewish title for God. Only God is good or perfectly good. If Jesus is good, He is God. God who is Good is the only real source of eternal life.

Jesus was not being insensitive to this great potential for discipleship. He answers the young man: *"But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments"* (19:17b). Salvation is conditional upon respect and obedience of God's word. Perfect obedience is not possible nor does it merit eternal life. But God has always required many to work out his own salvation by doing the works of God.

The young man responds with *"Which ones?"* Did he think like many of the Jews of the day that some commandments were more important than others? Did he regard some as optional?

Jesus lists six commandments from the Law of Moses. He skips the first five commandments in the Decalogue and mentions only the fifth through the ninth (Ex. 20:12-16), He adds a sixth commandment about loving one's neighbor from (Lev. 19:18). Jesus is not saying these are more important. They represent a sampling of all the commandments God wants him to obey. Jesus' listing is not an attempt to sum up all that needs to be done as if eternal life is a matter of checking off a to do list. The commandments represent the will of God revealing to man what He wants the obedient to do.

*"The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?'"* (19:20). He is not insincere or bragging. Like Cornelius, the young man has been obedient. But he stills feels a deep sense of personal inadequacy. He is not like the Pharisees who felt they need nothing and are righteous.

Jesus spoke the truth in love (Mark 10:21). *"If you want to be perfect"* (19:21a). The term "perfect" is not the concept of sinless perfection but that of completeness or wholeness or full maturity. Jesus wanted him to recognize that something was missing. He was blind to the shortcoming in his life. He must first recognize his sin of covetousness and removing anything in his life that would hinder him for following Jesus.

The first thing this young man must do is *"sell what your have."* Jesus knew that this man loved material wealth. Possessions were his god. Selling all one's possessions was never made a universal condition of discipleship. Or was it? *"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:33). Discipleship requires removal from the heart and life of a man anything that will hinder total commitment. Although ownership of property was not condemned by Jesus or forbidden to members of His kingdom. Money is not evil. The love of money is the problem (1 Tim. 6:10).

Jesus left off the tenth commandment: *"Thou shalt not covet."* Covetousness had reached such a degree in the young man's heart that if he did not go to this extreme, he would never be a disciple much less have eternal life. Christ knew literally what was best for him.

The next step was to “*give to the poor.*” This was not a requirement given to all those seeking eternal life or discipleship. Zacchaeus committed to give only half of his wealth to the poor. Jesus agreed with this (Luke 19:8-9). But with all his wealth and obedience the young man may have overlooked the needs of the poor. The poor were his neighbors too.

The promised reward of doing this is “*you will have treasure in heaven*” (see 6:19-20).

Finally, Jesus tells him to “*come, follow Me.*” A great invitation where the yoke is easy and the burden is light (11:29-30). The rich, young ruler was being called to go on the road with an itinerant rabbi in full time discipleship. This would require a major sacrifice and change of life style.

“*But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*” (19:22). He came to Jesus with the right respect calling him good “*Teacher*” and bowing down. He came with the right question, the right motive, but he still made the wrong decision. He was not willing to give up the temporal for the eternal. He would go away grieving with great sorrow, not for his spiritual loss but because of his material attachment. He did not have riches, his riches had him. He was not the master of his money, materialism was his master. He was sorry that he could not be rich in both worlds. He realized he would not be able to serve two master. He came to a fork in the road and had to make a decision. He chose the broad way. It did not lead to eternal life (7:13,14). He came seeking eternal life but left without it. How very, very sad indeed.

### **With God All Things Are Possible, 19:23-30**

When the rich, young ruler reject Jesus demands for discipleship, Jesus “*became very sorrowful.*” He could offer him no second choice. Either Christ will be ALL or NOTHING at all. So Jesus now turns to His disciples to utilize this disappointing encounter to teach them a lesson about material possessions and position. Too often the rich become self-sufficient to the point of not depending upon God to supply what money cannot buy (Rev. 3:17).

By way of explaining how hard it is for a rich man to have eternal life Jesus says, “*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*” (19:24). It is hard to overlook the humor behind this statement. Jesus brings to their mind a picture of a camel struggling to go through the eye of a needle. The camel was the largest animal known in Palestine and the eye of the needle as the smallest opening. Jesus often used humor to make a lasting memorable point. The Persians had a similar proverbial saying involving an elephant.

Some have argued that Jesus was referring not to a literal needle but to a gate at Jerusalem. First, of all, if this gate did exist at the time of Jesus there were many other gates a camel hauling its burden could easily access. Second, Jesus was describing something impossible. Hence the disciples’ response. Mark uses *raphis* coming from the verb *rhapto* meaning “to sew.” Showing that Jesus had a literal eye of a needle in mind. Luke uses *belone* which “is the peculiar word for the surgical needle” (Vincent). W. E. Vine apply states, “The idea of applying ‘the needle’s eye’ to small gates seems to be a modern one; there is no ancient trace of it. The Lord’s object in the statement is to express human impossibility and there is no need to endeavor to soften the difficulty by taking the needle to mean anything more than the ordinary instrument.” Finally, a literal gate with a camel crawling through it on its knees makes the impossible - a possibility. This contradicts the context.

The response of the disciples was “*they were greatly astonished*” (19:25a). They were overwhelmed at this inconceivable claim of Jesus. The Jews viewed the blessings of wealth as proof of God’s favor upon an individual. This belief was based upon a misapplication of Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Which was not a promise to an individual Israelite but to them in general as a nation.

The apostles explain why they are so perplexed. If this be the case “*Who then can be saved?*” (19:25b). If any one should be in the “kingdom” or have “eternal life” or “be saved” it was this young man. What hope did anyone have, even the Twelve? From a mere human standpoint it is impossible whether he has one dollar or a billion. After all, earthly treasure tends to choke out the Word.

Jesus explained that eternal life was not hopeless. Salvation is not a matter of wealth or works but God’s grace. “*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*” (19:26).

This statement is not all inclusive. God is able to accomplish His will (Luke 1:37), but God is not able to lie for that is impossible (Heb. 6:19). It is possible by faith to see God accomplish through His

power what would be impossible for us without Him (17:20). However, without faith it is impossible please Him (Heb. 11:6).

Jesus did not say that it was impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, but impossible for those who trust in their riches. Mark's account adds that Jesus is talking about those who "*trust in riches*". Having wealth is not a hindrance to the Kingdom. Barnabas was wealthy. But if one puts their trust in wealth they will miss eternal life. Being a camel and carrying you material possessions through the gates of Heaven is impossible. Have you ever seen a hearse towing a u-haul/

Peter, speaking for the Twelve, reminded Jesus they "*have left all and followed*" Him (19:27a) when called by Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James and John left their fishing nets and Matthew his tax table. Therefore it was only logical to ask, "*what shall we have?*" (19:27b).

Jesus does not rebuke Peter and the rest but tells them to listen up to something that is of grave importance.

He speaks of an event coming in their future: "*in the regeneration*" (19:26b). It literally means a new birth or beginning. The term is found in one other passage: "*according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration*" (Tit. 3:5).

A variety of interpretations of the regeneration can be found. One of the most popular views comes from Premillennialists who claim this will happen when the Lord returns again to establish his 1000 year reign in Jerusalem sitting upon the throne of David and with the Twelve ruling over the literal nations of the world. This is a false doctrine not supported by the Bible. However, the regeneration may be referring to the resurrection of Jesus. After all, He was brought back to life. There is also a spiritual resurrection that regenerates a new beginning for all who are baptized (Rom. 6:1-6). Others see this event taking place on the Day of Pentecost when Christ has ascended to His throne in Heaven. The apostles rule or judge the sinners telling what to do and the saved who look to their doctrine to be faithful kingdom citizens (Acts 2:42).

The event mentioned above was to take place "*when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory*" (19:28c). Peter said that Jesus was sitting upon the throne on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: ).

Jesus promises the Twelve "*who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (19:28b). These thrones are spiritual and represent their place of authority to judge men on Jesus behalf. They would condemn men of their sin, they would tell them what they must do to be forgiven of their sins and be added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:38,47). The apostles doctrine would then guide them or in matters of kingdom living (Acts 2:42).

Notice Jesus does not give preeminence to Peter, showing the equality of the Twelve.

The promise is given in regard to multiplication on a massive scale. The homes and family one gains as a Christian is "*a hundredfold.*" This promise is contingent upon having sacrificed "*for My name's sake.*" Spiritual blessings and relationships abound when choosing to follow Christ. Jesus reminds them they are making an investment for their future not just sacrifices their life on earth.

This is not to be taken literally. After all, having a hundred wives and a hundred children (not to mention a hundred in-laws) would not be a blessing.

However, this is not a promise for all disciples to be healthy and wealthy as if this is a formula for getting rich. This is not a passage meant to manipulate God into giving to just because we gave or sacrificed in His name. Instead it may reflect a the promise of 6:33: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*" How? After Pentecost when some of the disciples had serious needs, many of the others would supply these needy saints with a place to stay and food just has if they were family.

As the discussion with the young man began with a pursuit of eternal life, Jesus now promises the Twelve they will "*inherit eternal life.*"

### Questions:

1. What did the disciples say "*it is better not to marry*"?

2. What was the common view about marriage and divorce during the time of Jesus?
3. What are the three categories of eunuch listed by Jesus?
4. What are some reasons why some are celibate for the sake of the kingdom?
5. Why did parents bring little children to Jesus?
6. How did the apostles respond to this?
7. What did Jesus do with the little children?
8. What is the attitude of a child? Why is that a good model for kingdom citizens to emulate?
9. What questions does the young man ask?
10. Who is "good"?
11. Which commandments does Jesus suggest to the young man? Which one is ironically left out?
12. What must the young man do to be "perfect"? Why?
13. What reward did Jesus promise him?
14. How did the young man respond?

15. Is Jesus talking about a literal camel and eye of a needle or does this refer to a gate in Jerusalem? Explain.
16. Why did this impossibility of a rich man getting into the Kingdom perplexing to the apostles?
17. What is the "*regeneration*"?
18. What reward did Jesus promise the Twelve?
19. What reward did Jesus promise to all those to come to the kingdom?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What are some teachings of Jesus which you find hard to accept?
2. Is Matthew 19:15 teaching that children are to be baptized into the Kingdom/church? Explain.

**Homework:** Consider what things are you willing to accept and/or give up to be a part of the kingdom?

# Here Comes the King

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## 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 19:25: "*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 to 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 importance. 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 show 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 a 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.

# Rejection of Teaching

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## **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 Pharisee could get around this by placing an object they possessed at a fellow Pharisee’s 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. God’s 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 to John’s Gospel it meant “teacher” (John 20:16). However in Latin, *rabbi* is *doctore* 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 worshippers 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 gnat 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 an 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 that 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 heros 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 of 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?



# Judgment & the End

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## **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 their 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 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 life 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 of 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 of 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.

## **Trials & Crucifixion**

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### **Matthew 26:57 - 27:44**

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”* (26:60). 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 witness 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 suppose 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 a 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 guilt 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 not does 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 not 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 a like 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 suggests 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).

### **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 we 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 sceptre 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. Why was the timing of Jesus' trial illegal?
2. What injustice to Caiaphas commit when interrogating Jesus and putting him under oath?
3. What blasphemy did they hold Jesus guilty? Was this a true case of blasphemy? Explain.
4. What proof does Jesus offer as to His claim to be both the Messiah and the Son of God?
5. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Jesus indictment of blasphemy?

6. What prophecy was fulfilled in the treatment of Jesus by the guards of the court?
7. What did the crowing of the rooster remind Peter of? How did he respond? Why?
8. Why did the Jews need Pilate the Roman governor involved in convicting and sentencing Jesus to death?
9. How did the chief priests respond to Judas?
10. What did they do with the thirty pieces of silver?
11. What prophecy does Judas and the chief priests fulfill?
12. How did Pilate react to the silence of Jesus?
13. Who was Barabbas?
14. Why did Pilate offer the people the choice to release Jesus or Barabbas?
15. Why did Pilate wash his hands? Why was this futile?
16. What is a scourging? Why did Pilate have Jesus scourged?
17. Who carried Jesus' cross the rest of the way? Why?
18. Why did Jesus refuse to drink the wine mingled with myrrh? What prophecy was fulfilled in this refusal?
19. How did the Roman soldiers fulfill the prophecy in Psalm 22:18?

20. What was a "titulus"? How was it used in Jesus crucifixion? Was its writing truthful?
21. Why couldn't Jesus prove Himself to be the Son of God by coming down from the cross?
22. How did the thieves who were crucified with Jesus treat Him?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Contrast Judas' remorse with Peter's.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
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: Homework:** When the rooster crows in your life this week remember the warnings of Jesus and repent..



# Resurrection & Commission

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## **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.