THE LIFE OF CHRIST

IN ORDER

The Four Gospels Woven into One Story,
from Bethlehem to the Empty Tomb



Four witnesses. One Lord. Every step of His life, in order.

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

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Andrew Dominguez

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Before You Begin

> *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*
>
> John 20:31 (SLB)

God gave us four Gospels, not one. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell the story of Jesus, and each one tells it for a reason. Matthew writes for readers who know the Old Testament and shows Jesus as the promised King. Mark writes fast and plain, and shows Jesus as the Servant who acts. Luke, a careful doctor and historian, sets out to write "in order" and shows Jesus as the Son of Man who came to seek the lost. John writes last, fills in much of what the others left out, and shows Jesus as the Son of God.

When I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible, I read the four Gospels side by side and wanted to follow Jesus from start to finish without jumping back and forth. Putting the events in order showed me how they connect. I wrote this book for readers who want to walk through the life of Jesus as one continuous story.

That is a gift. Four witnesses are better than one. But it also means that most of us know the life of Jesus in pieces. We know the Christmas story from Luke, the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew, the raising of Lazarus from John, and the walk on the water from somewhere, but we could not tell you which came first or how they fit together.

This book puts the pieces in order. It walks through the life of Jesus from before His birth to His ascension, one event at a time, and brings in every Gospel that tells each part. When you finish, you should be able to tell the whole story of Jesus from start to finish, and know where to find each part of it in your Bible.

What a Harmony Is

A book like this is called a harmony of the Gospels. The word comes from music. When a choir sings in harmony, the voices sing different notes, but together they make one song. The Gospels work the same way. Each writer has his own voice, his own details, and his own reasons for what he includes. Put together, they tell one true story.

Christians have been doing this for a long time. Around A.D. 170, a man named Tatian wove the four Gospels into a single account called the *Diatessaron*, a Greek word meaning "through the four." Since then, many teachers have laid the Gospels side by side to study them. This book stands in that long line, but it is written for ordinary readers, not scholars.

What You Will Find in This Book

The book is built around 172 numbered events in the life of Jesus, in the order I believe they happened. Each event gets its own heading, and under it you will find two things:

1. **Read it in.** Every Gospel passage that tells this event, so you can open your Bible and read all of them side by side.
2. **Where.** The town or region where it happened, so you can follow Jesus as He travels.

Then I retell the event in plain words, bring the Gospel accounts together, and point out what it shows us about Jesus. When one Gospel adds a detail the others leave out, I say so. When the accounts look different at first glance, I explain how they fit.

Each chapter ends with **Study Questions** for your own reading or for a small group.

At the back of the book you will find the whole harmony in one table, every event with its Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John references side by side. There is also a timeline with approximate dates, a list of the places Jesus went, a list of words to know, the sources I used, and an index of every Bible verse cited, with page numbers.

How I Decided the Order

I want to be straight with you here, because this is where harmonies can go wrong. The Gospel writers did not always tell events in the order they happened. Sometimes they grouped things by topic. Matthew, for example, gathers a run of miracles in chapters 8 and 9 and a run of parables in chapter 13. Mark and Luke do not always put those same events in the same order. None of this is an error. The writers never claimed to be keeping a diary. They were telling the truth about Jesus in the way that would teach it best.

So where did I get the order? Mostly from four places.

- **The clear time markers in the text.** Words like “on the next day,” “after six days,” and “after these things” tell us what came first. Where a Gospel gives a marker like that, I follow it.
- **The feasts in John.** John names several Jewish feasts that Jesus attended in Jerusalem, including at least three Passovers (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Those feasts are the skeleton of the timeline. They are how we know His public ministry lasted about three and a half years.
- **Mark and Luke.** Mark seems to follow the order of events closely in most places, and Luke tells us he wrote “in order” (Luke 1:3). Where Matthew groups things by topic, I usually follow Mark and Luke.
- **The work of careful harmonies before me.** For a few events the Bible simply does not tell us exactly when they happened. In those places I follow the order most conservative harmonies have used, and I tell you when the timing is uncertain.

Good Bible teachers place a handful of events in slightly different spots. If your study Bible puts one or two of these in another order, that is fine. The big picture is not in doubt. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, was baptized by John, preached and healed in Galilee, set His face toward Jerusalem, died on a cross under Pontius Pilate, and rose from the dead on the third day.

When the Accounts Look Different

Sometimes one Gospel says there were two blind men and another mentions only one. Sometimes one writer quotes Jesus a little differently than another. Skeptics like to point to these as contradictions. They are not. They are what you would expect from honest witnesses.

Think about it this way. If four people saw the same car accident and their stories matched word for word, a judge would suspect they had gotten together and agreed on a story. Real witnesses notice different things. One mentions the driver. Another mentions the passenger too. Both are telling the truth. A writer who mentions one blind man has not said there was only one.

Also remember that the Gospel writers often give the sense of what someone said rather than a word-for-word recording. Jesus usually spoke Aramaic, and the Gospels were written in Greek, so even a careful quote is already a translation. And Jesus preached in many towns over three years. He surely said many of the same things more than once, in slightly different ways. When the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the sermon on a level place in Luke share much of the same teaching, that is no surprise. Every good preacher repeats his main message.

Where it helps, I explain how two accounts fit together. Where we simply do not know, I say that too. What I will not do is twist the text to make a problem go away.

A Word About Dates

Our calendar counts years from the birth of Christ, but the monk who set it up in the sixth century missed by a few years. That is why you will see Jesus' birth dated "B.C.," before Christ, which sounds strange but is simply the result of an old math mistake.

Here is what we can say with some confidence. Herod the Great was still alive when Jesus was born (Matthew 2:1), and most historians date Herod's death to 4 B.C., so Jesus was likely born around 6 to 4 B.C. Luke tells us John the Baptist began preaching in the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius (Luke 3:1), which works out to about A.D. 28 or 29. Jesus was about thirty when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). The crucifixion took place while Pontius Pilate governed Judea, between A.D. 26 and 36. The two dates most often given are A.D. 30 and A.D. 33. I lean toward A.D. 33, as many conservative scholars do, but I will show you both in the timeline. The dates in this book are approximate. The events are not.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. When I don't quote a passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself, and I hope you will. This book is meant to be read with your Bible open beside it. Don't take my word for anything. Check it, the way the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

I capitalize the pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (He, Him, His, You, Your) as a sign of reverence. Inside a Scripture quotation, I leave the capitals exactly as the translation prints them. Quotations from ancient writers like Josephus are left exactly as they were translated.

Where a writer outside the Bible speaks to an event, you will find a gray box marked **Outside the Bible**. Each one carries a label. **Text confirmed** means we have the writer's words, the text is not seriously in doubt, and I checked the quote against a published translation. **Disputed** means scholars argue over part

of it, and I tell you what the argument is. **Background** means the source confirms a person, place, or setting around the event, but not the event itself.

A few passages in the Gospels are missing from some of the oldest copies we have, mainly the longer ending of Mark (Mark 16:9-20) and the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). The SLB includes them, and so do I, but I mark them so you know. Nothing important in this book rests on them alone.

Last, this is not a book of opinions about Jesus. It is the story of what He did and said, in order, as the eyewitnesses told it. My prayer is the same as John's, written at the end of his Gospel and printed at the top of this page: that you would believe, and believing, have life in His name.

Part One: The Coming of the King

Chapter 1: Before Bethlehem

> *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from **the** Father, full of grace and truth.*
>
> John 1:14 (SLB)

The story of Jesus does not start in a stable. It starts before there was a world to put a stable in. Two of the Gospel writers want us to know that before we hear anything else. Luke opens by telling us how carefully he checked his facts. John opens by taking us back before the beginning of time. And Matthew and Luke both give us a family tree, so we know that the One born in Bethlehem came into a real family, in a real nation, at a real point in history.

So before we follow Jesus down the roads of Galilee, we start where the Gospels start.

1. Luke Tells Us Why He Wrote

Read it in: Luke 1:1-4

Luke is the only Gospel writer who stops at the start to tell us how he did his work. He writes to a man named Theophilus, a name that means "friend of God." Many others had already written accounts of Jesus. Luke did not want to add one more book of stories. He wanted to give Theophilus certainty.

> *it seemed good to me also, having followed all things carefully from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may come to know the certainty concerning the words in which you were instructed.* (Luke 1:3-4)

Notice what Luke says about his method. He went back to those who "from ***the*** beginning" were eyewitnesses and servants of the word (Luke 1:2). He investigated everything carefully. And he wrote it out in order. Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14) and a traveling companion of Paul, and he spent time in Judea while Paul was held in prison at Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27). That was more than enough time to sit down with people who had walked with Jesus, perhaps even Mary herself.

What it shows: The Christian faith is not built on feelings or legends. It is built on what eyewitnesses saw and heard, written down while many of them were still alive to be asked. You are allowed to check it. Luke wants you to.

2. The Word Who Was in the Beginning

Read it in: John 1:1-18
Where: Before time

John starts further back than anyone. He does not open with a birth. He opens with eternity.

> *In **the** beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in **the** beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one **thing** came into being that has come into being.* (John 1:1-3)

John calls Jesus “the Word.” A word is how one person makes his mind known to another. Jesus is how God makes Himself known to us. And John is careful to say three things about the Word. He was already there in the beginning, so He never had a beginning. He was with God, so He is a distinct person from the Father. And He was God, fully and truly. Then John adds that everything that exists was made through Him. The baby in the manger made the stars that the wise men followed.

John goes on to say that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men, and that the light shines in the darkness (John 1:4-5). Then he gives us the heart of the whole Christmas story in one verse, the verse at the top of this chapter: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The word translated “dwelt” means to pitch a tent. God the Son moved into the neighborhood.

John also tells us how people would respond. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gave authority to become children of God (John 1:11-12). That is the story of this whole book in two verses.

What it shows: Jesus did not start to exist in Bethlehem. He stepped into His own creation. Everything else in His life has to be read in that light. When He calms the storm, it is the Maker of the wind speaking. When He forgives sin, it is God doing what only God can do.

3. The Family Line of Jesus

Read it in: Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

Both Matthew and Luke give us a family tree, and the two lists are not the same. That has puzzled readers for centuries, so it is worth a few minutes.

Matthew starts with Abraham and works forward to Jesus. He shows that Jesus is a son of Abraham, the father of Israel, and a son of David, the great king. That matters to Matthew because God promised David that one of his sons would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Matthew even arranges the list in three groups of fourteen generations (Matthew 1:17), probably to make it easy to remember. He includes four women in the line, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and at least two of them were not Israelites. The family of the Messiah had outsiders and sinners in it from the start.

Luke places his list right after Jesus’ baptism and works backward, from Jesus all the way to Adam, “the ***son*** of God” (Luke 3:38). Luke wants us to see that Jesus came for the whole human race, not only for Israel.

The two lists match from Abraham to David. After David, Matthew follows the line of Solomon, the royal line, and Luke follows the line of Nathan, another son of David. So how can Jesus have two different grandfathers? There are two main answers, and both are reasonable.

- **Matthew gives Joseph’s line and Luke gives Mary’s.** In this view, Luke traces Jesus through Mary, and Heli is Mary’s father, with Joseph counted as his son by marriage. Luke is careful to say Jesus was the son “as was supposed” of Joseph (Luke 3:23).
- **Both lists are Joseph’s.** In this view, Matthew gives Joseph’s legal line, the line of the throne, and Luke gives his natural line. A legal heir and a blood father could differ through adoption or through the old law that a brother could marry his brother’s widow and raise up children in his name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

I lean toward the first view, but I hold it loosely. Either way, the point stands. Through Joseph, Jesus had the legal right to David's throne. Through Mary, He was David's son by blood. And Matthew is careful at the end of his list. He does not say Joseph was the father of Jesus. He says Joseph was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16).

What it shows: Jesus is not a myth set in no particular time or place. He has a family tree, full of real people, kings and shepherds and foreigners and sinners. God kept His promises to Abraham and David through generation after generation, and He brought them to their goal in Jesus.

Study Questions

1. Luke says he wrote so that Theophilus would know "the certainty" of what he had been taught. Why does it matter that the Gospels are based on eyewitnesses?
2. Read John 1:1-14. List everything John says about who the Word is. Which one surprises you most?
3. John 1:11-12 says some rejected Jesus and some received Him. What does it mean to receive Him?
4. Why do you think Matthew included women like Rahab and Ruth in the family line of Jesus? What does that tell you about the kind of people God uses?
5. How does knowing that Jesus existed before the world was made change the way you read the rest of His story?

Chapter 2: Two Announcements

> *For with God no declaration will be impossible.*
>
> Luke 1:37 (SLB)

For about four hundred years after the prophet Malachi, heaven had been quiet. No new prophet had spoken. Israel had been ruled by Persians, then Greeks, then their own Hasmonean kings, and now by Rome and its client king, Herod the Great. Faithful people were still waiting for the Messiah, but the waiting had been long.

Then, about six months apart, the angel Gabriel made two visits. One was to an old priest in the temple. The other was to a young woman in a small town in Galilee. Both visits announced a baby who should not have been possible.

4. Gabriel Appears to Zechariah

Read it in: Luke 1:5-25
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

Luke begins "in the days of Herod, the king of Judea" (Luke 1:5). Zechariah was a priest, and his wife Elizabeth came from the family of Aaron too. Luke says they were both righteous before God and walked blamelessly in His commands. But they had no children, and they were both old.

There were so many priests in those days that they served in turns, and the honor of burning incense in the holy place was decided by lot. Many priests never got to do it once in their lives. On the day this story begins, the lot fell to Zechariah.

While the people prayed outside, an angel appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was terrified. The angel told him not to be afraid. His prayer had been heard. Elizabeth would bear him a son, and he was to name him John.

> *And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to **the** Lord their God. And he himself will go before Him in **the** spirit and power of Elijah, to turn **the** hearts of fathers to children, and **the** disobedient to **the** understanding of **the** righteous, to make ready for **the** Lord a people prepared.* (Luke 1:16-17)

This was the fulfillment of the last words of the Old Testament. Malachi had promised that God would send Elijah the prophet before the great day of the LORD, and that he would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (Malachi 4:5-6). Now the angel was saying that the forerunner was about to be born.

Zechariah asked how he could know this, since he and his wife were old. The angel answered, "I am Gabriel, the one standing before God" (Luke 1:19). Because Zechariah did not believe, he would be unable to speak until the day these things happened. When he came out, he could not give the people the blessing. He could only make signs to them, and they understood he had seen a vision. When his days of

service were over, he went home, and Elizabeth became pregnant. She hid herself for five months and praised God for taking away her disgrace among people.

What it shows: God hears prayers that we may have stopped praying. Zechariah and Elizabeth had probably asked for a child for years. God's answer came at the right time, not at their time, and it came as part of a plan much bigger than their family.

5. Gabriel Appears to Mary

Read it in: Luke 1:26-38
Where: Nazareth in Galilee

In Elizabeth's sixth month, God sent Gabriel again, this time to Nazareth, a small farming village in the hills of Galilee. He came to a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.

An engagement in that culture was far more binding than ours. It was a legal agreement, often made a year before the wedding, and it could only be ended by divorce. But the couple did not yet live together, and Mary was still a virgin.

Gabriel greeted her as one who had been shown great favor, and told her the Lord was with her. Mary was troubled and wondered what this greeting could mean. Then came the announcement.

> *And look, you will conceive in **the** womb and will bear a son, and you will call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of **the** Most High; and **the** Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob to the ages, and of His kingdom there will be no end.* (Luke 1:31-33)

Mary did not doubt the way Zechariah had. She asked a reasonable question: how could this happen, since she had never been with a man? The angel told her the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, and for that reason the holy child would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). He also told her that her relative Elizabeth, who had been called barren, was in her sixth month. Then he said the words printed at the top of this chapter: nothing will be impossible with God.

Mary's answer is one of the great responses of faith in the whole Bible.

> *Then Mary said, "Look, the slave of **the** Lord; may it happen to me according to your declaration." And the angel departed from her.* (Luke 1:38)

Think about what she was saying yes to. In a small town, an engaged girl who turned up pregnant would face gossip at best and divorce at worst. Under the Law, she could even face death. Mary knew all of that, and she still said yes.

What it shows: The virgin birth is not a side detail. It is how the eternal Son of God became a man without ceasing to be God. And Mary shows us what faith looks like: not understanding everything, but trusting the God who does.

6. Mary Visits Elizabeth

Read it in: Luke 1:39-56
Where: A town in the hill country of Judea

Mary went quickly to visit Elizabeth in a town in the hill country of Judea. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She cried out that Mary was blessed among women and that the fruit of her womb was blessed, and she called Mary "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). Before John was born, he was already pointing to Jesus.

Mary then broke out in praise. Her song is often called the Magnificat, from its first word in Latin. It is full of the Old Testament, especially the prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2.

> *And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, because He has looked upon the lowliness of His slave; for look, from now on all the generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy **is** His name."* (Luke 1:46-49)

The song turns the world upside down. God scatters the proud, brings down rulers from their thrones, lifts up the humble, fills the hungry, and sends the rich away empty. And He does it because He remembers His promise to Abraham.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went home. Since Elizabeth was six months along when Mary arrived, Mary probably stayed until about the time John was born.

What it shows: Two women whom the world would have overlooked, one too old and one too young, were at the center of God's plan. Notice too that Mary calls God "my Savior" (Luke 1:47). She knew she needed a Savior like everyone else.

7. John the Baptist Is Born

Read it in: Luke 1:57-80
Where: The hill country of Judea

Elizabeth gave birth to a son, and her neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the baby, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. Elizabeth said no, he would be called John. They pointed out that no one in the family had that name, and they made signs to his father to ask what he wanted. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "John is his name" (Luke 1:63). Immediately his mouth was opened, and he began to speak, praising God.

The whole hill country of Judea talked about it, and people wondered what this child would become. Then Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied. His song is sometimes called the Benedictus. It praises God for raising up a horn of salvation in the house of David, and then it turns to his own little son.

> *And you, child, will be called a prophet of **the** Most High; for you will go before **the** face of **the** Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in **the** forgiveness of their sins* (Luke 1:76-77)

Luke closes with one verse that covers about thirty years. The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he lived in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel (Luke 1:80).

What it shows: Nine months of silence had taught Zechariah something. The first words out of his mouth were obedience and then praise. Sometimes God's discipline is how He gets our attention so He can fill our mouths with something better.

8. An Angel Speaks to Joseph

Read it in: Matthew 1:18-25
Where: Nazareth

Luke tells the story from Mary's side. Matthew tells it from Joseph's. When Mary came back from Elizabeth's house, she was about three months pregnant, and soon it could not be hidden.

Matthew says Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to shame her in public, so he planned to divorce her quietly. Put yourself in his place. As far as he knew, the woman he loved had been unfaithful. He was hurt, but he still chose mercy.

While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. He told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the child in her was from the Holy Spirit.

> *And she will bear a son, and you will call His name Jesus, for He Himself will save His people from their sins.* (Matthew 1:21)

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "the LORD saves." Matthew adds that all of this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah: the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call His name Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel commanded. He took Mary home as his wife, but he did not have relations with her until she gave birth to a son, and he named Him Jesus.

What it shows: Joseph never speaks a single recorded word in the Gospels. What we know of him is what he did. He obeyed right away, he protected Mary, and he gave Jesus his name and his place in the line of David. Quiet obedience is a kind of greatness too.

Study Questions

1. Zechariah and Mary both asked the angel a question. Why do you think Zechariah was disciplined and Mary was not? Compare Luke 1:18 and 1:34.
2. Mary said yes to God knowing it could cost her reputation, her marriage, and even her life. What has obeying God cost you, or what might it cost you?
3. Read Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. What does it teach about the kind of people God lifts up?
4. Why does it matter that Jesus was born of a virgin?
5. Joseph chose mercy before he knew the whole truth. How can his example shape the way you treat someone who you believe has wronged you?

Chapter 3: Born in Bethlehem

> *For there has been born to you today a Savior, who is Christ **the** Lord, in **the** city of David.*
>
> Luke 2:11 (SLB)

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah named the town. The ruler of Israel, whose goings forth are from long ago, would come out of Bethlehem, the little town in Judea where David had been born (Micah 5:2). The trouble was that Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, about ninety miles north by road. God used a Roman emperor to get them where they needed to be.

After 36 years of marriage, two daughters and granddaughters, I know how often I rushed past good moments while focused on the next task. Mary stopped in a crowded Bethlehem night and treasured what God was doing (Luke 2:19). Remembering how God rescued me in May 2020 and kept my family together keeps gratitude alive.

9. The Birth of Jesus

Read it in: Luke 2:1-7
Where: Bethlehem in Judea

Luke says that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Each person had to go to his own town, so Joseph went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, because he was of the house and family line of David. Mary went with him, pregnant.

Outside the Bible: The Census of Quirinius (*Disputed*)

Luke says this registration was the first, made while Quirinius was governing Syria (Luke 2:2). Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes a census of Judea under Quirinius, whom he calls Cyrenius, that took place after Herod's son Archelaus was removed, around A.D. 6, about ten years after Herod died. He writes that "Cyrenius, one that had been consul, was sent by Cæsar to take account of people's effects in Syria" (*Antiquities* 17.13.5). Skeptics say Luke got the date wrong.

Careful scholars have offered several answers. Luke calls this the *first* registration, which may be his way of setting it apart from the famous later one in A.D. 6 (Acts 5:37). The Greek word translated "first" can also mean "before," so some read the verse as "this registration took place before Quirinius was governor." Others suggest Quirinius held an earlier post in the region. None of these is proven, and the question is honestly open. What we can say is that Luke knew about the later census too, and he was not a careless writer. He was right about many other officials and titles that critics once doubted.

While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born. Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped Him in strips of cloth, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guest room.

The word often translated "inn" here is the same word Luke uses later for the upper room where Jesus ate the Last Supper (Luke 22:11). It probably means the guest room of a family home. Many homes in that

area had the animals' stall on a lower level of the house or in a cave beneath it. So the picture may be less of a lonely barn and more of a crowded family home with no room left upstairs, where the only space was down with the animals. Either way, the Son of God's first bed was a feeding trough.

What it shows: God moved an emperor to fulfill a promise to a village. And the King of kings came into the world with less than most of us had. He did not come to be served. He came low, so that no one would be too low for Him to reach.

10. Angels Appear to the Shepherds

Read it in: Luke 2:8-20
Where: The fields near Bethlehem

That same night, shepherds were living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flock. Shepherds were not well respected in those days. Their work kept them from keeping many of the religious rules, and some people did not trust their word. Yet God sent the birth announcement of His Son to them first.

An angel of the Lord stood before them, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel told them not to fear, because he brought good news of great joy for all the people. Then he gave them the words at the top of this chapter: a Savior has been born to you today, who is Christ the Lord. He even gave them a sign. They would find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Babies were wrapped in cloths every day. Babies did not lie in feeding troughs.

Suddenly a great army of heaven appeared with the angel, praising God.

> *"Glory in **the** highest to God, and on earth peace, among men good will!"* (Luke 2:14)

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger, just as they had been told. They spread the word, and everyone who heard it was amazed. But Mary was treasuring up all these things, thinking them over in her heart (Luke 2:19). The shepherds went back to their fields glorifying and praising God.

What it shows: The first people invited to see Jesus were ordinary working men on the night shift. That is still how the gospel works. You do not have to be important to be invited. And notice what the shepherds did after they saw Him. They told others. That is what people do when they have really met Jesus.

11. Jesus Is Circumcised and Named

Read it in: Luke 2:21
Where: Bethlehem

When eight days had passed, the baby was circumcised as the Law of Moses required (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3), and He was given the name Jesus, the name the angel had given before He was conceived.

Luke covers this in one verse, but it matters. From His first week, Jesus was "born under law," as Paul puts it, so that He could redeem those under the Law (Galatians 4:4-5). He kept the Law perfectly from the start, which we never could.

What it shows: Mary and Joseph obeyed God in the small things as well as the big ones. Jesus was raised in a home that took God's Word seriously.

12. Jesus Is Presented at the Temple

Read it in: Luke 2:22-38
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

The Law said that every firstborn son belonged to the LORD and had to be bought back with an offering (Exodus 13:2, 12-13), and a mother had to bring a sacrifice for her purification forty days after giving birth to a son (Leviticus 12:2-8). So when Jesus was about six weeks old, Mary and Joseph took Him the six miles to Jerusalem.

They offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:24). That small detail tells us a lot. The Law allowed that offering only for families who could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8). Jesus grew up poor.

In the temple there was an old man named Simeon, righteous and devout, who was waiting for the comfort of Israel. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. Led by the Spirit, he came into the temple just as Mary and Joseph brought Jesus in. He took the baby in his arms and praised God.

> *"Now You are releasing Your slave, Master, according to Your declaration, in peace, because my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before **the** face of all the peoples, a light for revelation of **the** Gentiles, and glory of Your people Israel."* (Luke 2:29-32)

Then Simeon turned to Mary with a harder word. This child was set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and a sword would pierce through her own soul too (Luke 2:34-35). More than thirty years later, she would stand at the foot of a cross.

There was also a prophetess named Anna, a widow of eighty-four who never left the temple and served God with fasting and prayer night and day. She came up at that very moment, gave thanks to God, and spoke about the child to everyone who was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

What it shows: God kept a promise to one old man. Simeon and Anna had waited their whole lives, and they did not give up hope. When Jesus came, they recognized Him. Faithful waiting is never wasted.

Study Questions

1. God used a census ordered by a pagan emperor to bring Jesus to Bethlehem. Where have you seen God use something you did not like to bring about something good?
2. Why do you think God announced the birth of His Son to shepherds instead of to the priests or to Herod?

3. Mary “was treasuring up all these declarations, pondering them in her heart.” What is one thing God has done in your life that you need to stop and treasure?

4. The offering of two birds shows that Jesus was born into a poor family. Why does that matter for people who struggle today?

5. Simeon and Anna waited for years. What are you waiting on God for, and what does their example teach you?

Chapter 4: The Hidden Years

> *And Jesus was advancing in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men.*
>
> Luke 2:52 (SLB)

After the presentation in the temple, the Gospels tell us only a few stories about the childhood of Jesus. Matthew tells of the wise men, a midnight escape to Egypt, and the move to Nazareth. Luke tells of one trip to the temple when Jesus was twelve. Then about eighteen years pass in silence.

Those quiet years matter. Jesus grew up the way every boy grows up, learning to walk and talk, doing chores, studying the Scriptures, and learning a trade. When the people of Nazareth later heard Him preach, they asked, "Is this not the carpenter?" (Mark 6:3). For most of His life on earth, the Son of God worked with His hands in a small town, and no one thought He was anyone special.

13. The Wise Men Come to Worship

Read it in: Matthew 2:1-12
Where: Jerusalem and Bethlehem

Matthew tells us that after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the king, wise men came from the east to Jerusalem. The word is *magoi*, magi. They were probably scholars and astrologers from Persia or Babylon, the same land where Daniel had once been made chief of the wise men (Daniel 2:48). Matthew does not say there were three. That number comes from the three gifts.

They asked where the One born King of the Jews was, because they had seen His star in the east and had come to worship Him. That question shook Herod, and all Jerusalem with him. Herod was old, sick, and dangerously suspicious. He had already killed one of his wives and several of his own sons because he feared they wanted his throne.

Herod called the chief priests and scribes and asked where the Messiah would be born. They knew right away: Bethlehem of Judea, as the prophet Micah wrote. Then Herod met the wise men in secret, found out exactly when the star had appeared, and sent them to Bethlehem, asking them to report back so that he could come and worship too. He had no intention of worshiping.

The star went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw it, they rejoiced with very great joy.

> *And having come into the house, they saw the child with Mary His mother, and having fallen down they worshiped Him; and having opened their treasures, they offered to Him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh.* (Matthew 2:11)

Notice two things. They found Jesus in a house, not a stable, and Matthew calls Him a child, not a newborn. Herod later killed the boys of Bethlehem two years old and under, based on the time the wise men had given him (Matthew 2:16). So the wise men probably arrived some months after the birth,

perhaps as much as a year or more. The Christmas scene with shepherds and wise men side by side is lovely, but they likely came at different times.

Their gifts fit a king. Gold is royal. Frankincense was used in worship. Myrrh was used in burial. Many Christians have seen in these three gifts a picture of who Jesus is: King, God, and the One who would die.

God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they went home another way.

What it shows: The scholars of Jerusalem knew exactly where the Messiah would be born and did not walk six miles to see Him. Foreigners traveled hundreds of miles to worship. Knowing the right answers is not the same as coming to Jesus.

14. The Escape to Egypt and the Killing at Bethlehem

Read it in: Matthew 2:13-18
Where: Bethlehem to Egypt

After the wise men left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt, because Herod was about to search for the child to kill Him. Joseph got up that same night and left. The gold from the wise men may well have paid for the trip.

Egypt was a natural place to go. It was outside Herod's reach, and there were large Jewish communities there, especially in Alexandria. Matthew sees in this a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1, "out of Egypt I called My son." Hosea was speaking of Israel coming out of Egypt in the Exodus. Matthew is showing that Jesus relives the history of His people, and does it right.

When Herod realized the wise men had tricked him, he was furious. He sent men to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and the area around it who were two years old and under. Matthew connects this with Jeremiah's picture of Rachel weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31:15).

Outside the Bible: Herod the Great (*Background*)

No other ancient writer mentions the killing at Bethlehem. That is not surprising. Bethlehem was a small village, and most scholars estimate the number of boys that age at perhaps a dozen or two. Next to Herod's other crimes, it would hardly have been noticed in Rome. Josephus describes in detail how Herod, near the end of his life, had his own sons Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater executed, and he tells of Herod's last illness. He also notes that shortly before Herod died "that very night there was an eclipse of the moon" (*Antiquities* 17.6.4). Most historians date that eclipse to March of 4 B.C., which is why Jesus' birth is usually placed a little before then. A few scholars argue for a later eclipse and date Herod's death to 1 B.C. Either way, the man Matthew describes fits the Herod history remembers.

What it shows: The world into which Jesus came was dangerous and cruel. From the very start, the powers of this world tried to destroy Him. God protected His Son through the quick obedience of an ordinary man.

15. The Return to Nazareth

Read it in: Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:39-40
Where: Egypt to Nazareth in Galilee

After Herod died, an angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt and told him it was safe to go back. Joseph took the family to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus, Herod's son, was ruling Judea in his father's place, he was afraid to go there. Archelaus was so brutal that Rome removed him about ten years later. Warned in another dream, Joseph went north to Galilee and settled in Nazareth.

Luke, who does not tell the Egypt story, simply says that when they had finished everything required by the Law, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth (Luke 2:39). The two accounts fit easily. Luke skips over the months between the presentation and the move.

Matthew says this fulfilled what the prophets said, that He would be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:23). No single Old Testament verse says those words, and Matthew says "prophets," plural. He probably means the general message of the prophets that the Messiah would be despised and looked down on. Nazareth had that kind of reputation. Later, Nathanael would ask, "Can any good thing be out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Some also hear a play on the Hebrew word *netzer*, "branch," from Isaiah 11:1.

Luke adds that the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:40).

What it shows: Jesus spent His childhood in a town people joked about. God is not embarrassed by small places, and He does not need an impressive address to do great things.

16. Jesus in the Temple at Twelve

Read it in: Luke 2:41-50
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

Every year Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem for the Passover. When Jesus was twelve, they went as usual. Families often traveled in large groups of relatives and neighbors, with the women and children often walking ahead and the men behind. So when the feast ended and the group started home, it is easy to see how each parent could have assumed Jesus was with the other.

After a full day's walk, they looked for Him among their relatives and friends and could not find Him. They went back to Jerusalem, and after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Mary said what any mother would: "Child, why did You do thus to us? Look, Your father and I, being in anguish, were seeking You" (Luke 2:48). His answer is the first recorded word of Jesus in the Bible.

> *And He said to them, "Why **is it** that you were seeking Me? Did you not know that I must be in the **things** of My Father?"* (Luke 2:49)

He spoke gently but clearly. Mary had said “Your father.” Jesus answered by speaking of His Father. Even at twelve, He knew who He was and why He had come. Luke adds that they did not understand what He said to them.

What it shows: The first words of Jesus are about His Father’s business, and His last words on the cross were “Father, into Your hands” (Luke 23:46). His whole life was lived for His Father.

17. Growing Up in Nazareth

Read it in: Luke 2:51-52
Where: Nazareth

After the temple visit, Jesus went home to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them. The eternal Son of God did as He was told by a carpenter and a young mother. And Mary kept all these things in her heart.

Then Luke gives us the verse at the top of this chapter. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. He grew in His mind, in His body, in His walk with God, and in His friendships with people. He was fully God, and He was also fully human, and real humans grow.

The Gospels tell us a little more about these years. Jesus had brothers named James, Joses, Jude, and Simon, and at least two sisters (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55-56). They were children born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus. James later became a leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote the letter of James. Jude wrote the letter of Jude. Joseph is never mentioned after the temple visit, and by the time Jesus died, He entrusted His mother to John (John 19:26-27). That is why most believe Joseph died sometime during these hidden years, and Jesus, as the oldest son, would have helped support the family.

What it shows: Most of the life of Jesus was ordinary. He worked, He obeyed His parents, and He lived faithfully in a small place for about eighteen years before anyone outside Nazareth knew His name. If your life feels ordinary right now, remember that Jesus spent most of His life there too, and it pleased His Father.

Study Questions

1. The chief priests knew where the Messiah would be born but did not go. The wise men did not know the Scriptures but came anyway. Which group are you more like, and why?
2. How did God protect Jesus from Herod? What part did Joseph’s obedience play?
3. What do you learn about Jesus from His first recorded words in Luke 2:49?
4. Luke 2:52 says Jesus grew in four ways. Which of those four do you most need to grow in right now?
5. Jesus spent about eighteen quiet years in Nazareth. What does that teach you about the value of faithfulness in ordinary days?

Part Two: Getting Ready

Chapter 5: The Voice in the Wilderness

> *"**The** voice of **one** crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of **the** Lord; make His paths straight.'"*
>
> Mark 1:3 (SLB)

About thirty years after the birth in Bethlehem, a strange figure appeared in the wilderness of Judea. He wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, the way Elijah had dressed (2 Kings 1:8), and he ate locusts and wild honey. People came from Jerusalem and all Judea to hear him. He was Zechariah's son John, and the time had come for him to prepare the way.

This chapter covers three events that set the stage for everything Jesus did afterward: John's preaching, the baptism of Jesus, and the temptation in the wilderness.

18. John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Read it in: Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18
Where: The wilderness of Judea and the Jordan River

Luke dates this moment like a careful historian. He names the Roman emperor, the governor of Judea, three local rulers, and two high priests.

> *Now in **the** fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governing Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother was tetrarch of Iturea and **the** region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the time of **the** high priests Annas and Caiaphas, a declaration of God came upon John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.* (Luke 3:1-2)

Outside the Bible: The Fifteenth Year of Tiberius (*Background*)

Tiberius became emperor when Augustus died in A.D. 14. Counting from then, his fifteenth year was about A.D. 28 or 29. Some scholars count from A.D. 12, when Tiberius began ruling the provinces together with Augustus, which would put John's ministry around A.D. 26 or 27. Pontius Pilate governed Judea from about A.D. 26 to 36. Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, ruled Galilee and Perea. Annas had been high priest from A.D. 6 to 15 and was still a power behind the office, while his son-in-law Caiaphas held the title from about A.D. 18 to 36. Every one of these names fits what we know from Roman and Jewish history.

John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All four Gospels connect him with Isaiah 40:3, the voice crying out in the wilderness to get the way of the Lord ready. In the ancient world, before a king traveled, workers went ahead to fill in the potholes and straighten the road. John was the road crew for the King, and the road he was fixing ran through people's hearts.

His message was not soft. When religious leaders came out to be baptized, he called them a brood of vipers and told them to bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not say, "We have Abraham as father," he

warned. God could raise up children for Abraham from the stones (Matthew 3:9). Being born into a religious family does not save anyone.

Luke tells us that the crowds asked John, "What then shall we do?" (Luke 3:10). His answers were practical. If you have two tunics, share with someone who has none. Tax collectors, do not collect more than you are told. Soldiers, do not take money by force or false accusation, and be content with your pay. Real repentance shows up on Monday morning.

People began to wonder if John himself was the Messiah. He said plainly that he was not.

> *And he was preaching, saying, "After me comes the **one** mightier than I, of whom I am not fit, having stooped down, to untie the strap of His sandals. I indeed baptized you with water, but He Himself will baptize you with **the** Holy Spirit."* (Mark 1:7-8)

What it shows: Before anyone is ready to receive a Savior, they have to know they need one. John's job was to show people their sin so they would be ready for Jesus. And John never pointed to himself. He was a voice, not the Word. He was content to be the one who points.

Outside the Bible: Josephus on John the Baptist (*Text confirmed*)

The Jewish historian Josephus, writing around A.D. 93, mentions John by name. He says Herod Antipas "slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism" (*Antiquities* 18.5.2). Josephus says Herod feared John's influence over the crowds and had him sent "a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death." Machaerus was Herod's fortress east of the Dead Sea. Scholars almost all accept this passage as genuine. It is one of the clearest outside witnesses to a person in the Gospels.

19. Jesus Is Baptized

Read it in: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23
Where: The Jordan River, at Bethany beyond the Jordan

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. John tried to stop Him. "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). John knew Jesus had no sin to repent of.

Jesus answered that it was fitting for them to fulfill all righteousness. He was not confessing sin of His own. He was standing with sinners, taking His place among the people He came to save. It was the first step on a road that would end at the cross, where He would take their sin on Himself.

As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and something happened that the whole Trinity took part in.

> *And having been baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water; and look, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him. And look, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased."* (Matthew 3:16-17)

The Son stood in the water. The Spirit came down like a dove. The Father spoke from heaven. This is one of the clearest pictures of the Trinity anywhere in Scripture: one God, three persons, all present at once.

Luke adds that Jesus was praying when this happened (Luke 3:21) and that He was about thirty years old when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). John's Gospel adds that John the Baptist saw the Spirit come down and remain on Him, and that God had told John this would be the sign of the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-33).

What it shows: Before Jesus preached a single sermon or did a single miracle, the Father said He was well pleased with Him. That approval was not earned by ministry. It came from who He was. For those who are in Christ, the Father's love works the same way. We do not work for His approval. We work from it.

20. Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness

Read it in: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13
Where: The wilderness of Judea

Right after the baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. Mark says the Spirit drove Him out, and that He was there forty days, with the wild animals, being tempted by Satan, and angels served Him (Mark 1:12-13). Matthew and Luke tell us what the temptations were.

After forty days without food, Jesus was hungry. The devil came to Him with three tests.

1. **Turn stones into bread.** "If You are ***the*** Son of God," he began. The Father had just said that He was. Satan wanted Jesus to doubt it, or to prove it by using His power for Himself. Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 8:3: man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.
2. **Throw Yourself down from the temple.** The devil took Him to the highest point of the temple and quoted Scripture himself, Psalm 91:11-12, that the angels would catch Him. But he left out part of the verse and twisted the rest. Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 6:16: you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.
3. **Bow down to me.** The devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and offered them all if Jesus would fall down and worship him. It was an offer to get the crown without the cross. Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 6:13: you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Then He said, "Go away, Satan" (Matthew 4:10).

Matthew and Luke give the second and third temptations in a different order. Matthew uses words like "then," which suggest the order of events, and ends with Jesus sending Satan away. Luke may have arranged them to end at the temple in Jerusalem, where his Gospel also ends. Both tell the same three tests.

Luke adds that when the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time (Luke 4:13). He would be back.

Every answer Jesus gave came from Deuteronomy, the book Israel was given at the end of their forty years in the wilderness. Israel was tested in the wilderness and failed again and again. Jesus was tested in

the wilderness and did not fail once. Adam fell in a garden with every tree to eat from. Jesus stood firm in a desert with nothing to eat at all.

What it shows: Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He did not fight the devil with special power we do not have. He fought with the Word of God, memorized and believed. That same weapon is in your hands.

Study Questions

1. John told people to bear fruit worthy of repentance. What does real repentance look like in everyday life? Look at Luke 3:10-14.
2. John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). How does that attitude show up in someone’s life?
3. Why did Jesus, who had no sin, choose to be baptized?
4. In the temptation, Satan quoted Scripture but twisted it. How can you guard yourself against people who misuse the Bible?
5. Jesus answered every temptation with a verse. What verse could you memorize this week to help you in the temptation you face most?

Chapter 6: The First Followers

> *On the next day John sees Jesus coming to him, and says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*
>
> John 1:29 (SLB)

After the temptation, Jesus came back to the Jordan, where John was still baptizing. Only John's Gospel tells us what happened over the next week or so. John writes like a man who was there, and he probably was. He counts the days: "on the next day," "on the next day," "on the next day," and then "on the third day." In these few days, Jesus gathered His first followers and did His first sign.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street and paid me to mow his lawn. He took me to church and pointed me to Jesus. Like John the Baptist in John 1, he stepped aside so I could see the Savior for myself.

21. John Says He Is Not the Christ

Read it in: John 1:19-28
Where: Bethany beyond the Jordan

The religious leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. He did not hide anything. He said, "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20). They asked if he was Elijah. He said he was not. They asked if he was the Prophet that Moses had promised (Deuteronomy 18:15). Again, no.

That answer about Elijah can be confusing, since Jesus later said John was the Elijah who was to come (Matthew 11:14). The angel had said John would go in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). John was not Elijah come back from heaven in person, which is what the leaders were asking. But he did fulfill the work Malachi said Elijah would do.

When they pressed him, John said he was only a voice crying in the wilderness, as Isaiah said. And he told them that among them stood One they did not know, whose sandal strap he was not worthy to untie.

What it shows: John had crowds, influence, and every chance to make himself important. Instead he made himself as small as he could, so that people would look past him to Jesus.

22. "Look, the Lamb of God"

Read it in: John 1:29-34
Where: Bethany beyond the Jordan

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said the words at the top of this chapter. Every Jewish listener knew what a lamb was for. Lambs were sacrificed every morning and evening at the temple. A lamb was killed at every Passover so that death would pass over the house. Isaiah had said the Servant of the LORD would be led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). John was saying that Jesus

was the sacrifice all the others pointed to, and that He would take away the sin of the world, not just of Israel.

John then told what he had seen at the baptism, the Spirit coming down like a dove and remaining on Him. He finished with his own testimony: he had seen it and testified that this is the Son of God (John 1:34).

What it shows: The very first title anyone gave Jesus in public in John's Gospel was "the Lamb of God." From the start, He was marked out to die for sin.

23. Andrew, John, and Simon Peter Meet Jesus

Read it in: John 1:35-42
Where: Bethany beyond the Jordan

The next day, John the Baptist was standing with two of his own disciples. When Jesus walked by, John said again, "Look, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and asked them, "What are you seeking?" (John 1:38). They asked where He was staying. He said, "Come and see." They spent the rest of the day with Him. John even remembers the hour: it was about the tenth hour, about four in the afternoon.

One of the two was Andrew. The other is not named, and most believe it was John, the writer of the Gospel, who never names himself. The first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). He brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah; you will be called Cephas," which is translated Peter, meaning a rock.

This was not yet the call to leave their nets. That came later in Galilee. This was the first meeting, when they got to know Him.

What it shows: Andrew is the quiet hero of this story. Every time we see him in John's Gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus: his brother here, a boy with five loaves later (John 6:8-9), and some Greeks near the end (John 12:22). You do not have to be a Peter to bring a Peter.

24. Philip and Nathanael

Read it in: John 1:43-51
Where: On the way to Galilee

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said, "Follow Me." Philip was from Bethsaida, the same town as Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him they had found the One that Moses and the prophets wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nathanael was not impressed. "Can any good thing be out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Philip did not argue. He said, "Come and see."

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He said, "Look, truly an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit!" (John 1:47). Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus said He had seen him under the fig tree before

Philip called him. Whatever happened under that tree, Nathanael knew no one could have seen it. He said, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49).

Jesus told him he would see greater things than that. He would see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man. That is a picture from Jacob’s dream of a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28:12). Jesus was saying that He Himself is the ladder, the only way between heaven and earth.

Nathanael is probably the same man the other Gospels call Bartholomew. In the lists of the Twelve, Bartholomew is usually paired with Philip, and John never uses the name Bartholomew.

What it shows: Philip’s answer to the skeptic is still the best one: “Come and see.” You do not have to win every argument. Bring people to Jesus and let Him speak for Himself.

25. Water Turned to Wine at Cana

Read it in: John 2:1-11
Where: Cana in Galilee

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, a village a few miles from Nazareth. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples had been invited too.

Weddings in that culture lasted as long as a week, and running out of wine would have been a deep embarrassment for the family. When the wine ran out, Mary told Jesus. He answered, “What ***is that*** to Me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). The word “woman” sounds harsh to us, but it was a polite form of address. Jesus would use the same word for His mother from the cross. He was gently telling her that His time to be revealed was set by His Father, not by her.

Mary did not argue. She told the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do ***it***” (John 2:5). Those are the last recorded words of Mary in the Bible, and they are good advice for anyone.

Six stone water jars stood nearby for Jewish washing rituals, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill them with water, and they filled them to the brim. Then He told them to draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. When he tasted it, the water had become wine. He did not know where it came from, but the servants did. He called the bridegroom over and said that everyone serves the good wine first and the cheaper wine later, but you have kept the good wine until now.

> *This beginning of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.* (John 2:11)

What it shows: John calls the miracles of Jesus “signs.” A sign points past itself. This one points to a Savior who brings joy and does not do things halfway: between 120 and 180 gallons of the best wine at the party. Jesus’ first sign was at a wedding, and the Bible ends with a wedding too, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

26. A Few Days in Capernaum

Read it in: John 2:12
Where: Capernaum

After the wedding, Jesus went down to Capernaum with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they stayed there a few days. Capernaum was a busy fishing town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It would soon become His home base.

What it shows: At this point His brothers were still with Him. Later they would doubt Him (John 7:5), and only after the resurrection would they believe. Families can take time to come to faith. Keep praying for yours.

Study Questions

1. John the Baptist kept pointing away from himself. Who in your life has pointed you to Jesus?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"?
3. Andrew brought his brother. Philip brought his friend. Who could you invite to "come and see" Jesus?
4. Mary told the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." What is one thing Jesus has told you in His Word that you have not yet done?
5. Why do you think Jesus chose a wedding for His first sign?

Part Three: The Early Ministry

Chapter 7: The First Passover

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*
>
> John 3:16 (SLB)

The first three Gospels jump from the temptation straight to Jesus preaching in Galilee. John fills in what happened in between. There was roughly a year of early ministry, much of it in Judea, before John the Baptist was arrested. It began at the Passover in Jerusalem, probably in the spring of A.D. 30 if the crucifixion was in A.D. 33, or A.D. 27 if it was in A.D. 30.

Schedules, budgets and busy programs can slowly crowd out simple prayer, even in good work for God. Jesus cleared the temple courts because people had turned His Father's house of prayer into a marketplace (John 2:13-17). Keeping our hearts focused on meeting with God protects us from trading worship for busyness.

27. Jesus Clears the Temple

Read it in: John 2:13-22
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

When the Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at their tables. Pilgrims came from all over the world and needed animals for sacrifice and the right coins for the temple tax. A market had grown up right inside the outer court, the one place where Gentiles were allowed to come and pray.

Jesus made a whip out of cords and drove them all out, with the sheep and oxen. He poured out the coins of the money changers and turned over their tables. To those selling doves He said, “Take these things from here; do not make the house of My Father a house of trade” (John 2:16). His disciples remembered that it is written, “The zeal of Your house has consumed Me” (John 2:17, quoting Psalm 69:9).

The leaders asked what sign He could show for doing this. He answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). They thought He meant the temple building, and said it had taken forty-six years to build. John explains that He was speaking about the temple of His body. After He rose from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed.

Outside the Bible: Forty-Six Years in Building (*Background*)

Josephus says Herod the Great began rebuilding the temple “in the eighteenth year of his reign” (*Antiquities* 15.11.1). Herod became king in Jerusalem in 37 B.C., which puts the start around 20 to 19 B.C. Forty-six years later brings us to about A.D. 27 or 28. That is a helpful date for this first Passover, though scholars count the years in slightly different ways. Work on the outer courts went on until about A.D. 63, only a few years before the Romans destroyed the whole thing in A.D. 70.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell of Jesus clearing the temple during the last week of His life. John tells of it here, at the start. Some think John moved the event to the front of his book for teaching reasons. I believe it happened twice. The details are different, the words of Jesus are different, and John clearly places this one at the first Passover, three years before the cross. It is not hard to imagine the market coming right back, and Jesus confronting it again at the end.

What it shows: Jesus cares how we treat God's house and God's people. He was angry, but His anger was not out of control. It was zeal for His Father's honor and for the outsiders who were being crowded out of the place of prayer.

28. Many Believe Because of His Signs

Read it in: John 2:23-25
Where: Jerusalem

While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, many believed in His name when they saw the signs He was doing. But John adds a sobering note. Jesus did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people. He did not need anyone to tell Him about a person, for He Himself knew what was in man.

What it shows: Some faith is only skin deep. People can be impressed by Jesus without truly trusting Him. He knows the difference, and He knows our hearts better than we do.

29. Nicodemus Comes at Night

Read it in: John 3:1-21
Where: Jerusalem

One man who had seen the signs came to Jesus by night. His name was Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council. He called Jesus "Rabbi" and admitted that no one could do these signs unless God was with him.

Jesus went straight to the point.

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3)

Nicodemus took it at face value. How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time? Jesus explained that unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. The Spirit is like the wind. You cannot see it or control it, but you can see what it does.

Nicodemus still did not understand, and Jesus gently scolded him. He was the teacher of Israel and did not know these things? Then Jesus pointed him to a story every Pharisee knew. In the wilderness, when snakes were biting the people, God told Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole, and whoever looked at it lived (Numbers 21:8-9). In the same way, the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.

Then comes the most famous verse in the Bible, the one at the top of this chapter. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.

Some Bible teachers believe Jesus' words end at verse 15 and that verses 16 to 21 are John's own comment. The Greek has no quotation marks, so we cannot be sure. Either way, it is God's Word.

We are not told how Nicodemus answered that night. But he shows up twice more. Later he defended Jesus before the council (John 7:50-51). And after the crucifixion, he came with about seventy-five pounds of spices to help bury the body (John 19:39). The man who came in the dark came out into the light.

What it shows: Being religious is not enough. Nicodemus was one of the most religious men in Israel, and Jesus told him he needed to be born again. New life does not come from trying harder. It comes from God, through looking in faith at the One lifted up on the cross.

30. John the Baptist's Last Witness

Read it in: John 3:22-36
Where: The Judean countryside and Aenon near Salim

After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, and He spent time with them and baptized. John 4:2 makes clear that Jesus Himself did not baptize. His disciples did. John the Baptist was baptizing nearby at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. John notes that this was before John had been put in prison.

John's disciples got into an argument and came to him upset. The man you pointed to is baptizing, they said, and everyone is going to Him. It was the kind of moment that reveals a heart. John answered like a best man at a wedding. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom stands and listens and rejoices to hear the bridegroom's voice. "Therefore this joy of mine has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I ***must*** decrease" (John 3:29-30).

The chapter ends with a strong word, either from John the Baptist or from John the Gospel writer.

> *The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* (John 3:36)

What it shows: Jealousy in ministry is as old as ministry. John had every reason to feel pushed aside, and instead he rejoiced. True servants of God are glad when Jesus gets the attention, even when it means they get less.

31. John Is Imprisoned and Jesus Leaves Judea

Read it in: Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20; John 4:1-4
Where: Judea toward Galilee

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. When Jesus learned this, He left Judea and headed back to Galilee. About the same time, John the Baptist was arrested.

Luke explains why. John had rebuked Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, because he had taken Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the other evil things he had done. Herod added this to all of them: he locked John up in prison (Luke 3:19-20). Luke tells this early in his Gospel so he can finish John's story before turning to Jesus, but the arrest actually happened about here.

John says, "it was necessary for Him to pass through Samaria" (John 4:4). Many Jews went around Samaria by crossing the Jordan, because they hated the Samaritans. The quickest road went straight through. But John's word "necessary" probably means more than geography. There was someone in Samaria Jesus had come to meet.

What it shows: John the Baptist ended up in prison for telling a powerful man the truth. Faithfulness does not always look like success. But God's plan was not stopped. As one voice was silenced, the ministry of Jesus spread.

Study Questions

1. Why was Jesus so angry about the market in the temple? Is there anything in your life or church that crowds out prayer?
2. John 2:24-25 says Jesus knew what was in every person. Is that a comfort to you or a worry? Why?
3. What does it mean to be "born again"? How would you explain it to someone who has never heard the phrase?
4. Nicodemus came at night, defended Jesus later, and helped bury Him at the end. What does his slow growth teach you about people who seem to be "almost" Christians?
5. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." What would that look like in your work, your family, or your church?

Chapter 8: Through Samaria and Home to Galilee

> *and they were saying to the woman, "No longer do we believe because of your speech; for we ourselves have heard, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world, the Christ."*
>
> John 4:42 (SLB)

On the way north, Jesus stopped at a well in Samaria and changed a whole town. Then He came home to Galilee, where He healed a boy from twenty miles away and was nearly thrown off a cliff by the people He grew up with. In this chapter, His ministry in Galilee begins.

32. The Woman at the Well

Read it in: John 4:5-42
Where: Sychar in Samaria, at Jacob's well

Jesus came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and it is still there today, a deep well near the modern city of Nablus. Jesus was tired from the journey, so He sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour, around noon. His disciples had gone into town to buy food.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Most women came in the cool of the morning or evening. Coming alone in the heat of the day suggests she wanted to avoid the other women. Jesus asked her for a drink, and she was shocked. Jews did not speak to Samaritans, and a rabbi did not speak to a woman alone in public.

Jesus told her that if she knew who was asking, she would have asked Him, and He would have given her living water. She thought He meant running water, and pointed out that He had no bucket and the well was deep. Jesus said that everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst. It will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

She asked for that water. So Jesus told her to go call her husband. She said she had no husband. Jesus said she was right: she had had five husbands, and the man she was with now was not her husband. He did not say it to shame her. He said it so she would know that He knew everything about her and was still offering her living water.

She tried to change the subject to an old argument between Jews and Samaritans over whether to worship on Mount Gerizim, which towered right above them, or in Jerusalem. Jesus answered that the hour was coming when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth. Then she said she knew the Messiah was coming. Jesus said something He had not yet said plainly to anyone else.

> *Jesus says to her, "I am **He**, the **One** speaking to you."* (John 4:26)

The disciples came back and were surprised He was talking with a woman. She left her water jar, ran into town, and told the people, "Come, see a man who told me all things that I did. This is not the Christ, is it?"

(John 4:29). The whole town came out. Jesus stayed two days, and many more believed because of His word. They told the woman the words at the top of this chapter: now we believe because we have heard Him ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.

While the town was coming, Jesus told His disciples to lift up their eyes and look at the fields, which were already white for harvest. They could see the Samaritans in their white robes streaming across the fields toward Him.

What it shows: Jesus crossed every line that kept people apart: race, religion, gender, and reputation. The woman everyone avoided became the first missionary to her town. No one is too far gone for Jesus to seek, and no one is too broken to be used by Him.

33. Jesus Arrives in Galilee Preaching

Read it in: Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15; John 4:43-45
Where: Galilee

After two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. Luke says He returned in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. Mark gives us the heart of His message.

> *and saying, "The time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and believe in the gospel."* (Mark 1:15)

John says the Galileans welcomed Him because they had seen all He did in Jerusalem at the feast. Matthew sums up this new stage the same way Mark does: from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matthew 4:17).

What it shows: The first sermon of Jesus in Galilee had two commands: repent and believe. They still belong together. Repenting is turning from sin. Believing is turning to Jesus. You cannot do one without the other.

34. The Royal Official's Son Is Healed

Read it in: John 4:46-54
Where: Cana, with the boy at Capernaum

Jesus came again to Cana, where He had turned the water into wine. A royal official, probably an officer serving Herod Antipas, had a son who was sick at Capernaum, about twenty miles away, and close to death. He came and begged Jesus to come down and heal his son.

Jesus said, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will certainly not believe" (John 4:48). He was speaking to the crowd as much as to the father. The man did not argue. He just pleaded, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word Jesus spoke and started home.

On the way, his servants met him with the news that his son was alive. He asked when the boy began to get better. They said the fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour, about one in the afternoon. The

father realized that was the very hour Jesus had said, "Your son lives." He and his whole household believed. John calls this the second sign Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

What it shows: Jesus does not need to be in the room to work. His word is enough. The father believed before he saw anything, and then his faith grew when he saw the answer.

35. Rejected at Nazareth

Read it in: Luke 4:16-30
Where: The synagogue at Nazareth

Jesus came to Nazareth, where He had been raised, and on the Sabbath He went to the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and they handed Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He found the place where it was written:

> *"**The** Spirit of **the** Lord **is** upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to **the** poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to **the** blind, to send away **the** oppressed in release, to proclaim **the** acceptable year of **the** Lord."* (Luke 4:18-19)

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down, which is how rabbis taught. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Him. Then He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

Notice where He stopped reading. Isaiah 61:2 goes on to say "and a day of vengeance of our God." Jesus stopped in the middle of the verse. His first coming was to bring good news and the year of the Lord's favor. The day of vengeance will come at His second coming.

At first the people spoke well of Him and marveled at the words of grace coming from His mouth. But then they began to ask, "Is this not the son of Joseph?" (Luke 4:22). They knew Him as the boy down the street. Jesus knew what they were thinking. They wanted Him to do the miracles here that He had done in Capernaum. He told them no prophet is accepted in his hometown. He reminded them that in Elijah's day there were many widows in Israel, but Elijah was sent to a widow in Sidon. In Elisha's day there were many lepers in Israel, but only Naaman the Syrian was healed. God had blessed outsiders when His own people would not believe.

That made them furious. They drove Him out of town and took Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, to throw Him off the cliff. But He passed through the middle of them and went on His way.

Some harmonies treat this as the same visit Matthew and Mark tell later (Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6). The details are quite different, and Luke places it at the start of the Galilean ministry, so I treat them as two visits. Jesus gave His hometown a second chance.

What it shows: Familiarity can blind us. The people of Nazareth thought they knew all about Jesus, so they missed who He really was. It is possible to grow up around Jesus and never truly meet Him.

36. Jesus Makes Capernaum His Home

Read it in: Matthew 4:13-16; Luke 4:31
Where: Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

After Nazareth rejected Him, Jesus moved to Capernaum, a town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the old tribal lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew points out that this fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2. Those lands had been the first in Israel to fall to the Assyrians centuries before, and they were looked down on as "Galilee of the Gentiles." But Isaiah promised that the people walking in darkness there would see a great light.

Capernaum was a good base. It sat on a main trade road, had a synagogue, a customs office, and a small Roman garrison, and it was home to the fishermen Jesus had already met. Matthew later calls it "His own city" (Matthew 9:1).

What it shows: The light of the world began to shine first in the place people thought was the darkest. God loves to start in places others have written off.

Study Questions

1. List the barriers Jesus crossed to talk with the Samaritan woman. What barriers keep us from talking to people about Him?
2. What is the "living water" Jesus offers? Why does it satisfy in a way nothing else does?
3. The royal official believed Jesus' word before he saw his son. Where do you need to take Jesus at His word right now?
4. Why did Jesus stop reading Isaiah 61 in the middle of a verse? What does that tell you about His first and second comings?
5. The people of Nazareth thought they knew Jesus. How can familiarity with church or with the Bible keep us from really seeing Him?

Part Four: The Great Galilean Ministry

Chapter 9: Fishers of Men

And Jesus said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."
Mark 1:17 (SLB)

Now the great Galilean ministry begins. For the next year and a half or so, Jesus will make Capernaum His home and travel through the towns and villages of Galilee, preaching, teaching, and healing. Crowds will come from every direction. And the first thing He does is call a handful of fishermen to leave their nets and come with Him.

37. Jesus Calls Four Fishermen

Read it in: Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11
Where: The shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum

Peter, Andrew, James, and John had already met Jesus months before in Judea (John 1:35-42). Now He came to them at work.

Luke tells the fullest version. The crowd was pressing in on Jesus at the edge of the lake to hear the word of God. He saw two boats on the shore. The fishermen had gotten out and were washing their nets. Jesus got into Simon's boat, asked him to push out a little from the land, and sat down and taught the crowd from the boat.

When He finished, He told Simon to put out into the deep water and let down the nets. Simon was a professional. He knew fish come up near the surface at night and go deep in the heat of the day. "Master, having toiled through the whole night, we took nothing; but at Your declaration I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5). They caught so many fish that the nets began to break. They signaled to their partners James and John in the other boat, and they filled both boats until they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!" (Luke 5:8). He had called Him "Master" a few minutes before. Now he called Him "Lord." Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear; from now on you will be catching men" (Luke 5:10).

Matthew and Mark tell it more briefly, with the words at the top of this chapter: "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Mark adds that James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants. The family business was doing well enough to have hired help. They were not leaving because they had nothing. They were leaving everything.

Some think Luke's story with the great catch is a different event from the brief call in Matthew and Mark. I think they are the same morning told two ways. Matthew and Mark tell the call. Luke tells what happened just before it.

What it shows: Jesus met these men in the middle of an ordinary workday, used their own trade to show them who He was, and then invited them into something bigger. He still calls ordinary people. The first step is obedience, even when it does not make sense: "at Your declaration I will let down the net."

38. A Demon Driven Out in the Synagogue

Read it in: Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37
Where: The synagogue at Capernaum

On the Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue at Capernaum and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes. The scribes always quoted other rabbis. Jesus said, "I say to you."

Suddenly a man with an unclean spirit cried out, "What ***is there*** to us and to You, Jesus ***the*** Nazarene? Did You come to destroy us? I know You, who You are: the Holy ***One*** of God." (Mark 1:24). Jesus rebuked it: "Be silenced, and come out of him!" The spirit threw the man down, cried out with a loud voice, and came out without hurting him. Everyone was amazed and asked each other what this was. A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him. News about Him spread at once all through Galilee.

What it shows: The demons knew exactly who Jesus was, and they were afraid. But Jesus would not take a testimony from them. Knowing facts about Jesus is not faith. Even the demons believe, and tremble (James 2:19).

Outside the Bible: The Synagogue at Capernaum (*Background*)

The ruins of a large white limestone synagogue stand in Capernaum today. That building dates from around the fourth or fifth century A.D., long after Jesus. But beneath it, archaeologists found the black basalt foundations of an earlier building that many believe is the first-century synagogue where Jesus taught. About thirty yards away is a house that early Christians turned into a meeting place and later a church, which many believe was the home of Peter.

39. Peter's Mother-in-Law and Many Others Healed

Read it in: Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41
Where: Peter's house in Capernaum

As soon as they left the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John to the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever, and they told Jesus about her right away. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. Luke the doctor notes that He stood over her and rebuked the fever. It left her at once, and she got up and began to serve them. When Jesus heals, there is no long recovery.

That tells us something else too. Peter was married. Paul later mentions that Peter took his wife along on his missionary travels (1 Corinthians 9:5).

That evening, when the sun had set and the Sabbath was over, people brought to Jesus all who were sick or had demons. Mark says the whole town was gathered at the door. Jesus laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. Matthew sees this as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4: He Himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases.

What it shows: Jesus is not too busy for one sick woman, and He is not overwhelmed by a whole town. He touched each person one by one.

40. The First Preaching Tour of Galilee

Read it in: Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44
Where: Throughout Galilee

Very early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, went out to a lonely place, and prayed there. Simon and the others hunted for Him. When they found Him, they said, "Everyone is seeking You" (Mark 1:37). They expected Him to come back and keep healing in Capernaum.

Jesus said, "Let us go into the neighboring towns, so that I may preach there also; for to this end I have come forth" (Mark 1:38). He went through all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. Matthew says news about Him spread throughout Syria, and great crowds followed Him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

What it shows: After His busiest day yet, Jesus got up early to pray. If the Son of God needed time alone with His Father, so do we. And He would not let popularity set His agenda. His mission was to preach the good news everywhere.

41. A Leper Is Cleansed

Read it in: Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16
Where: A town in Galilee

In one of the towns, a man covered with leprosy came to Jesus, knelt down, and begged Him, "If You are willing, You are able to cleanse me" (Mark 1:40). He did not doubt Jesus' power. He doubted whether Jesus would want to.

Under the Law, a leper had to live apart, tear his clothes, and cry out "Unclean, unclean" so that no one would come near (Leviticus 13:45-46). This man may not have been touched by another human being in years. Mark says Jesus was moved with compassion, stretched out His hand, and touched him. "I am willing; be cleansed." At once the leprosy left him.

Jesus told him to tell no one, but to go show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifice Moses commanded, as a testimony to them. The man went out and told everyone instead, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town. Luke adds that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

What it shows: Anyone else who touched a leper became unclean. When Jesus touched the leper, the leper became clean. That is what He does with our sin. And His answer to the man's question is His answer to every sinner who comes to Him: "I am willing."

42. A Paralyzed Man Lowered Through the Roof

Read it in: Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26
Where: A house in Capernaum

Some days later, Jesus was back in Capernaum, and word got out that He was at home. So many people gathered that there was no room, not even at the door. Luke says Pharisees and teachers of the Law had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

Four men came carrying a paralyzed friend on a mat. They could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, so they climbed onto the flat roof, dug through it, and lowered the man down right in front of Him. Roofs then were made of beams covered with branches and packed mud, so this could be done. It still would have been messy.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man, "Child, your sins have been forgiven you" (Mark 2:5). That was not what anyone expected. The scribes thought to themselves, "Why does this ***man*** speak blasphemies thus? Who is able to forgive sins except One, God?" (Mark 2:7). They were right that only God can forgive sins. They were wrong about who was standing in front of them.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked which is easier, to say "Your sins have been forgiven you," or to say "Rise, and take up your mat and walk" (Mark 2:9). Anyone can say the first, because no one can see whether it happened. So Jesus did the second to prove the first. "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins," He said to the paralyzed man, "I say to you, rise, and take up your mat and go to your house" (Mark 2:10-11). The man got up, picked up his mat, and walked out in front of them all.

What it shows: Jesus saw the man's deepest need before his most obvious one. And He showed He is God by doing what only God can do. Do not miss the four friends either. Sometimes the best thing you can do for someone is carry them to Jesus.

43. Matthew Is Called

Read it in: Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32
Where: The customs booth at Capernaum and Matthew's house

As Jesus walked by the lake, He saw a tax collector named Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. Matthew's Gospel calls him Matthew. Tax collectors worked for Rome or for Herod, collected more than they were owed, and kept the extra. Their own people saw them as traitors and thieves, and they were lumped together with prostitutes and sinners.

Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." And he got up and followed Him. Luke adds that he left everything. A fisherman could always go back to his boat. A tax collector who walked away from his booth could not get his job back.

Levi threw a big dinner for Jesus at his house, and invited a large crowd of tax collectors and others. When the Pharisees saw it, they complained to His disciples that He ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus heard it.

> *And having heard, Jesus says to them, "Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill. I did not come to call **the** righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Mark 2:17)

Matthew adds that Jesus told them to go learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13, quoting Hosea 6:6).

What it shows: The first thing Matthew did as a disciple was to introduce his old friends to Jesus. Jesus was not afraid of being seen with sinners. He was the doctor making house calls. The only people He cannot help are those who think they are not sick.

44. A Question About Fasting

Read it in: Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39
Where: Capernaum

John's disciples and the Pharisees fasted regularly, and some people asked why Jesus' disciples did not. Jesus answered with a wedding picture. The friends of the bridegroom do not fast while the bridegroom is with them. But days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. It was the first hint, very early, that He would be taken from them by force.

Then He gave two short parables. No one sews a patch of new cloth on an old garment, or the patch will shrink and tear it. No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or the wine will burst the skins. New wine goes into new wineskins.

What it shows: Jesus did not come to patch up the old religious system. He came to bring something new. The joy of His presence does not fit in the old forms of rule-keeping.

Study Questions

1. Peter said, "at Your declaration I will let down the net," even though it made no sense to him. Where is Jesus asking you to obey when it does not make sense?
2. Why do you think Jesus got up early to pray after such a busy day? What does your time with God look like right now?
3. The leper asked, "If You are willing." What does Jesus' answer tell you about His heart toward you?
4. Who in your life needs to be carried to Jesus by friends? What would that look like?
5. Jesus said He came to call sinners, not the righteous. Why is it so hard for some people to admit they are "sick"?

Chapter 10: Lord of the Sabbath

> *And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath. So then the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*
>
> Mark 2:27-28 (SLB)

The Sabbath was one of the great gifts God gave Israel: one day in seven to rest, to remember that God made the world, and to remember that He brought them out of slavery (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). But by the time of Jesus, the religious teachers had piled up hundreds of rules about what counted as work. You could not carry a needle in your cloak. You could not tie certain knots. Some taught that you could help a man with a broken bone on the Sabbath only if his life was in danger.

In this chapter, Jesus collides with those rules three times. Each time, the question underneath is the same: who is the Lord of the Sabbath?

45. Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

Read it in: John 5:1-47
Where: The Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. John does not name the feast. Some think it was Passover, some Pentecost, some Purim or Tabernacles. If it was a Passover, the ministry of Jesus would have included four Passovers, not three. The timeline at the back of this book allows for either.

By the Sheep Gate there was a pool called Bethesda, with five covered porches. A great number of sick people lay there, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to become well?" (John 5:6). The man did not say yes. He explained that he had no one to put him into the pool when the water was stirred, and someone always got there first.

Verse 4 in some copies explains that an angel would stir the water and the first one in would be healed. That verse is missing from the oldest copies of John, and many believe it was added later as a note to explain verse 7. Whether an angel was involved or not, the man believed that was his only hope.

Jesus said, "Rise, take up your mat and walk" (John 5:8). Immediately the man was made well, picked up his mat, and walked. And John adds, now that day was a Sabbath.

Outside the Bible: The Pool of Bethesda (*Background*)

For a long time, critics doubted John's description of a pool with five porches, because no such building was known. In the 1800s and 1900s, archaeologists digging near the Church of Saint Anne in Jerusalem uncovered a large double pool with two basins separated by a central wall. Four colonnades around the sides and one across the middle make five, just as John says. The site had also been used as a healing shrine in Roman times. This does not prove the miracle, but it shows John knew Jerusalem well before the Romans destroyed it in A.D. 70.

The Jewish leaders told the man it was not lawful for him to carry his mat. He said the one who healed him told him to. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said, “Look, you have become well; sin no more, so that something worse may not happen to you” (John 5:14). The man went and told the leaders it was Jesus.

They began to persecute Jesus for doing these things on the Sabbath. His answer made it far worse. “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). God never stops working on the Sabbath. He keeps the universe running, keeps hearts beating, and gives life. Jesus claimed the same right. John says that is why they tried all the more to kill Him: not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

Jesus did not back down. In one of His longest speeches, He said the Son does what He sees the Father doing, the Son gives life to whom He wishes, all judgment has been given to the Son so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father, and whoever hears His word and believes has eternal life and has passed from death to life. Then He named four witnesses to who He is: John the Baptist, His own works, the Father, and the Scriptures. “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they that testify concerning Me” (John 5:39).

What it shows: Jesus’ question to the man is one He asks all of us: do you want to be made well? Some people would rather keep their excuses. And note how clearly Jesus claimed to be equal with God. His enemies understood exactly what He meant. That is why they wanted Him dead.

46. Picking Grain on the Sabbath

Read it in: Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5
Where: Grainfields in Galilee

Back in Galilee, Jesus and His disciples were walking through the grainfields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they picked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate. The Law allowed this. Anyone walking by a neighbor’s field could pick grain by hand, just not use a sickle (Deuteronomy 23:25). But the Pharisees counted it as harvesting and threshing, which was work.

Jesus reminded them of David. When David was running for his life and hungry, he went into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread that only priests were allowed to eat, and gave some to the men with him (1 Samuel 21:1-6). Matthew adds that the priests in the temple work on every Sabbath and are innocent, and that something greater than the temple was here. Then Jesus gave the words at the top of this chapter. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

What it shows: God’s laws are for our good, not to crush us. When people turn God’s gifts into heavy burdens, they miss the heart of God. And Jesus did not just interpret the Sabbath. He claimed to own it.

47. The Man with the Withered Hand

Read it in: Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11
Where: A synagogue in Galilee

On another Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue. A man was there whose right hand was withered. Luke the doctor is the one who tells us it was the right hand, the one he worked with. The Pharisees watched Jesus closely to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so they could accuse Him.

Jesus told the man to stand up in front of everyone. Then He asked them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbaths to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4). They said nothing. Matthew adds that Jesus pointed out that any of them would pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, and a man is worth much more than a sheep.

Mark tells us that Jesus looked around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of their hearts. Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately began plotting with the Herodians how to destroy Him. That is a strange alliance. The Pharisees hated Herod’s family as Roman puppets. The Herodians supported Herod. But they hated Jesus more than they hated each other.

What it shows: The Pharisees were angry that a man was healed on the Sabbath, and then spent that same Sabbath planning a murder. Religion without love can become cruel. Jesus’ anger was the right kind: grief over hard hearts.

48. Crowds Follow Him to the Sea

Read it in: Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12
Where: The Sea of Galilee

Jesus knew what they were planning, so He withdrew to the sea with His disciples. A huge crowd followed from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea far to the south, beyond the Jordan, and around Tyre and Sidon to the north. So many people pressed in to touch Him that He had a small boat kept ready so the crowd would not crush Him.

Unclean spirits fell down before Him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” He strictly warned them not to make Him known. Matthew sees in this quiet way of Jesus the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4. God’s chosen Servant would not quarrel or cry out. A bruised reed He would not break, and a smoldering wick He would not put out.

What it shows: Jesus had all power, yet He was gentle with weak and broken people. If you feel like a bruised reed or a flickering candle, He will not snap you or snuff you out.

49. The Twelve Are Chosen

Read it in: Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16
Where: A mountain in Galilee

Luke tells us that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, He called His disciples and chose twelve of them, whom He also named apostles, meaning sent ones. Mark says He appointed them so that they might be with Him and so that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

The twelve were Simon, whom He named Peter, and his brother Andrew; James and John, the sons of Zebedee, whom He nicknamed Boanerges, "Sons of thunder"; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew the tax collector and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus, also called Judas the son of James; Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Think about that group. Matthew had worked for Rome. Simon the Zealot belonged, or had belonged, to a movement that wanted to drive Rome out by force. In any other setting, those two might have fought. Around Jesus, they became brothers.

What it shows: Before the biggest decision of His ministry, Jesus prayed all night. And He chose ordinary men, fishermen, a tax collector, a rebel, and even one who would betray Him. The first job of an apostle was not to do anything. It was to be with Him.

Study Questions

1. Jesus asked the man at Bethesda, "Do you want to become well?" Why might someone not want to be made well?
2. In John 5:18, why did the leaders want to kill Jesus? What does that tell you about what He claimed?
3. What does it mean that "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath"? How can rest be a gift instead of a burden?
4. The Pharisees cared more about their rules than about a man's hand. Where might we be tempted to put our traditions above people?
5. Jesus chose the Twelve first "so that they might be with Him." How much of your walk with God is being with Him, and how much is doing things for Him?

Chapter 11: The Sermon on the Mount

> *And it came about, when Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were astonished at His teaching; for He was teaching them as **one** having authority, and not as the scribes.*
>
> Matthew 7:28-29 (SLB)

Right after choosing the Twelve, Jesus came down the mountain, and a great crowd gathered from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. There He gave the most famous sermon ever preached. Matthew gives it in full in chapters 5 to 7. Luke gives a shorter version in chapter 6.

Matthew says Jesus went up on the mountain and sat down to teach (Matthew 5:1). Luke says He came down and stood on a level place (Luke 6:17). Both can be true. A hillside above the Sea of Galilee has plenty of level places partway up, and Jesus may have come down from the summit where He prayed to a flat spot on the slope where the crowd could gather. Most believe Matthew and Luke are giving the same sermon, with Matthew including more of it. Matthew may also have gathered in some teaching Jesus gave at other times, since Luke places a few of these sayings elsewhere.

This is not a sermon about how to get saved. It is a picture of what life looks like in the kingdom of God, for people who already follow the King. Read it slowly. It cuts deep.

50. The Sermon on the Mount

Read it in: Matthew 5:1-7:29; Luke 6:17-49
Where: A hillside near Capernaum

The Beatitudes

Jesus began with blessings. The word “blessed” means more than happy. It means deeply well off, in a good place before God. And He blessed the people the world never would.

> *Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed **are** those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed **are** the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst **for** righteousness, for they will be filled.* (Matthew 5:3-6)

> *Blessed **are** the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed **are** the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed **are** the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed **are** those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.* (Matthew 5:7-10)

The order matters. It starts with being poor in spirit, knowing you have nothing to offer God. That leads to mourning over sin, then meekness, then hunger for righteousness. Only after that come mercy, a pure heart, and peacemaking. And the last blessing is a warning: people who live this way will be persecuted, and Jesus says to rejoice when it happens, because the prophets were treated the same way.

Luke's version adds four woes to match four blessings: woe to the rich, the well fed, those who laugh now, and those everyone speaks well of (Luke 6:24-26).

Salt and Light

Jesus told His followers they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt preserves and gives flavor. Light shows the way. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, and no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket. Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus and the Law

Some thought Jesus had come to throw out the Law of Moses. He said the opposite. He came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. Then He said something that must have stunned the crowd: unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20). The Pharisees were the most careful rule-keepers in Israel. How could anyone do better?

Jesus showed them how, six times over, with the words, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you.

- **Murder.** The Law says do not murder. Jesus says anyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment. If you are offering a gift at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, go make it right first.
- **Adultery.** The Law says do not commit adultery. Jesus says anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- **Divorce.** Moses allowed a certificate of divorce. Jesus says divorcing a wife except for sexual immorality leads to adultery.
- **Oaths.** Do not swear by heaven or earth. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.
- **Revenge.** The Law said an eye for an eye, a rule meant to limit punishment in court. Jesus says do not resist an evil person: turn the other cheek, give your cloak too, go the second mile.
- **Love.** You have heard, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Jesus says love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Even tax collectors love those who love them.

He ended this section with an impossible standard: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father who ***is*** in the heavens is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). That is the point. No one can reach God's standard on his own. The sermon drives us to the poverty of spirit it started with, and to the only One who kept it all perfectly.

Giving, Praying, and Fasting

Jesus then warned against doing good things to be seen. When you give, do not sound a trumpet. When you pray, go into your room and shut the door. When you fast, wash your face so no one can tell. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In the middle of this, He gave His disciples a pattern for prayer.

> *Therefore you, pray in this way: 'Our Father who **is** in the heavens, let Your name be sanctified; let Your kingdom come; let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into*

> *temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Amen.'* (Matthew 6:9-13)

The last line of the prayer, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages," is printed in the SLB but is missing from the oldest copies of Matthew. It is still true, and the church has prayed it for centuries. Luke gives a shorter form of this prayer at a different time, when a disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-4). Jesus likely taught it more than once.

Right after the prayer, Jesus came back to the line about forgiveness. If you forgive others, your heavenly Father will forgive you. If you will not forgive, neither will your Father forgive you (Matthew 6:14-15).

Treasure and Worry

Do not store up treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Store up treasure in heaven. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money.

So do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear. Look at the birds. They do not plant or harvest, and your heavenly Father feeds them. Look at the lilies of the field. Not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of them.

> *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about its own things. Sufficient for the day* ***is*** *its trouble.* (Matthew 6:33-34)

Judging, Asking, and the Golden Rule

Do not judge, or you will be judged by the same measure. Take the log out of your own eye before you try to remove the speck from your brother's. Ask, seek, and knock, because your Father gives good gifts to those who ask Him. And then the summary of the whole Law and Prophets: whatever you want people to do to you, do the same to them (Matthew 7:12).

Two Gates, Two Trees, Two Houses

Jesus closed with a choice. There is a wide gate and a broad road that lead to destruction, and many go that way. There is a narrow gate and a hard road that lead to life, and few find it. Watch out for false prophets. You will know them by their fruit. Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of the Father. Many will say they did great things in His name, and He will say He never knew them.

Then the last picture, the one children still sing about.

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain came down, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and they fell against that house; and it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.* (Matthew 7:24-25)

The foolish man built on sand. The same storm hit both houses. The difference was the foundation.

When Jesus finished, the crowds were amazed. He did not teach like their scribes, who always quoted other teachers. He taught as one who had authority. He put His own words on the same level as the Law of God.

What it shows: The Sermon on the Mount shows us how far short we fall, and then shows us the life Jesus makes possible for those who belong to Him. It is not a ladder to climb to heaven. It is a description of what heaven's people look like on earth. And the whole thing rests on one question: are you building your life on His words?

Study Questions

1. Read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10. Which one describes you best right now? Which one is hardest for you?
2. Jesus said anger and lust are sins of the heart, not just the hands. Why does He go to the heart?
3. What does it mean to love your enemies? Name one person you find it hard to pray for, and pray for them this week.
4. Jesus said not to worry, because the Father knows what we need. What are you worried about, and what would it look like to seek His kingdom first in that area?
5. In the story of the two houses, what is the rock? How can you tell if your life is built on it?

Chapter 12: Faith in Unexpected Places

> *Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*
>
> Matthew 11:28-29 (SLB)

After the sermon, Jesus went back into Capernaum and then out through the towns of Galilee. In this stretch of the story, the faith He praises comes from the people you would least expect: a Roman officer, a grieving widow, and a sinful woman crying at His feet. Meanwhile, John the Baptist, sitting in Herod's prison, began to wonder.

For years I drifted and hurt the people I loved most, yet God met me with mercy when I came to the end of myself in May 2020. When you know how much debt God wiped off your ledger, you get more patient with other people's failures. The one who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47).

51. A Roman Officer's Faith

Read it in: Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
Where: Capernaum

A centurion in Capernaum had a servant he valued highly who was sick and about to die. A centurion was a Roman army officer over about a hundred men. Luke tells us the town's Jewish elders came to Jesus on his behalf. They said he deserved help, because he loved their nation and had built their synagogue.

Jesus went with them. But before He got to the house, the centurion sent friends with a message. Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell one to go, and he goes, and another to come, and he comes.

> *And having heard these things, Jesus marveled at him, and having turned to the crowd that was following Him, He said, "I say to you, not even in Israel did I find such great faith."*
> (Luke 7:9)

The friends went back to the house and found the servant well.

Matthew tells the story more briefly, as though the centurion spoke to Jesus himself. That is a common way of speaking in every age. If a reporter says the president signed a bill, we do not assume he did not use a pen handed to him by an aide. Matthew tells us who was asking. Luke tells us how the request was delivered. Matthew adds a warning from Jesus: many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out.

What it shows: The centurion understood authority. He knew that if Jesus spoke, it would happen, no matter the distance. And his faith went hand in hand with humility: I am not worthy. Faith that pleases Jesus does not demand. It trusts.

52. A Widow's Son Raised at Nain

Read it in: Luke 7:11-17
Where: Nain, a village southwest of the Sea of Galilee

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, with His disciples and a large crowd. As He came near the town gate, a dead man was being carried out. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was with her.

This woman had lost her husband, and now she had lost her only son. In that world, a widow with no son had no one to support her or protect her. She was not just grieving. She was facing a future with nothing.

When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her and said, "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13). He came up and touched the bier, the open stretcher they carried the body on, and the men carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Luke says, beautifully, that Jesus gave him to his mother.

Fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has been raised up among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" Some of them would have remembered that Elisha had raised a widow's son in Shunem, only a few miles from Nain on the other side of the same hill (2 Kings 4:8-37).

What it shows: No one asked Jesus to help this woman. She did not have time to ask. He saw her and had compassion. Jesus is moved by our grief, and death has to stop when He speaks.

53. John Sends Messengers from Prison

Read it in: Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35
Where: Galilee

By now John the Baptist had been in prison for months, in Herod's fortress at Machaerus east of the Dead Sea. John had preached that the Messiah would bring judgment, with an axe at the root of the trees and fire for the chaff. But Jesus was healing people, not overthrowing Herod. And John was still in chains.

So John sent two of his disciples to ask, "Are You the ***One*** who is coming, or are we to look for another?" (Luke 7:19). It is an honest question from a discouraged man.

Jesus did not scold him. Luke says that in that very hour He healed many people of diseases and evil spirits and gave sight to the blind. Then He told the messengers to go tell John what they had seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. Every one of those signs came from Isaiah's promises about the Messiah (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). And He added, "blessed is whoever is not caused to stumble in Me" (Luke 7:23).

After they left, Jesus praised John to the crowd. He was not a reed shaking in the wind or a man in soft clothes. He was more than a prophet. Among those born of women, there is no one greater than John. Yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. John stood at the doorway of the new age. Those who come after the cross get to see what John only pointed toward.

Then Jesus turned on that generation. They were like children in the market who complain that no one will play along. John came fasting, and they said he had a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they called Him a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Some people will find an excuse no matter what.

What it shows: Even the greatest men of God can have doubts. Jesus is not angry when we bring Him our honest questions. He answers by pointing us to what He has done and to what the Scriptures promised.

54. Woe to the Unrepentant Towns, and Rest for the Weary

Read it in: Matthew 11:20-30
Where: Galilee

Matthew places here a hard word and a gentle one. Jesus began to denounce the towns where most of His miracles had been done, because they did not repent. Woe to Chorazin and Bethsaida. If the miracles done there had been done in Tyre and Sidon, those pagan cities would have repented long ago. And Capernaum, His own home base, would be brought down to Hades. More was given to them, and more would be required.

Then, in the same breath, Jesus prayed. He thanked the Father for hiding these things from the wise and revealing them to little children. And He gave one of the sweetest invitations in the whole Bible, printed at the top of this chapter. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

A yoke was the wooden frame that joined two oxen together for plowing. The rabbis spoke of taking on the yoke of the Law. Jesus offers a different yoke. His is easy, and His burden is light, because He pulls alongside you.

What it shows: The same Jesus who warns of judgment opens His arms to anyone tired of carrying the weight of sin and religion. The door is open. It is only closed to those who refuse to come.

55. A Sinful Woman Anoints His Feet

Read it in: Luke 7:36-50
Where: The house of Simon the Pharisee, in Galilee

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to dinner. At a formal meal, guests lay on couches around a low table, leaning on one elbow, with their feet stretched out behind them. Meals like this were often semi-public. People could come in and stand along the walls to listen.

A woman of the town who was known as a sinner learned that Jesus was there. She brought an alabaster flask of perfume, stood behind Him at His feet, and wept. Her tears fell on His feet, and she wiped them with her hair, kissed His feet, and poured the perfume on them.

Simon said to himself that if this man were a prophet, He would know what sort of woman was touching Him. Jesus knew exactly what Simon was thinking. He told him a story. Two men owed money to a lender. One owed five hundred denarii, about a year and a half of wages, and the other owed fifty. Neither

could pay, so he canceled both debts. Which one will love him more? Simon answered, "I suppose that ***it is he*** to whom he graciously forgave the more" (Luke 7:43).

Then Jesus turned toward the woman and spoke to Simon. You gave Me no water for My feet. She washed them with her tears. You gave Me no kiss. She has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head. She put perfume on My feet. Her many sins have been forgiven, which is why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little.

Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven" (Luke 7:48). The other guests began asking who this was, who even forgives sins. Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Some people confuse this woman with Mary Magdalene, or with Mary of Bethany, who anointed Jesus near the end of His life. Nothing in the text says so. This was a different woman, in Galilee, at a different time. Luke does not even give her name.

What it shows: Simon thought he needed little forgiveness, so he loved little. The woman knew how much she had been forgiven, so she loved much. The problem was not that Simon was less of a sinner. It was that he did not know it.

56. Women Who Followed and Supported Him

Read it in: Luke 8:1-3
Where: Throughout Galilee

Soon afterward, Jesus went on through the cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, and so were some women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases. Luke names Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. They supported Jesus and the disciples out of their own means.

What it shows: In a world where women were often pushed aside, Jesus welcomed them as disciples. Some of these same women would stand by the cross when most of the men had run, and would be the first to find the empty tomb.

Study Questions

1. What made the centurion's faith so remarkable to Jesus? How does humility go together with real faith?
2. No one asked Jesus to help the widow of Nain. What does that tell you about His heart toward people who are grieving?
3. John the Baptist had doubts in prison. What do you do with your own doubts? How did Jesus answer John?
4. Read Matthew 11:28-30. What burdens are you carrying that Jesus is inviting you to bring to Him?
5. Jesus said the one who is forgiven little loves little. How does remembering how much you have been forgiven change the way you love Him and others?

Chapter 13: A House Divided

For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and My sister and mother.

Mark 3:35 (SLB)

As the crowds grew, so did the opposition. In this chapter, three groups try to explain Jesus away. His own family thinks He has lost His mind. The scribes from Jerusalem say He works by the power of the devil. And the Pharisees demand that He prove Himself with a sign. Jesus answers each one, and in the end He tells us who His real family is.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke arrange these events a little differently. Mark ties them closely together, and I follow his order here, with Luke's account of the true family at the end.

57. His Family Comes to Take Him Home

Read it in: Mark 3:20-21
Where: A house in Capernaum

Jesus came home, and again such a crowd gathered that He and His disciples could not even eat. When His family heard about it, they went out to seize Him, because they were saying, "He is beside Himself" (Mark 3:21).

Mark tells this honestly, and it is a hard verse. His own relatives, probably including His brothers, thought the pressure had gotten to Him. John says plainly that at this time even His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5).

What it shows: Jesus knows what it is like to be misunderstood by your own family. If following Him has put a strain on your family, He has been there. And remember that His brother James, who once thought Jesus was beside Himself, later led the church in Jerusalem and called himself "a slave of God and of ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1).

58. The Charge That He Works by Beelzebul

Read it in: Matthew 12:22-37; Mark 3:22-30
Where: Galilee

They brought to Jesus a man who was blind and mute because of a demon, and Jesus healed him so that he could speak and see. The crowds were amazed and asked, "This is not the Son of David, is it?" They were beginning to wonder if He was the Messiah.

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem had their answer ready. He has Beelzebul, they said. He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons. Beelzebul was an old name for a pagan god, and by this time it was used as a name for Satan.

Jesus showed them how foolish that was. How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand. If Satan is fighting himself, he is finished. Then Jesus gave the real explanation.

> *No one is able, having entered into the house of the strong man, to plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man; and then he will plunder his house.* (Mark 3:27)

Jesus is the stronger man. He has come into Satan's house, tied him up, and is taking back what he stole. Every demon cast out is proof.

Then Jesus gave a serious warning. Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Mark explains why He said it: "because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (Mark 3:30). These men saw the clear work of God's Spirit and called it the work of the devil, on purpose, against all the evidence. They were not confused. They had hardened their hearts so far that they called good evil.

People sometimes worry they have committed this sin. If you are worried that you have, that is a good sign you have not. The ones who commit it do not care. They have rejected the only One who could forgive them.

Matthew adds that Jesus warned them a tree is known by its fruit, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, and on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word.

What it shows: The leaders could not deny the miracles, so they tried to explain them away. Many people still do that with Jesus. But the evidence points one way. Jesus is stronger than the devil, and He came to set captives free.

59. The Sign of Jonah

Read it in: Matthew 12:38-45
Where: Galilee

Some scribes and Pharisees then said, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from You" (Matthew 12:38). He had just healed a blind and mute man in front of them. They had seen plenty of signs. They wanted Him to perform on command.

Jesus refused. An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, He said, but no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The great sign would be His resurrection.

Some read "three days and three nights" and say a Friday crucifixion cannot fit. But in Jewish counting, any part of a day counted as a day and its night. Jesus was in the tomb part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday, which by that way of counting is three days. Jesus Himself often said He would be raised "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21), which fits exactly.

Jesus added that the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and the queen of the South traveled to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And now something greater than Jonah and Solomon was here.

Then He told a strange story about an unclean spirit that leaves a man, wanders, and comes back to find the house swept and empty, and brings seven worse spirits with it. A house that is cleaned up but left empty is not safe. Reform without Jesus is not enough.

What it shows: Jesus will not perform for people who have already made up their minds. The one sign He promised everyone is the empty tomb. That is the sign we still point to.

60. His True Family

Read it in: Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21
Where: A house in Galilee

While Jesus was still speaking, His mother and His brothers arrived. They stood outside and sent word asking to speak to Him. The crowd was sitting around Him, and someone said, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers outside are seeking You” (Mark 3:32).

Jesus looked at those sitting around Him and gave the answer at the top of this chapter. Whoever does the will of God, this one is My brother and sister and mother.

He was not rejecting His mother. From the cross, He made sure she would be cared for (John 19:26-27). But He was making clear that the family of God is not formed by blood. It is formed by faith and obedience. The ties that bind God’s people are deeper than the ties of birth.

Luke places this a little later, after the parables by the sea. Since Luke says only that His mother and brothers “came to Him” and does not tie it to a time, it fits well here, where Mark puts it.

What it shows: If you have trusted Jesus, you are part of His family. You have brothers and sisters you have never met all over the world, and you will spend eternity with them.

Study Questions

1. Jesus’ own family thought He was out of His mind. Why do you think they misunderstood Him? Has following Jesus ever caused tension in your family?
2. Jesus said He binds the “strong man,” Satan. How does that encourage you when you face spiritual battles?
3. What was the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Why should a person who is worried about it take comfort?
4. Why did Jesus refuse to give the Pharisees a sign? Why is the resurrection the greatest sign of all?
5. Jesus said whoever does the will of God is His brother and sister and mother. What does it mean to you to be part of His family?

Chapter 14: Parables by the Sea

*But blessed **are** your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.*

Matthew 13:16 (SLB)

That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. The crowd was so large that He got into a boat and taught from the water while the people stood on the shore. A cove near Capernaum forms a natural amphitheater, and a voice from the water carries well up the slope.

This is the day Jesus began teaching in parables. A parable is a story from everyday life that carries a spiritual truth. It is like a window. People who want to see can look through it and see God's kingdom. People who do not want to see just see a story about farming.

61. The Parables of the Kingdom

Read it in: Matthew 13:1-53; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18
Where: From a boat on the Sea of Galilee, and in a house

The Sower and the Four Soils

A farmer went out to sow. As he scattered the seed by hand, some fell on the path, where the ground was packed hard, and birds ate it. Some fell on rocky ground with a thin layer of soil. It sprang up quickly, but when the sun came out it withered, because it had no root. Some fell among thorns, which grew up and choked it. And some fell on good soil and produced a crop, some a hundred times, some sixty, some thirty.

Jesus ended with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9).

Later, when they were alone, the disciples asked Him what it meant, and why He spoke to the crowds in parables. He told them the secret of the kingdom had been given to them, but to those outside everything came in parables. He quoted Isaiah 6:9-10: seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear. People who had already hardened their hearts against Him would hear stories and miss the meaning. People who wanted the truth would come and ask, as the disciples did.

Then He explained the parable. The seed is the word of God.

- **The path** is the person who hears the word, and the devil comes and snatches it away before it can take root.
- **The rocky ground** is the one who hears with joy, but has no root. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he falls away.
- **The thorns** are those who hear, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things choke the word, and it bears no fruit.
- **The good soil** is the one who hears the word, understands it, holds it fast, and bears fruit with patience.

The seed is the same in every case. The difference is the soil.

A Lamp on a Stand

No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket or a bed. It goes on a stand. Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed. So pay attention to how you listen. To the one who has, more will be given. From the one who does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away (Luke 8:16-18).

The Seed That Grows by Itself

Only Mark tells this one. A man scatters seed on the ground. He sleeps and gets up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, and he does not know how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the head, then the full grain. When the grain is ripe, he puts in the sickle (Mark 4:26-29). God's kingdom grows by God's power, often quietly and out of sight.

The Weeds Among the Wheat

A man sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The weed was probably darnel, which looks almost exactly like wheat until it heads out. When the servants wanted to pull up the weeds, the owner said no, or they might pull up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

Jesus explained it later. The field is the world. The good seed are the sons of the kingdom, and the weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels (Matthew 13:36-43). God will sort it out in the end. Until then, true and false believers live side by side, and it is not always easy to tell them apart.

The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed a farmer in Galilee would plant, which grows into a plant so large that birds can nest in its branches. And it is like leaven, or yeast, that a woman mixed into about twenty quarts of flour until all of it was leavened. Both stories say the same thing. The kingdom starts small, with a carpenter and twelve men, and it grows far beyond anything anyone expected.

Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Net

These three Jesus told to His disciples in the house. The kingdom is like treasure hidden in a field. A man found it, hid it again, and in his joy sold everything he had to buy that field. It is like a merchant looking for fine pearls who found one of great value and sold everything to buy it. Jesus is worth everything we have, and giving it all up for Him is not a sacrifice but a joy.

And the kingdom is like a net thrown into the sea that catches fish of every kind. When it is full, the fishermen pull it ashore and sort the good fish from the bad. So it will be at the end of the age.

The Householder's Treasure

Jesus asked His disciples if they had understood all these things. They said yes. Then He said every scribe trained for the kingdom is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom things new and old (Matthew 13:51-52). The kingdom does not throw away the Old Testament. It brings out its treasures and shows how they point to Jesus.

Mark sums up the day: with many such parables He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately He explained everything to His own disciples (Mark 4:33-34).

What it shows: The question in every one of these parables is the same: what kind of listener are you? The kingdom of God is real, it is growing, it is worth everything, and it ends with a harvest. Jesus gives understanding to those who come close and ask.

Study Questions

1. Which of the four soils best describes how you have listened to God's Word over the past year? What can make the soil of your heart better?
2. In the parable of the weeds, why does the owner let the weeds and wheat grow together? What does that teach about judging others?
3. The mustard seed and the leaven both start small. Where have you seen God start something small that grew?
4. The man who found the treasure sold everything in his joy. What would it look like for you to treat Jesus as your greatest treasure?
5. The disciples got understanding by coming to Jesus privately and asking. What questions do you need to bring to Him?

Chapter 15: Power over Wind, Demons, Disease, and Death

> *And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"*
>
> Mark 4:41 (SLB)

On the evening of the day of parables, Jesus said, "Let us pass over to the other side" (Mark 4:35). What followed was one of the most remarkable stretches in the Gospels. In a day or two, Jesus calmed a storm, set free a man held by a legion of demons, healed a woman no doctor could help, and raised a little girl from the dead. Mark tells these stories one after another, and the message is plain. There is nothing in all creation that does not have to obey Him.

After I got sober in May 2020, the people who most needed to see the change were my wife, my daughters and the people around me every day. You do not start by preaching to your household. You let them watch God change how you live and own your mistakes. Jesus told the healed man to go home and tell his own people (Mark 5:19).

62. Jesus Calms the Storm

Read it in: Matthew 8:18, 23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25
Where: The Sea of Galilee

They left the crowd and took Jesus along in the boat, just as He was, and other boats went with them. The Sea of Galilee sits about seven hundred feet below sea level, with hills around it. Cool air from the heights can rush down through the valleys and whip the lake into a storm with little warning.

A great windstorm came up, and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was already filling. Several of these men were fishermen who had spent their lives on this lake. If they were afraid, it was bad.

And Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. That one detail tells us how fully human He was. He was worn out from a long day of teaching, and He slept through the storm.

They woke Him and said, "Teacher, does it not concern You that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Be quiet! Be silenced!" The wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Usually after a storm, the waves keep rolling for hours. Not this time.

Then He turned to them. "Why are you so fearful? How ***is it that*** you do not have faith?" (Mark 4:40). And they were filled with a fear greater than their fear of the storm. They said to one another the words at the top of this chapter: who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?

The Old Testament had already answered their question. It is the LORD who stills the roaring of the seas (Psalm 65:7; 89:9). Sailors cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He made the storm still (Psalm 107:28-29).

What it shows: Jesus was fully man, tired enough to sleep in a storm, and fully God, able to stop it with a word. Being in the boat with Jesus does not mean you will never face a storm. It means the storm cannot win.

63. A Man Set Free from a Legion of Demons

Read it in: Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39
Where: The country of the Gerasenes, on the eastern shore

They came to the other side of the lake, to the region of the Gerasenes, mostly Gentile country. As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs to meet Him.

Mark describes him in heartbreaking detail. He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him anymore, not even with chains. He had been chained hand and foot many times, but he tore the chains apart and broke the shackles. Night and day among the tombs and on the hills, he was crying out and cutting himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from far off, he ran and fell down before Him and cried out with a loud voice, asking what Jesus wanted with him, Son of the Most High God, and begging Him not to torment him. Jesus asked, "What is your name?" He answered, "Legion ***is*** my name, because we are many" (Mark 5:9). A Roman legion had several thousand soldiers.

The demons begged Jesus not to send them out of the region. A large herd of pigs, about two thousand, was feeding on the hillside, and the demons begged to be sent into the pigs. Jesus gave them permission. The unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned.

People sometimes ask why Jesus allowed the pigs to be destroyed. One answer is that it showed everyone, including the man himself, that the demons were really gone and how destructive they had been. A man is worth more than a herd of pigs. The demons wanted to destroy whatever they touched. Jesus wanted to save.

The herdsmen ran and told it in the town and the countryside. People came out and found the man sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. They begged Jesus to leave their region. They were more upset about their pigs than glad about the man.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man begged to go with Him. Jesus would not let him. "Go to your house, to your own ***people***, and report to them how much the Lord did for you, and ***how*** He had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). So he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis, the region of ten cities, how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Matthew mentions two men set free here, while Mark and Luke focus on one. As we saw in Before You Begin, a writer who mentions one has not said there was only one. Mark and Luke tell the story of the man who did the talking and stayed behind to tell his town. The place name differs a little in the old copies too, Gerasenes, Gadarenes, or Gergesenes. Gadara was the main city of the district, and a smaller town on the shore may have given the other name.

Outside the Bible: Kursi, on the Eastern Shore (*Background*)

In 1970, road builders on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee uncovered the ruins of a large fifth-century monastery and church at a place called Kursi. It is the only spot on that side of the lake where steep slopes come close to the water, and early Christians believed it was the place where the pigs rushed into the sea. A small chapel was built on the hillside above, near a cave. Whether this is the exact spot cannot be proven, but it fits the Gospel description well.

What it shows: No one is too far gone for Jesus. This man was beyond the help of chains and the reach of his community. One word from Jesus, and he was sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. And Jesus sent him home with an assignment we all share: tell your own people what the Lord has done for you.

64. A Daughter Raised and a Woman Healed

Read it in: Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56
Where: Capernaum, at the house of Jairus

When Jesus crossed back over to the other side, a crowd was waiting. A ruler of the synagogue named Jairus came, fell at His feet, and begged Him to come, because his little daughter, his only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying.

Jesus went with him, and the crowd pressed in all around. In the crowd was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years. She had suffered much under many doctors and spent all she had, and instead of getting better she got worse. Luke, himself a doctor, says more gently that no one could heal her. Under the Law, her condition made her unclean all the time (Leviticus 15:25-27). For twelve years she could not go to the temple, and anyone she touched became unclean too.

She came up behind Jesus in the crowd and touched the edge of His cloak, because she told herself that if she could just touch His clothes, she would be healed. Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed.

Jesus stopped. He knew power had gone out from Him, and He turned and asked who touched His clothes. The disciples thought it was a silly question, with everyone pressing against Him. But He kept looking around. Trembling, the woman came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

> *And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healthy from your affliction."* (Mark 5:34)

He called her "daughter." She had been an outcast for twelve years. Jesus made sure the whole crowd heard that she was clean, she was healed, and she belonged.

While He was still speaking, men came from Jairus' house: "Your daughter died; why do you still trouble the Teacher?" (Mark 5:35). Imagine how Jairus felt during the delay. But Jesus overheard and said to him, "Do not fear; only believe."

He let no one follow Him except Peter, James, and John. At the house, people were weeping and wailing loudly, as was the custom. Jesus said, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child did not

die, but is sleeping" (Mark 5:39). They laughed at Him. They knew dead when they saw it. Jesus meant that for Him, raising her was as easy as waking someone from sleep.

He put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and the three disciples into the room. He took her by the hand and said, "Talitha koumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). Mark keeps the very words Peter must have remembered. Immediately she got up and began to walk, and they were overcome with amazement. And Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

What it shows: Jesus is never too late. The delay that seemed to cost Jairus his daughter only made the miracle greater. And Jesus has time for the person no one else has time for, even when He is on His way to someone important. Twelve years of suffering, and a girl of twelve years. Both were made whole by the same Lord.

65. Two Blind Men and a Mute Man

Read it in: Matthew 9:27-34
Where: Capernaum

Only Matthew tells this event. As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" The title Son of David meant the Messiah. When He went into the house, they came to Him. He asked, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said, "Yes, Lord." He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it come about for you" (Matthew 9:29). Their eyes were opened.

As they went out, a mute man with a demon was brought to Him. When the demon was driven out, the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed and said nothing like this had ever been seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said again that He cast out demons by the ruler of the demons.

What it shows: Blind men saw who Jesus was more clearly than the religious leaders did. They called Him Son of David and asked for mercy. The Pharisees saw the miracle and still refused to believe.

66. A Last Visit to Nazareth

Read it in: Matthew 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6
Where: Nazareth

Jesus went back to His hometown with His disciples. On the Sabbath He taught in the synagogue, and many were amazed. Where did this man get these things? What is this wisdom? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Jude, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him.

Jesus said a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his own house. Mark says He could do no mighty work there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. And He marveled at their unbelief.

Notice that Mark does not say Jesus lost His power. He healed some even there. But He would not force Himself on people who refused Him. The Gospels say Jesus was amazed twice: at the faith of a Roman centurion, and here, at the unbelief of His own town.

What it shows: This was the second time Nazareth had a chance, and they missed it again. It is possible to be so sure you know who Jesus is that you never really see Him.

Study Questions

1. Jesus was asleep in the storm. What storm are you facing, and what does it mean to you that Jesus is in the boat?
2. The people of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave because they lost their pigs. What "pigs" can make people want Jesus to go away?
3. Jesus sent the healed man home to tell his own people. Who are "your own people," and what has the Lord done for you that you could tell them?
4. Jesus stopped for the woman even though Jairus' daughter was dying. What does that tell you about how He sees people others overlook?
5. "Do not fear; only believe." Where do you need to hear those words this week?

Chapter 16: The Twelve Sent Out, and John's Death

> *Then He says to His disciples, "The harvest indeed **is** plentiful, but the workers **are** few; therefore implore the Lord of the harvest that He may send out workers into His harvest."*
>
> Matthew 9:37-38 (SLB)

For about a year, the Twelve had been with Jesus, watching and listening. Now it was time for them to go out on their own. While they were gone, news came that John the Baptist was dead. These two events sit side by side in the Gospels on purpose. They show both the power and the cost of following Jesus.

67. The Twelve Are Sent to Preach

Read it in: Matthew 9:35-11:1; Mark 6:6-13; Luke 9:1-6
Where: Throughout Galilee

Jesus went around all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He told His disciples the words at the top of this chapter. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

Then He made them the answer to their own prayer. He called the Twelve, gave them authority over unclean spirits and to heal every disease, and sent them out two by two.

His instructions were simple. For this first mission, go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Gentiles or Samaritans. Preach that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received freely, so give freely. Take no money, no bag, no extra tunic. Stay with whoever welcomes you. If a town will not listen, shake the dust off your feet as you leave.

Matthew gathers a longer speech here, much of it looking far ahead to the persecution the disciples would face after Jesus was gone. They would be handed over to councils and flogged in synagogues and brought before governors and kings. Brother would betray brother. But do not be afraid. Two sparrows sell for a penny, and not one falls to the ground apart from your Father. Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Whoever confesses Jesus before men, He will confess before His Father in heaven. Whoever loves father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple will not lose his reward.

So they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

What it shows: Jesus does not just do the work Himself. He trains and sends His people. The same compassion that moved Him to heal moves Him to send workers, and He still asks us to pray for more. Following Jesus is costly, but no one who serves Him is ever forgotten by the Father.

68. Herod and the Death of John the Baptist

Read it in: Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9
Where: Machaerus, Herod's fortress east of the Dead Sea

The disciples' mission made Jesus' name known even in the palace of Herod Antipas. Some were saying John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. Others said Elijah had come, or one of the old prophets. Herod had a guilty conscience. He said, "Whom I beheaded, John, this is he; he himself was raised from ***the*** dead!" (Mark 6:16). Luke adds that Herod kept trying to see Jesus.

Then Mark goes back and tells how John died. Herod had arrested John because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom Herod had married. John had kept telling him, "It is not lawful for you to have the wife of your brother" (Mark 6:18). Herodias held a grudge and wanted John dead, but Herod was afraid of him. He knew John was a righteous and holy man and kept him safe. When he heard John, he was greatly troubled, and yet he liked to listen to him.

Then came Herod's birthday banquet for his officials, military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee. The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, and she pleased Herod and his guests. Josephus tells us her name was Salome. Herod, probably with too much wine in him, promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked, up to half his kingdom. She went out and asked her mother what to ask for. Herodias said, "The head of John the Baptist" (Mark 6:24). The girl hurried back and asked for it at once, on a platter.

Herod was deeply sorry. But because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to refuse her. He sent an executioner, who beheaded John in the prison and brought his head on a platter. When John's disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. Matthew adds that they went and told Jesus.

Outside the Bible: Josephus on Herod, Herodias, and John (*Text confirmed*)

Josephus confirms the main facts of Mark's account from a different angle. He says Herod Antipas "fell in love with Herodias," his half-brother's wife, and agreed to divorce his first wife, the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia, to marry her (*Antiquities* 18.5.1). That led to war with Aretas, and Herod's army was destroyed. Josephus says some of the Jews thought "the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist" (*Antiquities* 18.5.2). He names Machaerus as the place John was killed. Josephus gives Herod's political fear of John's influence as the reason, while Mark gives the personal story of the banquet. The two fit together. A ruler can have more than one reason for a crime. Josephus also calls Herodias's first husband Herod, not Philip. Many in that family had more than one name, and "Herod Philip" is a common way of reconciling the two.

What it shows: John was the greatest of the prophets, and he died in a dungeon because a weak king would not break a foolish promise. Faithfulness does not always win in this life. But Herod is remembered as the man who killed John, and John is remembered as the man who pointed the world to Jesus. In the end, God has the last word.

Study Questions

1. Jesus saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd. Who do you see that way? What would it look like to have His compassion for them?
2. Jesus told the disciples to pray for workers, and then sent them out. Could you be the answer to that prayer in your workplace or neighborhood?
3. Matthew 10:29-31 says the Father notices even a sparrow. How does that help you when you are afraid?
4. Herod liked to listen to John but would not change. How is that a danger for people who hear God's Word every week?
5. John died faithful and seemingly defeated. How do you hold on when faithfulness to God costs you something real?

Chapter 17: Bread from Heaven

> *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The **one** coming to Me will certainly not hunger, and the **one** believing in Me will certainly not thirst at any time."*
>
> John 6:35 (SLB)

John tells us the Passover was near (John 6:4). If the crucifixion was in A.D. 33, this was the spring of A.D. 32, one year before the cross. It was the high point of Jesus' popularity in Galilee. In a single day, He fed more than five thousand people, and they tried to make Him king. In the next day or two, He walked on the water and then gave a sermon that turned most of the crowd away.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle besides the resurrection that all four Gospels tell.

I drifted from God more than once, and every time I tried life on my own terms, I came up empty. I kept coming back to one thing: nobody else has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Staying with Jesus is not always easy, but walking away leaves us with nothing.

69. Five Thousand Fed

Read it in: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14
Where: A remote place near Bethsaida, on the northeast shore

The apostles came back from their mission and told Jesus all they had done and taught. So many people were coming and going that they did not even have time to eat. Jesus said, "Come, you yourselves, privately into a deserted place and rest a little" (Mark 6:31). Matthew adds that this was also when Jesus heard that John had been killed. They got into a boat and went to a quiet place near Bethsaida.

But the crowds saw them leave and ran around the shore on foot and got there first. When Jesus stepped out of the boat and saw the great crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Tired and grieving, He did not send them away. He taught them many things and healed their sick.

Late in the day, the disciples told Him to send the people away to buy food in the villages. Jesus said, "You give them ***something*** to eat" (Mark 6:37). John tells us Jesus asked Philip where they could buy bread, to test him, since He already knew what He would do. Philip did the math: two hundred denarii worth of bread, about eight months of wages, would not be enough for each to get a little. Andrew found a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish, but said, "these, what are they for so many?" (John 6:9). Barley bread was the bread of the poor.

Jesus had the people sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties on the green grass. Mark, who got his story from Peter, remembers the grass was green, which fits the spring. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied. The disciples picked up twelve baskets full of leftovers, one for each apostle. The men alone numbered about five thousand, besides women and children.

John tells us what happened next. When the people saw the sign, they said this is truly the Prophet who is coming into the world. Jesus knew they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, so He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself (John 6:14-15). Mark says He made His disciples get into the boat right away and go ahead of Him, while He sent the crowd away. Then He went up on the mountain to pray.

What it shows: Jesus takes the little we bring Him and makes it more than enough. And He would not be made the kind of king the crowd wanted, a king who would fill their stomachs and fight Rome. He came to be a different kind of King, and the road to His throne went through a cross.

70. Jesus Walks on the Water

Read it in: Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21
Where: The Sea of Galilee

That night the disciples were in the middle of the lake, rowing hard against the wind. Jesus was alone on the land, and He saw them straining at the oars. About the fourth watch of the night, between three and six in the morning, He came to them, walking on the sea. They had rowed three or four miles (John 6:19).

When they saw Him, they thought it was a ghost and cried out in fear. Immediately He spoke to them.

> *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage; I am **He**; do not be afraid."*
> (Matthew 14:27)

"I am He" is simply "I am" in Greek, the name God gave Himself at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). Job had said that God alone treads on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8).

Only Matthew tells what Peter did next. Peter said, "Lord, if ***it*** is You, command me to come to You on the waters" (Matthew 14:28). Jesus said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid, and he began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said, "***You*** of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).

When they climbed into the boat, the wind stopped. Those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are ***the*** Son of God" (Matthew 14:33). John adds that immediately the boat reached the land where they were going.

Mark adds a hard line. They were utterly astonished, because they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52). They had seen Him feed five thousand that same day, and still they did not grasp who He was.

What it shows: Jesus sees us straining against the wind, and He comes. Peter's faith was little, but he was the only one who got out of the boat, and when he sank, Jesus caught him. Even little faith in a great Savior is enough to cry out, "Lord, save me."

71. Healings at Gennesaret

Read it in: Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 6:53-56
Where: The plain of Gennesaret

When they crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret, a fertile plain on the northwest shore just south of Capernaum. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran through the whole region and began carrying the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. In villages, cities, and farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak. And as many as touched it were made well.

What it shows: The word had spread from the woman who touched His cloak. Now whole towns came the same way. No one who came to Him in need was turned away.

72. The Bread of Life

Read it in: John 6:22-71
Where: The synagogue at Capernaum

The next day the crowd that had been fed went looking for Jesus and found Him in Capernaum. Jesus told them plainly that they were looking for Him not because they saw signs, but because they ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that spoils, He said, but for the food that lasts to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

They asked for a sign, like the manna Moses gave their fathers in the wilderness. Jesus said it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven. My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. Then He said the words at the top of this chapter: “I am the bread of life.” It is the first of seven great “I am” sayings in John’s Gospel.

- I am the bread of life (John 6:35).
- I am the light of the world (John 8:12).
- I am the door of the sheep (John 10:7).
- I am the good shepherd (John 10:11).
- I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).
- I am the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6).
- I am the true vine (John 15:1).

Jesus went on to say that everyone the Father gives Him will come to Him, and whoever comes to Him He will never cast out. He came down from heaven to do the Father’s will, and the Father’s will is that He lose none of those given to Him, but raise them up on the last day.

Then He said something that shocked them. The bread He would give for the life of the world was His flesh. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Some take this as a direct reference to the Lord’s Supper. But the Supper had not yet been given, and Jesus explains Himself in verse 63: the Spirit gives life, the flesh profits nothing, and His words are spirit and life. To eat His flesh and drink His blood is to take Him in by faith, to trust Him completely, as fully as you take in food. He is speaking of His death on the cross, where He would give His body and blood for the world.

Many of His disciples said, “This word is hard; who is able to hear it?” (John 6:60). From that time many of them turned back and no longer walked with Him. Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “You do not also want to go away, do you?” (John 6:67).

> *Therefore Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (John 6:68-69)

Then Jesus said one of the saddest things in the Gospels. He had chosen the Twelve, and yet one of them was a devil. John explains that He meant Judas Iscariot, who was going to betray Him.

What it shows: The crowd wanted a Jesus who would keep feeding them. When He offered them Himself instead, they left. Peter’s answer is still the right one. Where else would we go? No one else has the words of eternal life.

Study Questions

1. The disciples saw five loaves and two fish and said, “these, what are they for so many?” What small thing do you have that you could put in Jesus’ hands?
2. Why do you think Jesus refused to let the crowd make Him king?
3. Peter got out of the boat, sank, and was caught. Which part of that story do you relate to most right now?
4. Jesus said the crowd came for the loaves, not for Him. How can we tell if we are seeking Jesus for Himself or only for what He gives?
5. When many left, Peter said, “Lord, to whom will we go?” Has there been a time when you were tempted to walk away? What kept you?

Part Five: Training the Twelve

Chapter 18: Clean Hands and a Clean Heart

> *There is nothing outside the man entering into him that is able to defile him; but the **things** going out from him, those are the **things** defiling the man.*
>
> Mark 7:15 (SLB)

After the Bread of Life sermon, the crowds in Galilee thinned. The leaders in Jerusalem were plotting His death, and Herod Antipas had just killed John. For the next six months or so, Jesus spent much of His time away from the big crowds, often outside Galilee, in Gentile lands to the north and east. He was training the Twelve for what was coming.

Many teachers call this the period of withdrawals. Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon on the coast, to the Decapolis east of the lake, and up to Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon.

73. Tradition or the Command of God

Read it in: Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; John 7:1
Where: Galilee, likely Capernaum

Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem and noticed that some of Jesus' disciples ate with unwashed hands. This was not about germs. It was a religious washing ritual handed down by the elders, not written in the Law of Moses. Mark explains for his Gentile readers that the Pharisees would not eat unless they washed their hands a certain way, and they had many other traditions about washing cups, pots, and copper vessels.

They asked why His disciples did not walk according to the tradition of the elders. Jesus answered with Isaiah 29:13: this people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

He gave them an example. God's Law says honor your father and mother. But the Pharisees had a rule that if a man declared his money "Corban," meaning a gift devoted to God, he no longer had to use it to support his parents. In that way, He said, you make void the word of God by your tradition.

Then He called the crowd and gave them the words at the top of this chapter. Nothing outside a person can make him unclean by going into him. It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. Later the disciples asked what He meant. Food goes into the stomach and passes out of the body, He said. Mark 7:19 ends with the words "cleansing all the foods," which most readers take as Mark's own note that in saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. It is what comes out of the heart that defiles a person: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

John notes that during this time Jesus stayed in Galilee and did not want to go about in Judea, because the leaders there were seeking to kill Him (John 7:1).

What it shows: Religion can keep the outside of the cup clean while the inside is filthy. Jesus goes straight to the heart, because that is where the problem is. Washing your hands will never wash your heart. Only He can do that.

74. The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

Read it in: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30
Where: The region of Tyre and Sidon

Jesus went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon, on the Mediterranean coast, in what is now Lebanon. He went into a house and did not want anyone to know, but He could not be hidden.

A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him and came and fell at His feet. Mark says she was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth. Matthew calls her a Canaanite woman, using the old name for Israel's ancient enemies. She cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is badly demonized" (Matthew 15:22).

At first Jesus did not answer her a word. The disciples asked Him to send her away, because she kept shouting after them. Jesus said He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and knelt before Him and said, "Lord, help me!"

Then Jesus said it was not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. It sounds harsh to us. But Jesus used the word for small house dogs, family pets, not the wild dogs of the street. And He was testing her, drawing her faith out into the open.

She did not take offense. She took Him at His word and turned it into a plea. "Yes, Lord; for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs falling from the table of their masters" (Matthew 15:27). Even a crumb from Your table is enough for me.

> *Then answering, Jesus said to her, "O woman, great **is** your faith! Let it be to you as you desire."*
> *And her daughter was healed from that hour.* (Matthew 15:28)

When she went home, she found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

What it shows: Jesus came first to Israel, but He never meant to stop there. This Gentile woman had a faith that would not take no for an answer, and Jesus praised it. Sometimes God's silence is not a refusal. It is an invitation to keep asking.

75. A Deaf Man Healed and Many Others

Read it in: Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37
Where: The Decapolis, east of the Sea of Galilee

Jesus went back by way of Sidon and came around to the Sea of Galilee into the region of the Decapolis. This was the same area where the man set free from Legion had been telling everyone what Jesus had done for him. Now the people were ready.

They brought Him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak. Jesus took him aside from the crowd, privately. He put His fingers into his ears, spat and touched his tongue. A deaf man cannot hear an

explanation, so Jesus used touch to show him what He was about to do. Then He looked up to heaven, sighed, and said, “Ephphatha,” which means, “Be opened” (Mark 7:34). Mark again keeps the Aramaic word. The man’s ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Matthew adds that great crowds came, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at His feet, and He healed them. The crowd was amazed and glorified the God of Israel. That phrase is a clue that many of these people were Gentiles.

What it shows: Jesus treated this man with great care, privately and personally, in a way he could understand. He meets each of us where we are. And His sigh shows us that He feels the brokenness of this world.

76. Four Thousand Fed

Read it in: Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10
Where: The Decapolis, east of the Sea of Galilee

Again a great crowd had gathered, and they had been with Jesus three days with nothing to eat. He told the disciples He had compassion on them. If He sent them home hungry, they would faint on the way, and some had come a long way.

The disciples asked where anyone could get enough bread in this desolate place. It is remarkable that after the five thousand they did not think of it. Jesus asked how many loaves they had. Seven, and a few small fish. He had the crowd sit on the ground, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples to serve. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftovers. About four thousand men were there, besides women and children.

Some think this is the feeding of the five thousand told twice. But the numbers, the place, the time, and the people are different, and Jesus Himself later speaks of the two feedings as two separate events (Mark 8:19-20). The first fed mostly Jewish crowds in Galilee. This one fed mostly Gentile crowds in the Decapolis. Even the word for basket is different. The second is the large basket used for carrying supplies, the same kind of basket used to lower Paul over the wall at Damascus (Acts 9:25).

What it shows: The Bread of Life is for the Gentiles too. And the disciples’ forgetfulness is a mirror for us. We have seen God provide before, and still we panic when the cupboard looks empty.

77. A Sign Refused, and a Warning About Leaven

Read it in: Matthew 16:1-12; Mark 8:11-21
Where: Magadan and across the lake

Jesus crossed to the region of Magadan, also called Dalmanutha, on the western shore. The Pharisees and Sadducees came out to test Him and asked Him for a sign from heaven. Jesus sighed deeply in His spirit. You know how to read the sky, He said, red in the evening means fair weather and red in the morning means a storm, but you cannot read the signs of the times. Again He said no sign would be given except the sign of Jonah.

He got back in the boat and crossed to the other side. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf. Jesus warned them, “Watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” (Mark 8:15). They thought He was scolding them for forgetting lunch.

Jesus asked them a string of questions. Do you still not understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets did you pick up? Twelve. And the seven for the four thousand? Seven. Do you not yet understand? Then they understood that He meant the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which spreads quietly through a whole life like yeast through dough.

What it shows: The disciples worried about bread while the Bread of Life sat in the boat with them. False teaching and unbelief spread the same way leaven does, quietly and through everything. Remembering what Jesus has already done is the cure for both.

78. A Blind Man Healed in Two Stages

Read it in: Mark 8:22-26
Where: Bethsaida

Only Mark tells this miracle. At Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village. He spat on his eyes, laid His hands on him, and asked if he saw anything. The man looked up and said, “I see the men like trees, walking” (Mark 8:24). Jesus laid His hands on his eyes again, and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly.

This is the only healing in the Gospels that happens in two steps. It was not because Jesus’ power ran low. It may have been a lesson for the disciples, who had just been asked if they had eyes that do not see. They were seeing Jesus partly, like men walking as trees. In the very next scene, Peter will see clearly that Jesus is the Christ, and then show he still does not see what kind of Christ He is.

What it shows: Sometimes God opens our eyes a little at a time. If you see Jesus only dimly today, do not give up. He is not finished with you.

Study Questions

1. Jesus said what defiles a person comes from inside. Why is it easier to focus on outward rules than on the heart?
2. The Pharisees used a religious rule to get out of caring for their parents. How can people use religion to avoid real love?
3. The Canaanite woman kept asking even when Jesus was silent. What does her example teach you about prayer?
4. The disciples forgot the feeding of the five thousand when the four thousand needed food. What has God done for you in the past that you need to remember today?
5. The blind man at Bethsaida saw in two stages. Where in your life are you still seeing “men like trees, walking”?

Chapter 19: “Who Do You Say That I Am?”

> *And Simon Peter, answering, said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
>
> Matthew 16:16 (SLB)

This chapter is the turning point of the Gospels. Up to now, the big question has been, who is Jesus? At Caesarea Philippi, Peter answers it. From that moment on, Jesus begins to teach the Twelve the second big lesson: what kind of Messiah He is, and where He is going. He is going to Jerusalem to die.

Mark marks the turn with the words “He began to teach them” (Mark 8:31). Matthew says, “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples” (Matthew 16:21). From here on, the shadow of the cross falls over every page.

79. Peter Confesses That Jesus Is the Christ

Read it in: Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21
Where: The villages near Caesarea Philippi

Jesus took His disciples about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Caesarea Philippi. It was a pagan place. At the base of a great cliff was a cave and a spring that fed the Jordan River, and there stood shrines to the Greek god Pan and a temple Herod the Great had built in honor of Caesar Augustus. Against that backdrop of false gods and an emperor who called himself divine, Jesus asked His question.

Luke tells us He had been praying alone with His disciples nearby. Then He asked, “Who do men say Me, the Son of Man, to be?” (Matthew 16:13). They told Him: some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Everyone agreed He was a great man. Then He made it personal.

> *He says to them, “But you, who do you say Me to be?” And Simon Peter, answering, said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:15-16)

Jesus told Peter he was blessed, because flesh and blood had not revealed this to him, but His Father in heaven. Then He said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and ***the*** gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

This verse has been argued over for centuries. In Greek, Peter’s name is *Petros*, and “rock” is *petra*. Some say the rock is Peter himself, the first to confess Christ and the leader of the apostles in the early church. Others say the rock is Peter’s confession, the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Others say it is Christ Himself, the true foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). What everyone should agree on is that Peter was the first of the apostles to preach to Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and to Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), and that the church stands on the truth he confessed. Nothing in the passage says anything about successors.

Jesus also gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, a picture of opening the door. Two chapters later He gave the same authority to bind and loose to all the disciples (Matthew 18:18). Then He strictly ordered them

to tell no one that He was the Christ. The people's idea of the Messiah was a warrior king. Until they understood the cross, the title would only be misunderstood.

What it shows: It is not enough to know what other people say about Jesus. Every person has to answer His question for himself: who do you say that I am? Your answer to that question decides everything else.

80. Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Read it in: Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-9:1; Luke 9:22-27
Where: Near Caesarea Philippi

From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and on the third day be raised. Mark says He spoke about it plainly.

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "***God be*** merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means be to You" (Matthew 16:22). In Peter's mind, the Messiah could not die. Messiahs win.

Jesus turned, looked at His disciples, and rebuked Peter. "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not minding the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23). A few minutes earlier, Peter had spoken by revelation from the Father. Now he was speaking the same lie Satan had offered in the wilderness: a crown without a cross.

Then Jesus called the crowd with the disciples and told them what it means to follow Him.

> *And having called the crowd to **Him** with His disciples, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life on account of Me and the gospel, this **one** will save it."* (Mark 8:34-35)

A cross in that day meant one thing: death. A man carrying a cross was walking to his execution and would not be coming back. To take up your cross is to die to your own way and follow Jesus wherever He leads. What good is it to gain the whole world and lose your soul?

He finished with a promise: some of those standing there would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. The next event explains what He meant.

What it shows: The way of Jesus is the way of the cross, for Him and for us. Peter wanted the glory without the suffering. Jesus says the road to glory goes through the cross.

81. The Transfiguration

Read it in: Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36
Where: A high mountain, likely Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain by themselves. Luke says about eight days, counting the first and last days; Matthew and Mark count the days in between. Tradition names Mount Tabor in Galilee, but Mount Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi and over nine thousand feet high, fits better.

Luke tells us Jesus went up to pray. As He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became dazzling white. Mark says whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. For a moment, the glory He had with the Father before the world began shone through (John 17:5).

Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Him. Moses stood for the Law, Elijah for the Prophets, and both bore witness to Him. Luke tells us what they talked about: His departure, which He was about to complete at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). The word Luke uses is *exodos*, exodus. Jesus was about to lead the greatest exodus of all, not out of Egypt, but out of sin and death.

Peter, not knowing what to say, offered to build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud.

> *While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and look, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased; listen to Him."*
> (Matthew 17:5)

The disciples fell on their faces, terrified. Jesus came and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid" (Matthew 17:7). When they looked up, they saw no one but Jesus only.

The Father's words corrected Peter. Jesus is not one great teacher among three. Moses and Elijah were servants. Jesus is the Son. Listen to Him.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus told them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man was raised from the dead. They asked about the teaching that Elijah must come first. Jesus said Elijah had already come, and they did to him whatever they wished. Then they understood He was speaking of John the Baptist.

Peter never forgot this night. Over thirty years later he wrote that he had been an eyewitness of His majesty when that voice came from the Majestic Glory, and he and the others heard it when they were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).

What it shows: Just after Jesus told them He would suffer, He let three of them see His glory. The cross was not the end of His story. Glory was on the other side. And the command is still the same: listen to Him.

82. A Boy Set Free When the Disciples Could Not Help

Read it in: Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43
Where: At the foot of the mountain

When they came down, a crowd was arguing with the other disciples. A father had brought his son, his only son, who had a spirit that threw him into fits, made him unable to speak, and threw him into fire and water to destroy him. The disciples had tried to drive it out and could not.

The father said to Jesus, "if You are able ***to do*** anything, help us, having compassion on us" (Mark 9:22). Jesus turned the question back on him: "If you are able to believe, all things ***are*** possible to the ***one*** believing" (Mark 9:23). The father's reply, with tears, is one of the most honest prayers in the Bible: "I believe, Lord; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and commanded it to come out and never enter him again. The spirit cried out, threw the boy into terrible convulsions, and came out. The boy lay so still that many said he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he stood. Luke says Jesus gave him back to his father, and all were astonished at the majesty of God.

Later the disciples asked privately why they could not drive it out. Jesus told them it was because of their little faith. If they had faith like a mustard seed, they could say to this mountain, move, and it would move. In Mark He said this kind could come out only by prayer. Some copies add "and fasting," but those words are missing from the oldest copies of Mark.

What it shows: The disciples had driven out demons before, and maybe they had started trusting their own experience instead of God. Real power comes from depending on God in prayer. And Jesus accepts even weak faith that cries out to Him: I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.

83. Jesus Again Foretells His Death

Read it in: Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45
Where: Passing through Galilee

They went on through Galilee, and Jesus did not want anyone to know, because He was teaching His disciples. He told them again: the Son of Man is going to be handed over into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised. Matthew says they were deeply grieved. Mark and Luke say they did not understand and were afraid to ask Him.

What it shows: Jesus kept telling them, plainly and more than once. They did not want to hear it. Sometimes we do not understand God's plan because we do not want it to be true.

84. The Coin in the Fish's Mouth

Read it in: Matthew 17:24-27
Where: Capernaum

Back in Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and asked if his teacher paid it. Every Jewish man paid a half-shekel each year for the upkeep of the temple (Exodus 30:13-16). Peter said yes.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus spoke first. Do kings collect taxes from their own sons, or from others? From others, Peter said. Then the sons are free, Jesus said. The temple was His Father's house. He did not owe tax on it. But so as not to cause offense, He told Peter to go to the lake, throw in a hook, and take the first fish that came up. In its mouth he would find a coin, a stater, worth exactly enough to pay the tax for two. "Having taken that, give ***it*** to them for Me and you" (Matthew 17:27).

What it shows: Jesus had every right to refuse, but He gave up His rights to avoid needless offense. And He provided for Peter too. He takes care of His own, sometimes in ways we would never expect.

85. Who Is the Greatest?

Read it in: Matthew 18:1-35; Mark 9:33-50; Luke 9:46-50
Where: A house in Capernaum

On the road, the disciples had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. Right after Jesus told them He was going to die. When they got to the house, He asked what they had been discussing. They were silent.

Jesus sat down, called the Twelve, and said that if anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. He took a little child, stood him in the middle of them, and took him in His arms. Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest. Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me.

John spoke up. They had seen a man driving out demons in Jesus' name and had told him to stop, because he was not one of them. Jesus said do not stop him. The one who is not against us is for us.

Then Jesus gave some of His most serious warnings. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Him to stumble, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be thrown into the sea. If your hand or foot or eye causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better to enter life maimed than to be thrown into hell. He was not commanding self-injury. He was saying deal with sin ruthlessly, whatever it costs.

Matthew gathers more of Jesus' teaching from this time. The Father is like a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. If your brother sins against you, go to him alone first, then with one or two others, then to the church. Where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there among them.

Peter asked how often he should forgive his brother. As many as seven times? The rabbis taught three. Peter thought he was being generous. Jesus said, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). Then He told about a servant who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents, more than he could earn in many lifetimes, and then went out and choked a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii, a few months of wages. The king threw the unforgiving servant into prison. So also My heavenly Father will do to you, Jesus said, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

What it shows: Greatness in God's kingdom looks like a child and a servant, not a boss. And people who have been forgiven an impossible debt by God have no right to hold small debts against each other.

Study Questions

1. Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" How would you answer Him today, in your own words?
2. Peter went from speaking for God to speaking for Satan in a few minutes. What does that teach you about how quickly we can drift from God's way of thinking?
3. What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross? What is one specific way that applies to you this week?
4. "I believe, Lord; help my unbelief." When have you prayed that kind of prayer?

5. Jesus said to forgive seventy times seven. Is there someone you are keeping score on? What would it take to forgive them from your heart?

Part Six: The Later Ministry in Judea and Perea

Chapter 20: The Feast of Tabernacles

> *Therefore again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. The **one** following Me will certainly not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."*
>
> John 8:12 (SLB)

About six months before the cross, in the fall, Jesus left Galilee for good. Luke marks the moment with a solemn line: when the days were coming near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). The rest of His ministry would be spent in Judea and in Perea, the region across the Jordan, with trips in and out of Jerusalem for the feasts.

The first stop was the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths. For a week every fall, Jewish families lived in shelters made of branches to remember how God cared for Israel in the wilderness. Two ceremonies stood out. Each morning a priest carried water from the Pool of Siloam up to the temple and poured it out at the altar, recalling the water from the rock. And at night, great lamps were lit in the temple courts, lighting up the city, recalling the pillar of fire. Jesus used both pictures to tell the crowd who He was.

After a hiking accident in 2014 and four major surgeries, I used alcohol to mask the pain while keeping up a successful front at work. It never satisfied. On May 29, 2020, I started recovery and leaned on Christ, and found what I had been chasing. Jesus promised living water to anyone who is thirsty and comes to Him (John 7:37-39).

86. His Brothers Taunt Him

Read it in: John 7:2-9
Where: Galilee

As the feast drew near, Jesus' brothers told Him to go to Judea so His disciples there could see His works. No one works in secret if he wants to be known, they said. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. John adds a painful note: not even His brothers believed in Him (John 7:5).

Jesus said His time had not yet come, but their time was always ready. The world could not hate them, but it hated Him, because He testified that its works were evil. Go up to the feast yourselves, He said. I am not going up to this feast yet, because My time has not yet been fulfilled.

What it shows: Jesus would not be pushed into the spotlight on someone else's schedule, even His family's. He lived by His Father's timing. And the brothers who mocked Him here would believe after the resurrection (Acts 1:14). Do not give up on the people in your family who do not believe yet.

87. The Journey South and the Cost of Following

Read it in: Matthew 8:19-22; Luke 9:51-62; John 7:10
Where: Through Samaria toward Jerusalem

After His brothers left, Jesus went up too, not publicly, but as it were in secret. Luke tells of the journey. He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to make preparations, but the people would not welcome Him, because His face was set toward Jerusalem. The old hatred between Jews and Samaritans ran deep.

James and John, the Sons of Thunder, asked, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elijah also did?” (Luke 9:54). Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

As they walked, several people offered to follow Him. One said, “I will follow You wherever You go, Lord” (Luke 9:57). Jesus told him foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Another said, let me first go and bury my father. Jesus said, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but you, having gone, declare the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). The man’s father was probably not dead yet. He was saying, let me wait until my family obligations are over. Another said, let me first say goodbye to those at home. Jesus said no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

Matthew places two of these sayings earlier, before the storm on the lake. Jesus may well have said such things more than once. Luke gathers them here, where the road to the cross begins.

What it shows: Following Jesus is not something you fit in around everything else. He comes first. And His disciples had to learn that He came to save people, not to burn them up, even people who rejected Him.

88. Teaching at the Feast

Read it in: John 7:11-52
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

At the feast, the Jewish leaders were looking for Him and asking, where is He? The crowds were whispering. Some said He was a good man. Others said no, He leads the people astray. But no one spoke openly for fear of the leaders.

About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching. The leaders marveled that He knew so much without having studied with the rabbis. He said His teaching was not His own, but from the One who sent Him. Anyone who is willing to do God’s will, He said, will know whether the teaching is from God (John 7:17). He also defended healing the man at Bethesda on the Sabbath a year or more before. You circumcise a boy on the Sabbath, He said. Why are you angry with Me for making a whole man well on the Sabbath?

People argued about Him. Some said the rulers must know He is the Christ. Others said when the Christ comes, no one will know where He is from, but we know where this man is from. The chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest Him.

Then on the last day, the great day of the feast, after a week of watching water poured out at the altar, Jesus stood up and cried out.

> *Now on the last day, the great **day** of the feast, Jesus was standing, and He cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. The **one** believing in Me, even as the Scripture said, 'Rivers of living water will flow out of his belly.'"* (John 7:37-38)

John explains that He was speaking about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The crowd was divided. Some said this is the Prophet. Others said this is the Christ. Others asked, does the Christ come from Galilee? Does Scripture not say the Christ comes from the line of David and from Bethlehem? They did not know He had been born in Bethlehem.

The officers came back without Him. The leaders asked why they had not brought Him. Their answer: "Never did a man speak like this, as this man ***speaks***" (John 7:46). Then Nicodemus spoke up in the council. Does our Law judge a man without first hearing him? They mocked him: are you from Galilee too?

What it shows: Jesus offers living water to anyone who is thirsty. The only requirement is to come and drink. The officers sent to arrest Him were arrested by His words instead.

89. The Woman Caught in Adultery

Read it in: John 7:53-8:11
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

This story is one of the best loved in the Gospels, but it is missing from the oldest copies of John we have, and in some later copies it appears in other places, even in Luke. Many scholars believe it is a true story about Jesus that was passed down and later placed here. The SLB prints it, and so do I. I include it with that note so you know, and nothing in this book depends on it alone.

Early in the morning Jesus came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery and set her in the middle. They said the Law of Moses commanded such women to be stoned. What do You say? It was a trap. If He said let her go, He broke the Law of Moses. If He said stone her, He broke Roman law, which did not allow the Jews to carry out executions, and He would lose His name as a friend of sinners. And where was the man? The Law said both were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:10).

Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with His finger. When they kept asking, He stood up and said, "The sinless ***one*** among you, let him first cast the stone at her" (John 8:7). And He bent down again and wrote. One by one, beginning with the oldest, they went away, until Jesus was left alone with the woman.

He asked her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more" (John 8:10-11).

What it shows: Jesus was the only one there without sin, the only one who had the right to throw a stone. He chose not to. But He did not tell her that sin did not matter. Mercy and holiness go together: neither do I condemn you, and sin no more.

90. The Light of the World

Read it in: John 8:12-59
Where: The temple treasury in Jerusalem

In the court of the women, where the great lamps of the feast had burned, Jesus spoke again, with the words at the top of this chapter. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

What followed was one of the sharpest arguments in the Gospels. Jesus told the leaders, "you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am ***He***, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). To the Jews who had believed in Him, He said, "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

They said they were Abraham's children and had never been slaves to anyone. Jesus said everyone who sins is a slave to sin, and if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. You say Abraham is your father, but you are trying to kill Me, and Abraham did not do that. You are of your father the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies.

They said He had a demon. Jesus said if anyone keeps His word, he will never see death. They said Abraham died, and the prophets died. Are You greater than Abraham? Jesus said Abraham rejoiced to see His day. They said You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham? Then Jesus said the words that ended the argument.

> *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came into being, I am."*
> (John 8:58)

He did not say, before Abraham came into being, I was. He said "I am," the name God gave Himself at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The leaders understood exactly what He meant. They picked up stones to throw at Him, because by their reckoning He had just claimed to be God. But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

What it shows: Jesus did not claim to be a good teacher or a prophet only. He claimed to be the eternal God, the great I AM. That leaves us only a few choices. He was a liar, He was out of His mind, or He is who He said He is.

Study Questions

1. Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him at this time. How does it encourage you that they later did?
2. Jesus said no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom. What might you be tempted to look back to?
3. What does Jesus mean by "living water"? How have you seen the Holy Spirit satisfy a thirst nothing else could?

4. In the story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said both “neither do I condemn you” and “sin no more.” Why do we need to hear both?

5. Jesus said, “before Abraham came into being, I am.” Why did the leaders want to stone Him for that? What does that claim mean for you?

Chapter 21: The Seventy and the Good Samaritan

> *Then He was saying to them, "The harvest **is** indeed plentiful, but the workers **are** few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest that He send out workers into His harvest."*
>
> Luke 10:2 (SLB)

Between the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall and the Feast of Dedication in the winter, Jesus spent about two months in Judea. Most of what we know about this time comes from Luke alone. Luke chapters 10 through 13 are full of stories found nowhere else: the Good Samaritan, Martha and Mary, the rich fool, and more. Luke does not always say exactly where or when each one happened, so the order here follows his.

91. The Seventy Sent Ahead

Read it in: Luke 10:1-24
Where: Judea

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of Him into every town and place where He Himself was about to go. Some old copies say seventy-two. His instructions were much like the ones He gave the Twelve. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Go like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag. Heal the sick and say the kingdom of God has come near to you.

The seventy came back with joy. "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!" (Luke 10:17). Jesus said He saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. But He gave them a better reason to rejoice: "do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice that your names were written in the heavens" (Luke 10:20).

Then Jesus Himself rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and thanked the Father for revealing these things to little children. He turned to His disciples and told them privately that many prophets and kings had wanted to see what they were seeing and did not see it.

What it shows: Jesus used far more than twelve people. Ordinary disciples whose names we do not even know were sent to prepare the way for Him. And the greatest joy is not what God does through us. It is that He knows us and has written our names in heaven.

92. The Good Samaritan

Read it in: Luke 10:25-37
Where: Judea

An expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher, having done what will I inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Jesus asked what was written in the Law. The man gave a good answer: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, you have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.

But the man wanted to justify himself, so he asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). He wanted a limit. Surely not everyone.

Jesus told a story. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. That road dropped about three thousand feet in seventeen miles through rocky desert, and it was known for robbers. The man was beaten, stripped, and left half dead. A priest came by, saw him, and passed by on the other side. So did a Levite, a temple worker. Then a Samaritan came by, the last person a Jewish listener would expect to be the hero. He saw the man and had compassion. He bandaged his wounds, poured on oil and wine, put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and paid for his care, two days’ wages, with a promise to pay more when he came back.

Then Jesus turned the question around. Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man? The expert could not even bring himself to say “the Samaritan.” He said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Jesus said, “Go, and you do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

What it shows: The question is not, who is my neighbor? The question is, will I be a neighbor? Love does not look for limits. And many have seen Jesus Himself in the Samaritan: the despised outsider who found us beaten and dying by the road, paid the cost of our healing, and promised to come back.

93. Martha and Mary

Read it in: Luke 10:38-42
Where: Bethany, near Jerusalem

As they went on their way, Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. John tells us the village was Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, and that Martha had a sister named Mary and a brother named Lazarus (John 11:1). Their home seems to have been a place Jesus loved to stay.

Mary sat at the Lord’s feet listening to His teaching, the way a disciple sits before a rabbi. Martha was distracted with all the preparations. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, does it not concern You that my sister has left me alone to serve? Tell her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40).

> *And answering, Jesus said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but there is need of one **thing**; and Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”* (Luke 10:41-42)

Jesus was not scolding Martha for serving. Serving is good, and He would soon praise it. He was gently telling her that she was letting the work crowd out the most important thing, which was being with Him.

What it shows: It is possible to be so busy serving Jesus that you never sit with Him. The one thing that is needed is to sit at His feet and listen. Everything else flows from that.

94. Teach Us to Pray

Read it in: Luke 11:1-13
Where: Judea

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). They had watched Him pray. They wanted what He had.

He gave them a short form of the prayer He had taught in the Sermon on the Mount: Father, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, give us each day our daily bread, forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone in debt to us, and lead us not into temptation.

Then He told a story about a man who knocked on his friend’s door at midnight to borrow three loaves for an unexpected guest. The friend said go away, the door is shut, my children are in bed. But because of the man’s shameless persistence, he got up and gave him what he needed. So ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened. If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

What it shows: God is not the grumpy neighbor. The point is the contrast. If even a sleepy friend will get up for persistence, how much more will a loving Father answer His children? Keep asking.

95. More Conflict with the Pharisees

Read it in: Luke 11:14-54
Where: Judea

Jesus drove out a demon from a man who could not speak, and again some accused Him of doing it by Beelzebul. He answered much as He had in Galilee. When a woman in the crowd called out, blessed is the womb that bore You, He said, “Rather, blessed ***are*** those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28).

A Pharisee invited Him to eat and was surprised He did not wash first. Jesus told him the Pharisees clean the outside of the cup but inside are full of greed and wickedness. He pronounced a series of woes. Woe to you, you tithe even your garden herbs but neglect justice and the love of God. Woe to you, you love the best seats. Woe to you, experts in the Law, you load people with burdens hard to carry and do not lift a finger to help. You build tombs for the prophets your fathers killed.

When He left, the scribes and Pharisees began to press Him hard and to lie in wait for Him, to catch Him in something He said.

What it shows: Jesus does not grade on outward performance. He looks at the heart. The same warnings apply to anyone who is careful about small religious duties and careless about justice and love.

96. Warnings to Be Ready

Read it in: Luke 12:1-59
Where: Judea

Crowds of thousands gathered, so many that they were trampling one another. Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Do not fear those who can kill the body. Fear Him who has authority to cast into hell. And do not be afraid, because you are worth more than many sparrows.

A man in the crowd asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him. Jesus refused to be his judge and warned the crowd to guard against every kind of greed, because life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Then He told of a rich man whose land produced so much that he planned to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, and then take it easy, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, “Fool! This night they are demanding your soul from you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20). So it is with anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

He told His disciples again not to worry, as He had in the Sermon on the Mount. “Do not fear, little flock, because your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

Then He told them to be ready, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast, with their lamps burning, or like a homeowner who would have stayed awake if he had known when the thief was coming. “You also therefore be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40). To whom much is given, much will be required.

What it shows: Life is short, and stuff does not last. The wise person lives ready for the day he meets God, whether that day comes through death or through the return of Christ. Either way, it may come sooner than we think.

97. Repent or Perish

Read it in: Luke 13:1-21
Where: Judea

Some people told Jesus about Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. We know nothing more about this event, but it fits what history tells us of Pilate. Jesus asked, do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this? No. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or the eighteen killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse sinners than everyone else in Jerusalem? No. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Then He told of a fig tree that had borne no fruit for three years. The owner said cut it down. The vinedresser said give it one more year, and I will dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit, good. If not, cut it down. Jesus had been preaching for about three years, and Israel was still not bearing fruit. The time of mercy was running out.

On a Sabbath, in a synagogue, Jesus saw a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years and could not straighten up at all. He called her over and said, “Woman, you have been released from your infirmity” (Luke 13:12). He laid His hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and glorified God. The synagogue ruler was angry and told the crowd there were six days for healing. Jesus called him a hypocrite. You untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath to lead it to water. Should not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be set free on the Sabbath day? His opponents were put to shame, and the crowd rejoiced.

What it shows: When disaster strikes, the question is not, what did they do to deserve it? The question is, am I ready? And Jesus’ Sabbath healing shows the true heart of the day of rest: freedom for those Satan has bound.

Study Questions

1. Jesus told the seventy to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. Why is that a better joy than success in ministry?
2. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, who is the hardest person for you to treat as a neighbor? What would it look like to go and do likewise?
3. Are you more like Martha or Mary? What would it take for you to choose “the good portion” this week?
4. Jesus told the rich fool he was not “rich toward God.” What does it look like to be rich toward God?
5. When we hear about a disaster, Jesus says to ask, am I ready? How would you answer that question today?

Chapter 22: The Good Shepherd

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:11 (SLB)

John picks up the story again in Jerusalem. Somewhere between the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall and the Feast of Dedication in December, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. The healing set off a fight with the Pharisees, and Jesus answered with one of the most tender pictures of Himself in the Bible: the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

98. A Man Born Blind Receives His Sight

Read it in: John 9:1-41
Where: Jerusalem, at the Pool of Siloam

As Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this ***man*** or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (John 9:2). Many people then believed that every suffering was punishment for a specific sin.

Jesus said neither. This happened so that the works of God might be shown in him. Then He said, "While I am in the world, I am ***the*** light of the world" (John 9:5).

He spat on the ground, made mud with His saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then He told him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). John adds that Siloam means "Sent." The man went, washed, and came back seeing.

Outside the Bible: The Pool of Siloam (*Background*)

In 2004, workers repairing a sewer line in Jerusalem uncovered stone steps leading down into a large pool from the time of Jesus, a short distance from a smaller pool long shown to visitors. Archaeologists Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron identified it as the Pool of Siloam of the first century. Coins found in the plaster dated its use to the late Second Temple period, and it was buried when the city was destroyed in A.D. 70. Its water came through the tunnel King Hezekiah cut through solid rock about seven hundred years earlier (2 Kings 20:20). John knew the place well.

His neighbors could hardly believe it was the same man. He kept saying, "I am ***he***." They brought him to the Pharisees, and it turned out it was a Sabbath. Some of the Pharisees said this man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath. Others said how can a sinner do such signs? They were divided.

They questioned his parents, who said yes, this is our son, and yes, he was born blind, but we do not know how he sees. Ask him. He is of age. They were afraid, because the leaders had agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ would be put out of the synagogue.

They called the man back a second time and told him to give glory to God, because we know this man is a sinner. His answer is one of the great testimonies of the Bible.

> *Then he answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one **thing** I know, that being blind, now I see."* (John 9:25)

When they kept pressing him, he got bolder. Do you want to become His disciples too? They insulted him and said we are disciples of Moses. We do not know where this man is from. The man said, this is amazing. You do not know where He is from, and He opened my eyes. Since the world began, no one has ever heard of anyone opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing. They answered, you were born entirely in sins, and you are teaching us? And they threw him out.

Jesus heard they had thrown him out, and He went and found him. He asked, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man asked who He was, so that he could believe. Jesus said, "You have both seen Him, and the ***One*** speaking with you is He" (John 9:37). The man said, "I believe, Lord," and he worshiped Him.

What it shows: The blind man saw more and more clearly as the chapter went on. First he called Jesus a man called Jesus, then a prophet, then one from God, and finally he worshiped Him as Lord. The Pharisees, who thought they saw everything, grew more and more blind. You do not need to answer every question to testify. You only need to say what Jesus has done: I was blind, and now I see.

99. The Good Shepherd

Read it in: John 10:1-21
Where: Jerusalem

Jesus went right on speaking to the same Pharisees who had thrown the man out. They were supposed to be shepherds of Israel, and they had just cast out one of the sheep. So Jesus told them what a true shepherd is like.

In those days, several flocks were often kept together at night in a walled sheepfold with one door. In the morning, each shepherd would come and call, and his own sheep would recognize his voice and follow him out. Jesus said the sheep hear the voice of the true shepherd, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. They will not follow a stranger.

Then He said, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). In the open country, a shepherd would sometimes lie down across the opening of a rough stone pen at night, so that nothing could get in or out without going past him. Jesus is the only way in. Whoever enters through Him will be saved.

And then: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. A hired hand runs when he sees the wolf coming, because he does not care about the sheep. But Jesus knows His own, and His own know Him. He has other sheep that are not of this fold, the Gentiles, and He must bring them too, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

> *Because of this the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life, so that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down from Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I received from My Father.* (John 10:17-18)

No one would take His life from Him. He would give it. And He would take it up again.

Once again the crowd was divided. Many said He has a demon and is out of His mind. Others said these are not the words of a man with a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

What it shows: Jesus is not a hired hand who runs when trouble comes. He laid down His life on purpose, for His sheep, and took it up again. If you belong to Him, He knows you by name, and you can learn to recognize His voice in His Word.

100. The Feast of Dedication

Read it in: John 10:22-39
Where: Solomon's Porch in the temple

It was winter, and the Feast of Dedication was being held in Jerusalem. Today it is known as Hanukkah. It remembers how Judas Maccabeus cleansed and rededicated the temple in 164 B.C., after the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled it by offering a pig on the altar. Jesus was walking in the temple in the covered walkway called Solomon's Porch, out of the cold.

The leaders surrounded Him and said, "How long do You hold our soul in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24). Jesus said He had told them, and they did not believe. The works He did in His Father's name testified about Him. But they did not believe because they were not His sheep.

> *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given **them** to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch **them** out of the hand of My Father.* (John 10:27-29)

Then He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Again they picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus said He had shown them many good works from the Father. For which of them were they stoning Him? They said not for a good work, but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God. They understood Him perfectly.

Jesus answered from Psalm 82, where God calls human judges "gods" because they speak for Him. If Scripture can call them that, how can you accuse Me of blasphemy for saying I am the Son of God, the One the Father set apart and sent into the world? If you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father. Again they tried to seize Him, but He escaped from their hands.

What it shows: The sheep of Jesus are held in two hands, His and His Father's, and no one can snatch them out. That is one of the strongest promises of security in the Bible. And notice again how clearly Jesus claimed to be one with God. His enemies did not miss it.

101. Jesus Withdraws Beyond the Jordan

Read it in: John 10:40-42
Where: Bethany beyond the Jordan, in Perea

Jesus went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had first been baptizing, and He stayed there. It had been about three years since He was baptized at this river. Many people came to Him, and

they said John did no sign, but everything John said about this man was true. And many believed in Him there.

What it shows: John the Baptist had been dead for most of a year, but his witness was still bearing fruit. Faithful words about Jesus keep working long after the one who spoke them is gone.

Study Questions

1. The disciples asked whose sin caused the man's blindness. How do you respond when people say suffering is always someone's fault?
2. The blind man said, "one thing I know, that being blind, now I see." What is the "one thing" you know about what Jesus has done for you?
3. Jesus said His sheep hear His voice. How do you hear Jesus' voice today? How can you learn to recognize it better?
4. Read John 10:27-29. What does it mean to you that no one can snatch you out of the Father's hand?
5. John the Baptist's words were still bringing people to Jesus after his death. What would you like people to say about your witness after you are gone?

Chapter 23: Lost and Found

> *for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost.*
>
> Luke 19:10 (SLB)

From the Jordan, Jesus taught in Perea and the towns along the road toward Jerusalem. Luke gives us this teaching in chapters 13 through 17, and it includes some of the best-known stories Jesus ever told: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The verse at the top of this chapter comes a little later, but it sums up this whole stretch. Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost.

After 36 years of marriage and about 40 years of work, I have had plenty of chances to forgive, and I have needed even more forgiveness from others. Forgiving the same hurt again takes God's help. Jesus said to forgive even seven times in a day when someone repents (Luke 17:3-4).

102. The Narrow Door and a Lament over Jerusalem

Read it in: Luke 13:22-35
Where: Perea, on the way to Jerusalem

Jesus was going through towns and villages, teaching as He made His way toward Jerusalem. Someone asked, “Lord, are those who are being saved few?” (Luke 13:23). Jesus did not answer with a number. He answered with a command. Strive to enter through the narrow door, because many will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the master of the house shuts the door, people will knock and say we ate and drank with You, and He will say I do not know where you are from. People will come from east and west and north and south and recline at table in the kingdom of God, and some who are last will be first.

Some Pharisees warned Him that Herod wanted to kill Him. Jesus said, go tell that fox that I am casting out demons and healing today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish My course. It cannot be that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem. Then He cried out over the city.

> *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the **one** killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her! How often I was willing to gather your children together, the way a hen **gathers** her own brood under **her** wings, and you were not willing!* (Luke 13:34)

What it shows: The question is not how many will be saved, but whether you will be. And the heart of Jesus toward the city that would kill Him was not anger, but grief, like a mother hen who wants to gather her chicks under her wings.

103. Dinner at a Pharisee’s House

Read it in: Luke 14:1-24
Where: Perea

On a Sabbath, Jesus went to eat at the house of a leader of the Pharisees, and they were watching Him closely. In front of Him was a man with dropsy, a swelling of the body. Jesus asked the experts in the Law whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not. They were silent. He healed the man and sent him

away, then asked which of them would not pull out a son or an ox that fell into a well on the Sabbath. They had no answer.

He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table. Do not take the best seat, He said, or someone more important may come and you will be moved down in shame. Take the lowest place, and the host may say, friend, move up higher. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. And to the host He said, when you give a dinner, do not invite only your friends and rich neighbors who can invite you back. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

One of the guests said, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. Jesus answered with a story. A man gave a great banquet and invited many. When it was ready, the invited guests all made excuses. I bought a field. I bought five yoke of oxen. I just got married. The master was angry and told his servant to go out quickly into the streets and lanes and bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. When there was still room, he said go out to the roads and the hedges and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.

What it shows: God's invitation goes out to everyone, and the people who think they have better things to do will miss it. The ones who know they have nothing to offer are the ones who come in.

104. The Cost of Following Him

Read it in: Luke 14:25-35
Where: Perea

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned and told them plainly what following Him meant. If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Jesus was using strong language to make a point. Your love for Him must be so great that every other love looks like hate next to it. Matthew records the same idea in milder words: whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:37).

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Then He told two short stories. Who builds a tower without first sitting down to count the cost, so that he will not lay the foundation and be unable to finish? What king goes to war without first considering whether he can win with ten thousand against twenty thousand? So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all that he has.

What it shows: Jesus never hid the cost of following Him. He did not want a crowd of fans. He wanted disciples who had counted the cost and decided He was worth it.

105. The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son

Read it in: Luke 15:1-32
Where: Perea

Tax collectors and sinners were all coming near to listen to Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes grumbled. "This ***man*** receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). So Jesus told three stories, all with the same point.

A man has a hundred sheep and loses one. He leaves the ninety-nine in the open country and goes after the lost one until he finds it. When he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders, rejoicing, and calls his friends and neighbors to celebrate. In the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who think they need no repentance.

A woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it. Then she calls her friends to celebrate. In the same way, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Then the longest and best-loved story. A man had two sons. The younger said, Father, give me my share of the estate now. In that culture, it was like saying, I wish you were dead. The father divided his property. The younger son went to a far country and wasted it all in reckless living. Then a famine came, and he was so desperate that he hired himself out to feed pigs, the lowest job a Jewish boy could imagine, and he longed to eat the pods the pigs were eating.

Then he came to his senses. My father's hired men have more than enough bread, and I am dying of hunger. He planned a speech: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.

> *And having risen up, he went to his own father. But while he was still far distant, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him.*
> (Luke 15:20)

In that world, dignified older men did not run. The father ran anyway. The son started his speech, but the father did not even let him finish the part about being a hired man. He told the servants to bring the best robe, put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and kill the fattened calf. "this son of mine was dead and came to life again, and he was lost and was found" (Luke 15:24). And they began to celebrate.

But the older son was out in the field. When he came home and heard the music, he was angry and would not go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. The older son said, all these years I have served you and never disobeyed, and you never gave me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. The father said, son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it was right to celebrate, because your brother was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found.

The story ends there. We never find out whether the older brother went in. That is because Jesus was telling it to the Pharisees, who were standing outside the party, grumbling. The ending was up to them.

What it shows: God is the shepherd who searches, the woman who sweeps, and the father who runs. There is no one He will not welcome home. And there are two ways to be lost: you can run off to the far country, or you can stay home, do all the right things, and still not know the Father's heart.

106. The Shrewd Manager, and the Rich Man and Lazarus

Read it in: Luke 16:1-31
Where: Perea

Jesus told His disciples about a manager who was about to be fired for wasting his master's money. Before he left, he called in his master's debtors and cut their bills, so they would welcome him later. The master praised the dishonest manager for acting shrewdly. Jesus was not praising the dishonesty. He was saying the people of this world are often smarter about their future than the people of light. Use the money of this world to make friends for eternity. Whoever is faithful in little is faithful in much. You cannot serve God and money.

The Pharisees, who loved money, scoffed at Him. So He told another story. There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted every day. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue. Abraham said, remember that in your lifetime you received good things and Lazarus bad things. Now he is comforted and you are in anguish. And between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that no one can cross over.

The rich man begged him to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers. Abraham said they have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. The rich man said no, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. Abraham's answer is chilling.

> *But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from **the** dead.'* (Luke 16:31)

Within weeks, Jesus would raise a different man named Lazarus from the dead, and the leaders would respond by plotting to kill them both. And within months, Jesus Himself would rise from the dead.

This is the only story Jesus told in which a character has a name. Some believe it is not a parable at all but a real account. Either way, Jesus teaches through it that after death there is conscious life, that there is no second chance, and that the Scriptures are enough to lead us to repentance.

What it shows: The rich man was not condemned for being rich. He was condemned for living as if God and his neighbor did not exist. And the most powerful miracle will not convince someone who has already refused to listen to God's Word.

107. Forgiveness, Faith, and Duty

Read it in: Luke 17:1-10
Where: Perea

Jesus warned that stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. Even if he sins against you seven times in a day and comes back seven times saying I repent, you must forgive him.

The apostles said, “Add faith to us!” (Luke 17:5). Jesus said if you had faith like a mustard seed, you could tell this mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you. The issue is not the size of your faith but the size of the God it rests on.

Then He told them about a servant who comes in from plowing all day. Does his master thank him for doing what he was told? So you also, when you have done everything you were commanded, say, we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.

What it shows: Forgiving over and over takes faith, and even a little faith in a great God is enough. And no matter how much we do for God, we never put Him in our debt. Serving Him is a privilege, not a favor we do Him.

Study Questions

1. Someone asked Jesus if only a few would be saved. Why do you think He answered with a command instead of a number?
2. In the story of the great banquet, people made excuses. What excuses do people give today for not coming to God?
3. Which son in the story of the prodigal son are you more like? What does the father’s response to each son teach you?
4. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, what did the rich man do wrong? What does it teach about life after death?
5. Jesus said to forgive even seven times in a day. Is there someone you need to forgive today, even if it is not the first time?

Chapter 24: “Lazarus, Come Out!”

> *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The **one** believing in Me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone living and believing in Me will certainly never die. Do you believe this?”*
>
> John 11:25-26 (SLB)

The raising of Lazarus is the last and greatest of the seven signs John records before the cross. It is also the event that sealed Jesus’ death. The leaders could not deny it, and they could not allow it to spread. So, after this, they made plans not just to stop Him, but to kill Him.

This happened in the winter or early spring, not long before the final Passover.

108. Lazarus Raised from the Dead

Read it in: John 11:1-44
Where: Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem

While Jesus was across the Jordan, a message came from Mary and Martha in Bethany: “Lord, look, ***he*** whom You love dearly is sick” (John 11:3). They did not ask Him to come. They did not need to. They knew He loved Lazarus.

Jesus said this sickness would not end in death but was for the glory of God, so that the Son of God might be glorified through it. Then John writes two verses that seem to clash. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days where He was (John 11:5-6). Because He loved them, He waited.

Then He told the disciples, let us go back to Judea. They reminded Him that the leaders had just tried to stone Him there. Jesus said Lazarus had fallen asleep, and He was going to wake him. They thought He meant natural sleep. So He told them plainly, “Lazarus died” (John 11:14). Thomas, the one we often call doubting Thomas, showed real courage here. He said to the others, “Let us also go, so that we may die with Him” (John 11:16).

When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Many Jews believed a soul stayed near the body for three days, and after that all hope was gone. Four days meant he was truly dead.

Martha heard He was coming and went out to meet Him. “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). But even now she knew God would give Him whatever He asked. Jesus said, your brother will rise again. Martha said she knew he would rise in the resurrection on the last day. Then Jesus said the words at the top of this chapter: I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?

Martha’s answer is as strong a confession as Peter’s.

> *She says to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the **One** coming into the world."* (John 11:27)

Then Mary came, fell at His feet, and said the same words her sister had: Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people with her weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. He asked where they had laid him. They said, come and see.

> *Jesus wept.* (John 11:35)

It is the shortest verse in most English Bibles, and one of the deepest. Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus. He wept anyway. He was not crying because He had no hope. He was crying because death is an enemy, and because He loved His friends and felt their grief. Some of the people said, see how He loved him. Others said could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?

The tomb was a cave with a stone across the opening. Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, practical as always, said, Lord, by now there will be a smell, for he has been dead four days. Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? They took away the stone. Jesus lifted up His eyes and thanked the Father for hearing Him, and said He was praying out loud for the sake of the crowd, so they would believe the Father had sent Him.

> *And having said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And the **one** who had died came out, bound feet and hands with linen strips, and his face had been bound around with a cloth. Jesus says to them, "Unbind him and allow **him** to go."* (John 11:43-44)

Someone once said that if Jesus had not called Lazarus by name, every grave in the place would have emptied.

Outside the Bible: Bethany and the Tomb of Lazarus (*Background*)

Bethany sat on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem, just as John says (John 11:18). Today the village is called al-Eizariya, Arabic for the place of Lazarus, a name that goes back to the old Christian name for the town. Pilgrims were being shown a tomb of Lazarus there by the fourth century. Whether it is the actual tomb cannot be proven, but the town's very name keeps the memory of what happened there.

What it shows: Jesus does not always come when we want Him to. But when He waits, it is never because He does not love us. It is so that we will see something greater. He wept with His friends, and then He called death to give back what it had taken. One day He will do that for everyone who belongs to Him.

109. The Plot to Kill Jesus

Read it in: John 11:45-54
Where: Jerusalem, then Ephraim near the wilderness

Many who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did and believed in Him. But some went to the Pharisees and told them. The chief priests and Pharisees called the council together. What are we doing?

This man performs many signs. If we let Him go on, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, you know nothing at all. You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people, rather than the whole nation perish. He meant it as cold politics. But John says he did not say this on his own. As high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the scattered children of God (John 11:51-52). Caiaphas spoke a truth far bigger than he knew.

From that day on, they made plans to put Him to death. So Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went to a town called Ephraim, near the wilderness, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem, and stayed there with His disciples.

Outside the Bible: The Caiaphas Ossuary (*Background*)

In 1990, construction workers in the Peace Forest south of Jerusalem's Old City broke into a family burial cave from the first century. Inside were several ossuaries, stone boxes used to hold bones. One of the most finely decorated was inscribed twice with a name read as Joseph son of Caiaphas, and it held the bones of a man about sixty years old. Josephus gives the high priest's full name as Joseph Caiaphas (*Antiquities* 18.2.2). Many scholars believe this is the high priest's family tomb. A few have questioned the reading of the name, so the identification is likely, not certain.

What it shows: The greatest miracle of Jesus' ministry led straight to the decision to kill Him. Unbelief does not always need more evidence. Sometimes it needs less, because the evidence is the problem. And God used even the cynical words of Caiaphas to announce the gospel: one man would die for the people.

Study Questions

1. Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, and so He waited two days. When has God's timing felt like He did not care? How does this story help you?
2. Jesus asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" How would you answer Him?
3. Jesus wept, even though He knew He would raise Lazarus. What does that teach you about how He feels about your grief?
4. Why did the raising of Lazarus make the leaders want to kill Jesus instead of believe in Him?
5. Caiaphas said it was better for one man to die for the people. How was he more right than he knew?

Chapter 25: The Last Journey to Jerusalem

> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.*
>
> Mark 10:45 (SLB)

In the spring, as the last Passover drew near, Jesus left Ephraim and began the final journey to Jerusalem. Luke says He passed between Samaria and Galilee (Luke 17:11), probably along the border, then crossed into Perea and came down the Jordan valley to Jericho. From Jericho, the road climbs about three thousand feet in seventeen miles to Jerusalem. Pilgrims from Galilee were traveling the same road to the feast, and crowds walked with Him.

Along the way, He healed, taught, blessed children, and told His disciples for the third time exactly what was waiting for Him in Jerusalem.

110. Ten Lepers Cleansed

Read it in: Luke 17:11-19
Where: The border of Samaria and Galilee

As He entered a village, ten men with leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance, as the Law required, and called out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Luke 17:13). He told them to go show themselves to the priests. That was the step a cleansed leper took to be declared clean. They had to start walking before anything happened. And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, thanking Him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner? Then He said to him, “Rise up and go; your faith has saved you” (Luke 17:19).

What it shows: Ten were healed in body. Only one came back, and only that one heard the words “your faith has saved you.” Gratitude is not a small thing. It is the mark of a heart that has truly met Jesus.

111. The Coming of the Kingdom

Read it in: Luke 17:20-37
Where: On the road

The Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus said the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be watched for. People will not say look, here it is, or there, “For look, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The Greek word can also mean “among you,” and since Jesus was speaking to Pharisees who did not believe, many take it that way. The King was standing in front of them.

Then He told His disciples about the day the Son of Man will be revealed. It will be like the days of Noah. People were eating and drinking and marrying, right up to the day Noah entered the ark and the flood

came. It will be like the days of Lot. People were buying and selling and planting and building, until fire and sulfur rained from heaven. Remember Lot's wife. On that day, two will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.

Many Bible teachers, myself included, believe the full fulfillment of these words belongs to the end of the age. I hold the pre-tribulation view: that Jesus will first come for His church in the Rapture, before the seven years of tribulation, and then return in glory with His church at the end of those years. Some take "one will be taken" as a picture of the Rapture. Others, also pre-tribulation, read it as being taken in judgment at His return in glory, the way the flood took the wicked away. Either way, Jesus' point is the same. The day will come suddenly, in the middle of ordinary life, and the time to be ready is now. Chapter 28 says more about this.

What it shows: The people of Noah's day were not doing anything unusual. They were just living as if God would never act. That is the danger Jesus warns about. He is coming back, and ordinary days are the days to be ready.

112. Two Parables on Prayer

Read it in: Luke 18:1-14
Where: On the road

Luke tells us why Jesus told the next story: to show that they should always pray and not lose heart. A widow kept coming to an unjust judge who did not fear God or respect people, saying, give me justice against my adversary. For a while he refused. But finally he said, I will give her justice, so she will not wear me out by her continual coming. And will not God give justice to His chosen ones who cry to Him day and night? Then Jesus asked a haunting question: "the Son of Man, having come, will He find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Then He told a story to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. Two men went up to the temple to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. The tax collector stood far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, beat his chest, and said, "God, be propitious to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). To be propitious is to turn away wrath and show mercy.

Jesus said it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who went home justified before God. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

What it shows: Keep praying, and do not give up. And come to God the way the tax collector did, with nothing to offer but your need. That prayer God always answers.

113. A Question About Divorce

Read it in: Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12
Where: Judea beyond the Jordan

Jesus came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered again. Pharisees came to test Him with a question about divorce. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? At that time, rabbis argued over the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1. One school said a man could divorce only for serious sexual sin. Another said he could divorce for almost anything, even burning dinner.

Jesus went back to the beginning. God made them male and female, and the two become one flesh. What God has joined together, let no man separate. They asked why Moses commanded a certificate of divorce. Jesus said Moses permitted it because of the hardness of your hearts, but from the beginning it was not so. Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery.

The disciples said if that is how it is, it is better not to marry. Jesus said not everyone can accept this, but only those to whom it is given. Some stay single for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

What it shows: Jesus held up God's design for marriage as one man and one woman, for life. He was not harsh toward broken people, as we have seen again and again. But He would not lower God's standard to fit the culture.

114. Jesus Blesses the Children

Read it in: Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17
Where: Judea beyond the Jordan

People were bringing even infants to Jesus so that He would touch them and pray for them. The disciples rebuked them, probably thinking He was too important and too busy. Mark says that when Jesus saw it, He was indignant.

> *But Jesus, having seen **it**, was indignant and said to them, "Permit the little children to come to Me, and do not hinder them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will certainly not enter into it."* (Mark 10:14-15)

And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.

What it shows: No one is too small for Jesus. And the way into His kingdom is the way a child comes: with empty hands, trusting, not trying to earn anything.

115. The Rich Young Ruler

Read it in: Matthew 19:16-20:16; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30
Where: On the road in Perea

As He was setting out on His journey, a man ran up, knelt before Him, and asked, "Good Teacher, what should I do so that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). Matthew says he was young. Luke says he was a ruler. All three say he was rich.

Jesus asked why he called Him good. No one is good except God alone. He was not denying He was good. He was asking the man whether he understood who he was talking to. Then He listed the commandments about how we treat others. The young man said he had kept all of these since he was a boy.

Mark adds a beautiful line. Jesus, looking at him, loved him. And said, one thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow Me. The man's face fell, and he went away sad, because he had great possessions.

Jesus did not tell everyone to sell everything. He told this man, because money was his god. The man had kept the commandments about his neighbor, but not the first one, to have no other gods.

Jesus looked around and said how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. 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. The disciples were astonished. Then who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, "With men ***it is*** impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

Peter said, we have left everything and followed You. Jesus promised that no one who has left house or family or fields for His sake and the gospel would fail to receive a hundred times as much in this age, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Matthew adds a parable to explain that last line. A landowner hired workers for his vineyard at dawn, at nine, at noon, at three, and even at five in the afternoon. At the end of the day, he paid them all the same, a denarius, a full day's wage. Those hired first grumbled. The owner said, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree to a denarius? Am I not allowed to do what I want with what is mine? Or is your eye evil because I am good?

What it shows: Salvation is impossible for anyone to earn, rich or poor. It is a gift of God, who does the impossible. And no one who gives up anything for Jesus will end up the loser. God's grace is not fair. It is better than fair.

116. Jesus Foretells His Death a Third Time

Read it in: Matthew 20:17-28; Mark 10:32-45; Luke 18:31-34
Where: On the road up to Jerusalem

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the Twelve aside and told them, more fully than ever before, what would happen. The Son of Man would be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They would condemn Him to death and hand Him over to the Gentiles. They would mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. And after three days He would rise. Luke adds that they understood none of these things.

Right after this, James and John came with their mother and asked for the seats at His right and left in His glory. Jesus asked if they could drink the cup He was about to drink. They said we can. Jesus said they would, but the seats were not His to give. When the other ten heard, they were angry with the two brothers.

Jesus called them together. The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. It shall not be so among you. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. Then He gave the words at the top of this chapter: for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

James did drink the cup. He was the first apostle to be killed for his faith, by Herod Agrippa, about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). John lived the longest and suffered exile on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9).

What it shows: Right after Jesus described His own suffering in detail, His disciples argued about who would be greatest. We are not so different. Jesus answers with His own example. True greatness is to serve, and He came to serve us by paying the ransom price with His own life.

117. Blind Bartimaeus

Read it in: Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43
Where: Jericho

As they came to Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he began to cry out, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47). Many told him to be quiet. He cried out all the more.

Jesus stopped and said, call him. They called the blind man and said, take heart, get up, He is calling you. Throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked, “What do you desire ***that*** I should do for you?” The blind man said, “Rabboni, that I may receive sight” (Mark 10:51). Jesus said, go, your faith has made you well. Immediately he received his sight and followed Him on the road.

Matthew says there were two blind men. Mark and Luke tell of the one who was named and remembered, Bartimaeus. Mark and Matthew say this happened as Jesus was leaving Jericho, and Luke says as He was coming near it. There were two Jerichos at the time, the old town on its ancient mound and the new Roman town Herod had built about a mile south. Jesus may have been leaving one and approaching the other. Or Luke may simply mean that Jesus was in the area of Jericho. These are the kinds of differences honest witnesses have.

What it shows: The crowd tried to shut Bartimaeus up, and he only cried louder. He knew who Jesus was, the Son of David, the Messiah. And when Jesus asked what he wanted, he did not hesitate. He threw off his cloak, maybe the only thing he owned, and when he could see, he followed Jesus.

118. Zacchaeus

Read it in: Luke 19:1-10
Where: Jericho

Jericho was a wealthy city, a center for the balsam trade and a customs post on the road from Perea. A man named Zacchaeus lived there. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he could not because of the crowd, since he was short. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree.

When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, having hurried, come down; for today I must stay in your house” (Luke 19:5). He hurried down and welcomed Him with joy. Everyone grumbled that He had gone in to stay with a sinner.

Zacchaeus stood and said, look, Lord, half of my possessions I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone of anything, I give back four times as much. The Law required a thief to pay back what he took plus a fifth (Numbers 5:6-7). Zacchaeus went far beyond it.

Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9). Then He said the words at the top of Chapter 23: “for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost” (Luke 19:10).

What it shows: Zacchaeus came to see Jesus, but Jesus had come looking for Zacchaeus. And real salvation changed his wallet. The rich young ruler walked away from Jesus sad, holding on to his money. Zacchaeus met Jesus and let go of his money with joy.

119. The Parable of the Ten Minas

Read it in: Luke 19:11-28
Where: Jericho

Because He was near Jerusalem, and the people thought the kingdom of God was going to appear right away, Jesus told a story. A nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom and then return. Before he left, he gave each of ten servants a mina, about three months’ wages, and said, do business with this until I come. His citizens hated him and sent word, we do not want this man to reign over us.

When he came back as king, he called his servants. One had made ten minas, and he was given ten cities. Another had made five, and he was given five cities. Another had wrapped his mina in a cloth and hidden it out of fear, and it was taken from him. And the citizens who refused his rule were judged.

Many in Jesus’ day would have remembered a real event behind the story. When Herod the Great died, his son Archelaus went to Rome to have his kingdom confirmed, and a group of Jews sent a delegation after him to protest, as Josephus tells. Jesus used that memory to teach a truth about Himself. He was about to go away to a far country, to heaven, and He would come back as King.

After telling this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

What it shows: The King has gone away, but He is coming back. Until then, He has entrusted us with what is His, and He expects us to put it to work. The question is not how much we have, but whether we are faithful with it.

120. Arrival at Bethany

Read it in: John 11:55-12:1, 9-11
Where: Bethany, on the Mount of Olives

The Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the feast. They were looking for Jesus and asking each other in the temple, what do you think? Will

He not come to the feast at all? The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where He was should report it, so they could arrest Him.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom He had raised from the dead. A large crowd found out He was there and came, not only for Jesus, but also to see Lazarus. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

What it shows: Lazarus did not preach a sermon that we know of. His life was the sermon. Everyone who saw him alive saw what Jesus could do. The leaders thought the answer was to kill the evidence.

Study Questions

1. Only one of the ten lepers came back to say thank you. What has Jesus done for you that you have never really thanked Him for?
2. Compare the prayer of the Pharisee and the tax collector. What is the difference between them? Which one sounds more like your prayers?
3. The rich young ruler walked away sad, and Zacchaeus gave his money away with joy. What made the difference?
4. Jesus said He came “to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” What does it mean that His death was a ransom?
5. In the parable of the minas, the King is coming back. What has He given you to invest for Him, and what are you doing with it?

Part Seven: The Last Week

Chapter 26: The King Comes to Jerusalem

> *Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look, your King comes to you; He **is** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys.*
>
> Zechariah 9:9 (SLB)

The four Gospels slow down when they reach the last week of Jesus' life. Mark spends six of his sixteen chapters on it. John spends almost half of his book. No other week in history has been written about so carefully. Part Seven of this book walks through it day by day.

Here is the outline most harmonies follow, with a Friday crucifixion.

Day	Main events
Saturday	Dinner at Bethany; Mary anoints Jesus
Sunday	The entry into Jerusalem on a donkey
Monday	The fig tree cursed; the temple cleared
Tuesday	The fig tree withered; the day of questions in the temple; the Olivet Discourse
Wednesday	Judas agrees to betray Him (the Gospels record no other events)
Thursday	The Last Supper; the Upper Room teaching; Gethsemane; the arrest
Friday	The trials; the crucifixion; the burial
Saturday	In the tomb
Sunday	The resurrection

Some Bible teachers place the crucifixion on Thursday or even Wednesday, partly to fit "three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40). As we saw in Chapter 13, Jewish counting treated part of a day as a whole day, and the Gospels say the women came to the tomb after the Sabbath, the day of the crucifixion was "the Preparation, which is the day before the Sabbath" (Mark 15:42), and Jesus rose on the third day. I follow the Friday view, which has been the church's view from the beginning, but I hold it with respect for those who see it otherwise.

121. Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany

Read it in: Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8
Where: The house of Simon the leper in Bethany

John tells us that six days before the Passover, they gave a dinner for Jesus in Bethany. Martha served, as we would expect. Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. Matthew and Mark tell us the dinner was at the house of Simon the leper, probably a man Jesus had healed, since lepers could not host dinners.

Mary took about twelve ounces of pure nard, a very expensive perfume imported from India, and poured it on Jesus. Matthew and Mark say on His head. John says on His feet, and that she wiped His feet with her hair. She probably did both. The whole house was filled with the smell of the perfume.

Judas Iscariot objected. Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? That was about a year's wages. John tells us bluntly that he said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He kept the money bag and used to help himself to what was put in it. Matthew and Mark say some of the other disciples grumbled too.

Jesus said, leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing for Me. You always have the poor with you, and you can help them whenever you want. But you will not always have Me. She has anointed My body beforehand for burial.

> *Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this **woman** did will also be spoken of for a memorial of her.* (Mark 14:9)

Matthew and Mark tell this story later in their accounts, right before Judas goes to the priests, because it explains what pushed Judas over the edge. John gives us the exact day. The two fit together easily.

What it shows: Mary understood what the disciples did not. Jesus was going to die, and she gave Him the most precious thing she had while she still could. Love for Jesus is never wasted. And the same act that showed Mary's love showed Judas's greed.

122. The Entry into Jerusalem

Read it in: Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19
Where: From Bethany and Bethphage, down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem

The next day, Sunday, Jesus sent two disciples to a nearby village to bring a donkey and her colt, one no one had ever ridden. If anyone asked, they were to say the Lord needs it. Everything happened exactly as He said.

Matthew and John both point to the prophecy at the top of this chapter. Zechariah had said Israel's King would come to Jerusalem righteous and having salvation, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Kings rode horses into war. A king on a donkey came in peace.

A great crowd of pilgrims had come for the feast. When they heard Jesus was coming, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. Others spread their cloaks on the road, the way people did for a new king (2 Kings 9:13). As He came down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God loudly for all the mighty works they had seen.

> *took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and were crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed **is** the **One** coming in **the** name of **the** Lord, the King of Israel!"* (John 12:13)

Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means "save now." The crowd was quoting Psalm 118:25-26, one of the songs pilgrims sang on the way up to the feasts. The Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples. He answered, "I say to you that if these should be silent, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Then Luke tells us something the others do not. As He came near and saw the city, He wept over it. If you had only known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. The days will come when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you, and tear you down to the ground, you and your children, and they will not leave one stone on another, because you did not know the time of your visitation. About forty years later, in A.D. 70, the Roman armies did exactly that.

When He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? The crowds said this is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee. Mark says He went into the temple, looked around at everything, and since it was already late, He went back out to Bethany with the Twelve. The Pharisees said to one another, "Look, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19).

What it shows: For the first time, Jesus let the crowds hail Him openly as King. But He came on a donkey, not a warhorse, and He wept even as they cheered. Many in that crowd wanted a king to throw out Rome. Jesus came to deal with something far worse than Rome.

123. The Fig Tree Cursed and the Temple Cleared

Read it in: Matthew 21:12-19; Mark 11:12-18; Luke 19:45-48
Where: The road from Bethany, and the temple

The next morning, Monday, as they were coming back from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree in leaf from a distance and went to see if He could find anything on it. Fig trees in that region often put out small early fruit along with their leaves. A tree full of leaves but with no fruit at all was promising something it did not deliver. Jesus said to it, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. And His disciples heard it.

It is the only miracle of judgment Jesus ever did, and it was on a tree, not a person. It was an acted parable. Israel, and especially its temple, was full of leaves, all the outward show of religion, but bearing no fruit for God. What He did next made the point clear.

He went into the temple and began to drive out those who sold and bought there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves, and He would not let anyone carry goods through the temple courts as a shortcut. Then He taught them.

> *And He was teaching, saying to them, "Has it not been written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you made it a den of robbers."* (Mark 11:17)

This was the second time He had cleared the temple, three years after the first (John 2:13-22). The chief priests and scribes heard it and looked for a way to destroy Him, because they were afraid of Him, since the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. Matthew adds that the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them, and children were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" When the leaders complained, Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2: out of the mouths of babies and infants You have prepared praise.

What it shows: Jesus is not impressed by religious leaves. He is looking for fruit. And the house of prayer that should have welcomed the nations had become a hideout for people using God for profit. Jesus cleared it out and then filled it with the blind, the lame, and singing children.

124. Greeks Ask to See Jesus

Read it in: John 12:20-50
Where: The temple in Jerusalem

Among those who had come to worship at the feast were some Greeks, Gentiles who worshiped the God of Israel. They came to Philip and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Philip told Andrew, and Andrew, true to form, brought them to Jesus.

Jesus answered that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. The Gentiles would come to Him, but only after He died.

Then Jesus said, now My soul is troubled. What shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. A voice came from heaven: I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. Some in the crowd said it thundered. Others said an angel had spoken to Him. It was the third time the Father spoke from heaven during Jesus' ministry, after the baptism and the transfiguration.

> *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all **men** to Myself.* (John 12:32)

John explains that He said this to show what kind of death He was going to die. Lifted up on a cross. John then sadly notes that though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe, fulfilling Isaiah. Yet many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God (John 12:42-43).

What it shows: The way to life goes through death, for Jesus and for those who follow Him. And when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He began drawing people of every nation to Himself, Greeks, Romans, and every people since, including us.

Study Questions

1. Mary poured out her most valuable possession on Jesus, and Judas called it a waste. What would it look like for you to give Jesus something precious?
2. Why did Jesus choose to ride a donkey into Jerusalem? What does that say about the kind of King He is?
3. Jesus wept over Jerusalem even as the crowd cheered. What do you think He saw that they did not?
4. The fig tree had leaves but no fruit. Is there any area of your life that looks good from a distance but bears no real fruit for God?
5. Jesus said a grain of wheat must die to bear fruit. What might God be asking you to let die so that something more fruitful can grow?

Chapter 27: The Day of Questions

> *and you shall love **the** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' This **is the** first commandment. And **the** second **is** like **it**, this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*
>
> Mark 12:30-31 (SLB)

Tuesday of the last week was the longest day of teaching recorded in the Gospels. One group after another came to Jesus in the temple courts with a question meant to trap Him: the chief priests and elders, the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and a scribe. He answered every one, and by the end of the day no one dared to ask Him anything more. Then He asked them a question they could not answer.

I spent about 35 years at a public utility and took pride in doing my job well. In a busy career, it is easy to give God whatever is left after work takes the best. Jesus said to give God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21). Holding back our time and obedience robs Him of what already bears His image.

125. The Withered Fig Tree

Read it in: Matthew 21:19-22; Mark 11:19-25
Where: The road from Bethany

In the morning, as they passed by, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has been dried up” (Mark 11:21).

Jesus used it to teach about faith. Have faith in God. Whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, it will be done for him. They were standing on the Mount of Olives, within sight of the temple mount and the Dead Sea far below. Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you.

Matthew tells the cursing and withering together, as one event, while Mark tells them on two mornings. Matthew often shortens stories this way. Mark gives the fuller timing.

What it shows: The withered tree was a warning to fruitless religion. But Jesus turned it into a lesson for His disciples: real faith in God, real prayer, and real forgiveness. Those are the fruit God is looking for.

126. “By What Authority?”

Read it in: Matthew 21:23-22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-19
Where: The temple courts

The chief priests, scribes, and elders came to Him in the temple and asked, by what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority? They were the official leaders of the temple, and He had just thrown out the merchants.

Jesus answered with a question. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? They talked it over. If we say from heaven, He will ask why we did not believe him. If we say from man, the people will stone us, because they think John was a prophet. So they said, we do not know. Jesus said, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Then He told three parables aimed straight at them.

- **The two sons.** A father asked two sons to work in the vineyard. One said no, but later changed his mind and went. The other said yes, sir, and did not go. Which did his father's will? The tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus said, are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you (Matthew 21:28-32).
- **The tenants.** A man planted a vineyard, rented it to tenants, and went away. When he sent servants to collect his share of the fruit, the tenants beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Last of all he sent his beloved son, saying, they will respect my son. But the tenants said, this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What will the owner do? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Then Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22: the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The leaders knew He had told this parable against them, and they wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowd.
- **The wedding feast.** A king gave a wedding feast for his son. The invited guests refused to come, and some even killed his servants. So the king sent his servants to the streets to invite everyone they found, good and bad, and the hall was filled. But one man came without a wedding garment and was thrown out. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:1-14).

What it shows: In the parable of the tenants, Jesus told the leaders exactly what they were about to do to Him, and what it would cost them. God had sent prophet after prophet, and now He had sent His Son. The Son would be killed, and God would make the rejected stone the cornerstone of a new house.

127. Taxes to Caesar

Read it in: Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26
Where: The temple courts

Next the Pharisees teamed up with the Herodians again. They flattered Him first. Teacher, we know You are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and You do not care about anyone's opinion. Then the trap: is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?

If He said yes, the crowds who hated Rome would turn against Him. If He said no, the Herodians would report Him to Pilate as a rebel. Jesus saw their hypocrisy. Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius. They brought one. He asked, whose likeness and inscription is this? They said Caesar's. The coin of that day carried the head of Tiberius and words calling him the son of the divine Augustus.

> *And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." And they marveled at Him.* (Mark 12:17)

They were amazed at Him.

What it shows: Jesus did not dodge the question. Pay your taxes. Government has a real, God-given place (Romans 13:1-7). But Caesar's image was on the coin, and God's image is on you (Genesis 1:27). Give the coin to Caesar, and give yourself to God.

128. The Sadducees and the Resurrection

Read it in: Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40
Where: The temple courts

The Sadducees came next. They were the priestly party, wealthy and powerful, and they did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits (Acts 23:8). They accepted mainly the five books of Moses. Their question was meant to make the resurrection look ridiculous.

Moses wrote that if a man dies without children, his brother should marry the widow and raise up children for him (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). There were seven brothers. The first married and died childless, and so on through all seven. Last of all the woman died. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?

Jesus said they were wrong, because they knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. In the resurrection, people neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. Then He answered from the very books they accepted. At the burning bush, God said, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6). He did not say I was. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for centuries, but God was still their God. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Some of the scribes said, Teacher, You have spoken well.

What it shows: The resurrection is not a fairy tale. It is grounded in who God is. If He is your God, death cannot end that relationship. And the life to come will not just be this life continued. It will be something new and greater.

129. The Greatest Commandment

Read it in: Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34
Where: The temple courts

One of the scribes had heard them arguing and saw that Jesus had answered well. He asked, “Which is ***the*** first commandment of all?” (Mark 12:28). The rabbis counted 613 commandments in the Law and liked to debate which were heavy and which were light.

Jesus answered with the words at the top of this chapter. The first is the Shema, the prayer every faithful Jew recited each day: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The second is, you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). There is no other commandment greater than these. Matthew adds that on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

The scribe agreed. To love God like this and your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus saw that he had answered wisely and said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). And after that no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

What it shows: The whole Bible’s commands come down to love, for God and for people. That is simple to say and impossible to do perfectly. It is one more reason we need a Savior who did it perfectly for us.

130. Whose Son Is the Christ?

Read it in: Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44
Where: The temple courts

Now it was Jesus' turn to ask a question. While the Pharisees were gathered together, He asked them, what do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He? They said, the son of David. That was the standard answer.

Then how, Jesus asked, does David, speaking by the Spirit, call Him Lord? For David says in Psalm 110:1, The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies under Your feet. If David calls Him Lord, how is He his son? No one could answer Him a word.

The answer, of course, is that the Christ is both. He is David's son by human birth, and David's Lord because He is God. The Pharisees could not answer because they would not accept that the Messiah was more than a man. Psalm 110:1 is the Old Testament verse most often quoted in the New.

What it shows: Jesus is not only the greatest son of David. He is David's Lord. The question is not just whether He was descended from a king, but whether you will bow to Him as King.

131. Woe to the Scribes and Pharisees

Read it in: Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47
Where: The temple courts

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and His disciples. The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do what they tell you, but not what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will not lift a finger to move them. They do everything to be seen. They love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, and being called rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. The greatest among you shall be your servant.

Then came seven woes. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You travel across sea and land to make one convert, and make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. You strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You are like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones. You build the tombs of the prophets and say if we had lived then, we would not have killed them, and so you testify against yourselves that you are sons of those who did.

And then the anger turned to grief, with the same words He had spoken in Perea.

> *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the **one** killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her! How often I was willing to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her own chicks under the wings, and you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, you will by no means see Me from now on until you say, 'Blessed **is** the **One** coming in **the** name of **the** Lord.'* (Matthew 23:37-39)

What it shows: These are the hardest words Jesus ever spoke, and they were aimed at religious hypocrisy. But even here His heart breaks over the people who are rejecting Him. And notice the promise at the end. One day Jerusalem will say, "Blessed ***is*** the ***One*** coming in ***the*** name of ***the*** Lord." He is coming back.

132. The Widow's Two Coins

Read it in: Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4
Where: The temple treasury

Jesus sat down across from the treasury, where thirteen trumpet-shaped offering boxes stood in the court of the women, and watched the people putting in money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, the smallest coins in use, worth only a fraction of a day's wage.

Jesus called His disciples over. Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. They all gave out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.

Right after a scathing word about scribes "who devour the houses of the widows" (Mark 12:40), Jesus pointed to a widow giving everything to God.

What it shows: God does not measure a gift by its size, but by what it costs the giver and the heart behind it. Two coins given in faith are worth more to Him than a fortune given for show.

Study Questions

1. Jesus said, "Give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." What belongs to God in your life that you may be holding back?
2. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. How did Jesus prove it from the books of Moses? Why does the resurrection matter to you?
3. Jesus summed up all the commandments as love for God and love for neighbor. Which of the two is harder for you right now, and why?
4. In Matthew 23, Jesus warned against religion that is all outside and no inside. What are the warning signs of that in a person's life, or in a church?
5. The widow gave everything she had. What does her gift teach you about generosity and trust?

Chapter 28: On the Mount of Olives

> *The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*
>
> Matthew 24:35 (SLB)

Late on Tuesday, Jesus left the temple for the last time. As they walked out, one of His disciples pointed to the great buildings. Herod's temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Some of its stones were enormous, and the whole front gleamed with white marble and gold. Jesus said not one stone would be left on another that would not be thrown down.

That evening, sitting on the Mount of Olives across the valley, looking at the temple in the setting sun, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately when this would happen. His answer is called the Olivet Discourse. It is the longest prophecy Jesus ever gave. Then, on Wednesday, while Jesus was quiet, Judas went to the chief priests.

133. The Olivet Discourse

Read it in: Matthew 24:1-25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-38
Where: The Mount of Olives, facing the temple

Matthew gives the disciples' question in three parts: when will these things be, what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age (Matthew 24:3)? They probably thought all three would happen at once. Jesus' answer covers events near and far, and Bible teachers have long worked to sort out which parts refer to what.

What Jesus Said

He began with a warning: see that no one leads you astray. Many will come in His name, claiming to be the Christ. There will be wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, famines and earthquakes. But these are only the beginning of the birth pains. They will hand you over to be persecuted and killed, and you will be hated by all nations for His name's sake. Many will fall away, and false prophets will arise. Because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Then He spoke of a turning point. When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, then those in Judea must flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). There will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, and never will be. If those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved, but for the sake of the elect they will be cut short.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven.

> *And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.* (Matthew 24:30)

Learn the lesson of the fig tree. When its branches grow tender and put out leaves, you know summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that He is near, at the very gates. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As in the days of Noah, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Therefore stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Matthew 25 adds three more pictures. Ten virgins waited for the bridegroom with their lamps; five brought extra oil and five did not, and when he came at midnight, the foolish ones were shut out. Three servants were entrusted with talents of money; two put them to work, and one buried his in the ground. And when the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will sit on His glorious throne, and all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. To those on His right He will say, I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me. As you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.

How the Pieces Fit

Luke's version helps us with the near part. He records Jesus saying that when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, her desolation has drawn near, and Jerusalem will be trampled by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled (Luke 21:20, 24). That happened in A.D. 70, when the Roman general Titus surrounded the city and the temple was burned to the ground. Josephus, who was there, describes the siege in terrible detail in *The Jewish War*. Christians in Jerusalem remembered Jesus' words and fled across the Jordan to the town of Pella before the end, according to the church historian Eusebius (*Church History* 3.5.3).

But not everything Jesus described happened in A.D. 70. The sun did not go dark, the Son of Man did not appear in the clouds, and the nations were not gathered before His throne. Those events are still ahead.

I hold the pre-tribulation view, which I have taught in my studies on Daniel and Revelation. Here is how that view reads the Olivet Discourse.

- **The fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70** is a near fulfillment and a preview, especially in Luke 21:20-24.
- **The great tribulation** is the seven years of Daniel's seventieth week (Daniel 9:27), still in the future. In the middle of those seven years, a coming world ruler will set up the abomination of desolation in a rebuilt temple, and the worst of the judgments will follow (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13).
- **The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds** with power and great glory, gathering His elect from the four winds, is His return in glory at the end of the tribulation, when He comes to rule (Revelation 19:11-16).
- **The Rapture of the church** is not the main subject of this sermon. Jesus was speaking to Jewish disciples about Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. The Rapture, when Jesus calls His church up to meet Him in the air before the tribulation begins, was revealed more fully later, especially through Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Jesus pointed toward it on the night before He died, when He promised His disciples, "I am coming again and will receive you to Myself" (John 14:3).

Other Bible-believing Christians read this passage differently. Some believe nearly all of it was fulfilled in A.D. 70. Others believe the church will go through the tribulation and be caught up at the end of it. Good people disagree on the timing. But all of us agree on what Jesus most wanted His disciples to take from this: He is coming back, no one knows the day or the hour, and we must be ready.

What it shows: Jesus' words about the temple came true to the letter within forty years, which gives us good reason to trust His words about what is still ahead. He did not give this sermon so that we could argue over charts. He gave it so that we would stay awake, keep our lamps full, put our talents to work, and care for the least of His brothers until He comes.

134. Judas Agrees to Betray Him

Read it in: Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16; Mark 14:1-2, 10-11; Luke 22:1-6
Where: Jerusalem

When Jesus finished all these sayings, He told His disciples, you know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.

At the same time, the chief priests and the elders gathered in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and plotted to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him. But they said not during the feast, or there may be an uproar among the people. Jerusalem's population swelled to several times its normal size at Passover, and many of the pilgrims were Galileans who loved Jesus.

Then Luke says, "Then Satan entered into Judas, the one surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve" (Luke 22:3). He went to the chief priests and asked, what will you give me if I hand Him over to you? They were glad and agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver. That was the price the Law set for a slave who was gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32), and the exact amount named in Zechariah 11:12-13. From then on Judas looked for an opportunity to betray Him, away from the crowd.

Why did Judas do it? The Gospels give us greed: he was a thief (John 12:6) and he asked what they would pay. They also give us Satan's influence. Some have guessed that he was disappointed Jesus would not lead a revolt, or that he wanted to force Jesus' hand. The Bible does not say that. What it does say is that he walked with Jesus for three years, saw everything the others saw, and still sold Him.

What it shows: It is possible to be close to Jesus, to serve beside Him, and never give Him your heart. Judas is the saddest warning in the Gospels. Satan entered a door that greed had already opened.

Study Questions

1. Jesus' prophecy about the temple came true in A.D. 70. How does that help you trust what He said about His return?
2. Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour. Why do you think God has not told us? How should that shape the way we live?
3. In the parable of the ten virgins, what is the "oil" that the foolish virgins did not have? How do you keep your lamp full?

4. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus said that what we do for “the least of these” we do for Him. Who are the least of these in your world?
5. Judas was with Jesus for three years and still betrayed Him. What does that teach you about the difference between being near Jesus and belonging to Him?

Chapter 29: The Upper Room

> *Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who **were** in the world, He loved them to **the** end.*
>
> John 13:1 (SLB)

On Thursday evening, Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples in a large upper room in Jerusalem. It was the last meal before His death. John gives five chapters to that one night, more than any other evening in the Gospels. In that room, Jesus washed His disciples' feet, named His betrayer, gave the Lord's Supper, warned Peter, taught about the Holy Spirit, and prayed for His disciples and for all who would believe through them.

135. Preparing the Passover

Read it in: Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13
Where: Jerusalem

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the disciples asked where He wanted them to prepare the meal. Jesus sent Peter and John into the city. A man carrying a jar of water would meet them. That would stand out, because carrying water was usually women's work. They were to follow him into the house he entered and tell the owner, the Teacher asks, where is My guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples? He would show them a large upper room, furnished and ready.

Jesus may have arranged this ahead of time in secret, so Judas would not know where they would be until they got there. It was the one evening Jesus wanted with His disciples without interruption.

John's Gospel seems to say the Jewish leaders had not yet eaten the Passover when Jesus was on trial the next morning (John 18:28). There are several good explanations. The word "Passover" was used for the whole week-long feast, not just the first meal, so the leaders may have been worried about the feast meals still ahead. Some also think different groups in Israel followed slightly different calendars that year. What is clear in all four Gospels is that Jesus ate a final meal with His disciples on Thursday night and died on Friday, the day of preparation, while the Passover lambs were being sacrificed.

What it shows: Jesus planned the details of His last night. Nothing that happened that week caught Him by surprise.

136. The Meal Begins, and the Disciples Argue

Read it in: Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14-16, 24-30
Where: The upper room

When the hour came, Jesus reclined at the table with the apostles. He said, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). It was the meal He had been waiting for.

And yet, Luke tells us, a dispute arose among them about which of them was the greatest. Even here. Jesus told them again that the kings of the Gentiles lord it over people. But not so with you. The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? "But I am in your midst as the One serving" (Luke 22:27).

What it shows: The disciples were still fighting over position on the last night. What Jesus did next answered their argument better than any words.

137. Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

Read it in: John 13:1-20
Where: The upper room

John says Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God. Knowing all that, He got up from supper, laid aside His outer garments, and tied a towel around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel.

Roads were dusty, people wore sandals, and at dinner the guests lay with their feet behind them. Washing feet was the job of the lowest servant in the house. No one had volunteered.

When He came to Peter, Peter said, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" (John 13:6). Jesus said, you do not understand now what I am doing, but afterward you will understand. Peter said, "You will certainly never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). Peter swung the other way: then not just my feet, but my hands and my head! Jesus said the one who has bathed only needs to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not all of you. He knew who would betray Him.

When He had finished and sat down again, He asked if they understood what He had done.

> *If therefore I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example, so that even as I did to you, you also may do.* (John 13:14-15)

What it shows: The hands that made the stars washed the dirt off twelve pairs of feet, including the feet of the man who would betray Him that night. That is what greatness looks like in God's kingdom. And Jesus' words to Peter go deeper. Unless He washes us of our sin, we have no part with Him.

138. The Betrayer Is Named

Read it in: Matthew 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30
Where: The upper room

After He washed their feet, Jesus was troubled in spirit and said, truly, one of you will betray Me. The disciples looked at one another, uncertain whom He meant. One by one they asked, surely not I, Lord?

John was reclining next to Jesus, leaning back against Him. Peter motioned to John to ask who it was. John leaned back and asked, Lord, who is it? Jesus said it is the one to whom I give this morsel of bread

when I have dipped it. Giving someone a choice piece from the dish was a mark of honor and friendship. He dipped it and gave it to Judas. Even then, Jesus was offering him love.

Matthew records that Judas asked too, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" And Jesus said, "You have said ***it***" (Matthew 26:25). The others apparently did not hear or did not understand.

After Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, what you are going to do, do quickly. No one at the table knew why He said this. Some thought, since Judas kept the money bag, that Jesus was telling him to buy what they needed for the feast or to give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel of bread, Judas went out immediately. And John adds four of the most chilling words in the Bible: "And it was night" (John 13:30).

What it shows: Judas sat at the table with Jesus, had his feet washed by Jesus, and was offered the honored piece of bread by Jesus. He walked out into the night anyway. The other disciples each asked, is it I? A healthy fear of our own weakness is better than a confident trust in our own loyalty.

139. The Lord's Supper

Read it in: Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
Where: The upper room

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat; this is My body. Luke adds, "which is being given for you; do this for My remembrance" (Luke 22:19).

Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them.

> *And having taken the cup and having given thanks, He gave* ***it*** *to them, saying, "Drink from it, all* ***of*** *you; for this is My blood, the* ***blood*** *of the new covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."* (Matthew 26:27-28)

At the Passover, every part of the meal told the story of the Exodus: the lamb whose blood marked the doors, the unleavened bread eaten in haste, the bitter herbs of slavery. Jesus took that meal and filled it with a new meaning. His body would be broken. His blood would be poured out. And His blood would seal a new covenant, the one God promised through Jeremiah, when He would write His law on their hearts and remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Then He said He would not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day He drinks it new with them in His Father's kingdom. Christians have taken the Lord's Supper together ever since. Paul writes that every time we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

What it shows: Jesus did not leave His church a monument. He left a meal. Every time we take it, we remember that He gave His body and blood for us, and we look forward to the day we will eat with Him in His kingdom.

140. Peter's Denial Foretold

Read it in: Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-38
Where: The upper room

After Judas left, Jesus said, now is the Son of Man glorified. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. Where I am going you cannot come. Then He gave them a new commandment.

> *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love among one another.* (John 13:34-35)

Peter asked where He was going. Jesus said you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow afterward. Peter said why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for You. Luke records that Jesus spoke to him by his old name: "Simon, Simon, look, Satan has asked for you, to sift ***you*** like wheat. But I begged for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed, he would deny three times that he knew Him. Mark, who wrote down Peter's own memories, says before the rooster crows twice. Peter insisted, even if I must die with You, I will never deny You. And all the disciples said the same.

Jesus also warned them that times were changing. When He sent them out before with no money bag, they lacked nothing. But now, whoever has a money bag should take it, and whoever has no sword should buy one. He was telling them in a vivid way that they were about to face a hostile world. When they said, look, here are two swords, He said, it is enough. He was not raising an army, as He would show in the garden a few hours later.

What it shows: Jesus knew Peter would fail, and He prayed for him before it happened. He also knew Peter would come back, and He gave him a job to do when he did: strengthen your brothers. Our failures do not surprise Jesus, and they do not have to be the end.

141. The Upper Room Teaching

Read it in: John 14:1-16:33
Where: The upper room, and on the way to the garden

Then Jesus spoke words of comfort that have been read at more bedsides and funerals than perhaps any others in the Bible.

> *Let your heart not be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In the house of My Father are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.* (John 14:1-3)

Thomas said they did not know where He was going, so how could they know the way? Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Philip

asked Him to show them the Father. Jesus said, have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.

Then He promised them another Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would be with them forever. The Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance everything Jesus had said (John 14:26). That promise is one reason we can trust the Gospels. The same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures helped the apostles remember what Jesus said and did. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). At the end of chapter 14, He said, rise, let us go from here. Chapters 15 and 16 may have been spoken as they walked through the city toward the Kidron Valley, perhaps past the temple, where a great golden vine decorated the entrance.

> *I am the vine; you **are** the branches. The **one** remaining in Me and I in him, this **one** bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything.* (John 15:5)

He told them to abide in His love and to love one another as He had loved them. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. No longer do I call you servants, He said, but friends. He warned them the world would hate them, as it hated Him first. But the Spirit would come and convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, and guide them into all the truth.

Their sorrow would turn to joy, like a woman in labor whose pain is forgotten when her child is born. Then He ended with the words that close chapter 16.

> *These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33)

What it shows: On the night He would be betrayed, Jesus spent His time comforting His friends. He promised a place in His Father's house, the gift of His Spirit, His peace, and His victory over the world. Those promises are for everyone who believes in Him.

142. Jesus Prays for His Disciples and for Us

Read it in: John 17:1-26
Where: The upper room, or on the way to the garden

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and prayed. This is the longest prayer of Jesus recorded in the Bible, and it is often called His High Priestly Prayer, because in it He intercedes for His people the way the high priest did.

First He prayed for Himself: Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You. "And this is the eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You sent" (John 17:3). Glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.

Then He prayed for His disciples. Keep them in Your name. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

Then He prayed for you.

> *And I do not ask concerning these only, but also concerning those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, even as You, Father,* ***are*** *in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.* (John 17:20-21)

He ended by asking that those the Father had given Him would be with Him where He is, to see His glory, and that the love with which the Father loved Him would be in them, and He in them.

What it shows: On the night before He died, Jesus prayed for you by name, as one of those who would believe through the apostles' word. He prayed for your protection, your holiness, your unity with other believers, and that you would one day be with Him and see His glory. And the Bible says He is still praying for His people today (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34).

Study Questions

1. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, including Judas's. What would it look like for you to "wash the feet" of someone who has hurt you?
2. When Jesus said one of them would betray Him, each disciple asked, "Surely not I?" Why is it wise to be honest about our own weakness?
3. What does the Lord's Supper mean to you? How can you take it with more thought and gratitude?
4. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Why does that claim offend some people? Why is it good news?
5. Read John 17:20-26. Jesus prayed for you. What did He ask the Father for, and how does that change how you see yourself?

Chapter 30: Gethsemane and the Trials

> *He was oppressed, and He **was** afflicted, and He did not open His mouth; like the lamb **that** is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe **that** before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth.*
>
> Isaiah 53:7 (SLB)

Late Thursday night, Jesus led His disciples out of the city, across the Kidron Valley, to a garden on the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. The name means oil press. Within a few hours He would be arrested, abandoned by His friends, put on trial six times before Jewish and Roman courts, beaten, mocked, and sentenced to death. Most of it happened in the dark, between midnight and dawn.

The Gospels together describe three Jewish hearings and three Roman ones.

Hearing	Before whom	Where to read it
1	Annas, the former high priest	John 18:12-14, 19-23
2	Caiaphas and the council, at night	Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65
3	The full council, at dawn	Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71
4	Pontius Pilate	Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38
5	Herod Antipas	Luke 23:6-12
6	Pilate again	Matthew 27:15-26; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16

143. Agony in the Garden

Read it in: Matthew 26:30, 36-46; Mark 14:26, 32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1
Where: Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives

After they sang a hymn, probably the last of the Hallel psalms sung at Passover (Psalms 113 to 118), they went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus told eight of the disciples to sit while He went to pray. He took Peter, James, and John with Him, the same three who had seen His glory on the mountain. Now they would see His sorrow.

He began to be greatly distressed and troubled. He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, to ***the point of*** death. Remain here and keep watch” (Mark 14:34). He went a little farther, fell on the ground, and prayed.

> *And He was saying, “Abba, Father, all things **are** possible for You; take this cup away from Me. But not what I want, but what You **want**.”* (Mark 14:36)

Abba is the Aramaic word a child uses for his father. The cup is the cup of God’s wrath against sin, the picture the prophets used (Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Jesus was not afraid of pain the way a coward is afraid. He was facing something no one else has ever faced: taking the full judgment of God for the sins of the world. And yet He said, not My will, but Yours.

Luke the doctor tells us an angel appeared to strengthen Him, and being in agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:43-44). Those two verses are missing from some early copies of Luke, but they are found in many others and were known to writers in the second century. Under extreme stress, the tiny blood vessels near the sweat glands can break, a rare condition doctors call hematidrosis.

He came back and found the disciples sleeping. Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? "Keep watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed ***is*** willing, but the flesh ***is*** weak" (Mark 14:38). He went away and prayed again, the same words, and came back and found them sleeping again. The third time He came, He said, are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough. The hour has come. Rise, let us go. Look, My betrayer is at hand.

What it shows: Here we see how fully human Jesus was. He felt sorrow, dread, and loneliness, and He asked for His friends to stay with Him. And here we see how fully He obeyed. Adam said "my will" in a garden and brought death to the world. Jesus said "Your will" in a garden and brought life.

144. The Arrest

Read it in: Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12
Where: Gethsemane

While He was still speaking, Judas came, and with him a large crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests, scribes, and elders. John says it included a cohort of Roman soldiers and officers from the temple police, with lanterns, torches, and weapons. They came to arrest one unarmed man at night.

Judas knew the place, because Jesus often met there with His disciples. He had given them a sign: the one I kiss is the man; seize Him. He came up and said, Rabbi, and kissed Him. Jesus said, "Judas, are you delivering up the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

John tells us that Jesus stepped forward and asked, whom are you seeking? They said, Jesus of Nazareth. He said, "I am ***He***" (John 18:5). When He said that, they drew back and fell to the ground. In Greek He said simply *ego eimi*, "I am," the same words He had used of Himself before. For a moment, the soldiers felt the power of the One they had come to arrest. He asked them again, and said if you are seeking Me, let these men go.

Peter drew a sword and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. John tells us the servant's name was Malchus. Jesus said, put your sword back in its place. Do you think I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me? Luke the doctor adds that Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. It was the last healing miracle before the cross, done for one of the men arresting Him.

Then all the disciples left Him and fled. Mark adds a strange detail: a young man was following Him, wearing only a linen cloth, and when they seized him, he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. Many think this young man was Mark himself, quietly putting himself in the story.

What it shows: Jesus was not captured. He gave Himself up. With a word He knocked the soldiers to the ground, and He could have called twelve legions of angels. Instead He healed His enemy and let them bind Him, so that His friends could go free.

145. Before Annas

Read it in: John 18:12-14, 19-23
Where: The house of Annas in Jerusalem

They bound Jesus and took Him first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas had been high priest years before, and Rome had removed him, but five of his sons and his son-in-law held the office after him. To many Jews, he was still the real high priest, and he held the real power.

Annas questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. Jesus said He had spoken openly to the world, always teaching in synagogues and in the temple, and had said nothing in secret. Why ask Me? Ask those who heard Me. One of the officers struck Him in the face for answering the high priest that way. Jesus said, if I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if rightly, why do you strike Me?

What it shows: Under Jewish law, a prisoner was not supposed to be forced to testify against himself, and witnesses were supposed to be called first. From its first hour, this was not a fair trial. Jesus calmly asked for justice and received a blow.

146. Before Caiaphas and the Council

Read it in: Matthew 26:57, 59-68; Mark 14:53, 55-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65; John 18:24
Where: The palace of Caiaphas

Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas, where the chief priests, elders, and scribes had gathered. They were looking for testimony to put Him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. Their stories did not agree. Finally two came forward and twisted what He had said three years earlier about destroying the temple and raising it in three days.

Jesus said nothing. Isaiah had said He would be like a lamb that is silent before its shearers. The high priest stood up and said, have You no answer? Still He was silent. Then Caiaphas put Him under oath.

> *But Jesus was silent. And the high priest, answering, said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus says to him, "You have said **it**. Nevertheless I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at **the** right **hand** of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Matthew 26:63-64)

Jesus put together two great prophecies: the Son of Man coming on the clouds from Daniel 7:13, and sitting at God's right hand from Psalm 110:1. He was claiming to be the divine King who would one day judge the very men judging Him. The high priest tore his robes and said He has blasphemed. What further need do we have of witnesses? They answered, He deserves death.

Then they spit in His face and struck Him. Some blindfolded Him, hit Him, and said, prophesy to us, Christ! Who is it that struck You? The guards beat Him too.

What it shows: The only thing the council could condemn Jesus for was telling the truth about who He is. He was silent before lies, but He would not be silent about His own identity. And the One they mocked for not seeing who hit Him sees everything.

147. Peter Denies Him Three Times

Read it in: Matthew 26:58, 69-75; Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27
Where: The courtyard of the high priest

Peter had followed at a distance, and John, who knew the high priest, got him into the courtyard. It was cold, and Peter stood with the servants and officers warming himself at a charcoal fire.

A servant girl who kept the door looked at him and said, you also were with Jesus the Galilean. Peter denied it in front of everyone: I do not know what you are talking about. A little later another servant said this man was with Jesus of Nazareth. Again he denied it, with an oath: I do not know the man. About an hour later, the bystanders said, certainly you are one of them, for your accent gives you away. A relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter cut off, asked, did I not see you in the garden with Him? Then Peter began to call down curses on himself and to swear, I do not know this man you are talking about.

Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. Luke tells us what happened next.

> *And having turned, the Lord looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And having gone outside, Peter wept bitterly.* (Luke 22:61-62)

The four Gospels report the accusers a little differently, a servant girl, another girl, a man, a group of bystanders, a relative of Malchus. That is what you would expect from a tense, crowded courtyard where many people were talking at once. All four agree that Peter denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus said, and that the rooster crowed.

What it shows: A few hours earlier, Peter had said he would die for Jesus. Now he could not stand up to a servant girl. If Peter could fall that far, any of us could. But Jesus had already prayed for him, and the look from Jesus was not the end of Peter's story. We will see him again by another charcoal fire.

148. The Council Condemns Him at Dawn

Read it in: Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71
Where: The council chamber in Jerusalem

When day came, the whole council met again, the chief priests and scribes and elders. Jewish law did not allow a capital trial at night, so they held a short morning session to make the night's verdict official. They asked Him, if You are the Christ, tell us. Jesus said if I tell you, you will not believe. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God. They all asked, are You the Son of God, then? He said, you say that I am. They said, what further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from His own lips.

They bound Him and led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate. Under Roman rule, the council could not carry out a death sentence on its own (John 18:31).

What it shows: The leaders kept the outward form of the law while breaking its spirit. And again Jesus told them exactly who He was.

149. The Death of Judas

Read it in: Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19
Where: Jerusalem, and the potter's field

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was filled with remorse and brought the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders. "I sinned, having handed over innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). They said, what is that to us? You see to it. He threw the silver into the temple, went away, and hanged himself.

The chief priests picked up the silver and said it was not lawful to put it in the treasury, since it was blood money. They used it to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That field was still called the Field of Blood when Matthew wrote. Matthew sees in this a fulfillment of prophecy, drawing on both Jeremiah and Zechariah 11:12-13.

In Acts 1:18-19, Peter says Judas acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his insides spilled out. The two accounts fit together. The priests bought the field with Judas's money, so in a real sense Judas bought it. And a man who hanged himself from a tree on the edge of one of the steep ravines around Jerusalem could easily have fallen when the rope or branch gave way. Both accounts agree on the field and its name.

What it shows: Judas was sorry, but his sorrow led to death, not to life. Paul later wrote that godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation, but worldly grief produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10). Peter wept and came back. Judas despaired and was lost. The difference was not the size of their sin. It was where they took it.

150. Before Pilate

Read it in: Matthew 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38
Where: The governor's headquarters, the Praetorium

They led Jesus to the Praetorium, the governor's headquarters, early in the morning. The leaders would not go inside, so that they would not be defiled and could eat the Passover meals. So Pilate came out to them. They were careful not to step into a Gentile's house, while they handed over an innocent man to be killed.

Pilate asked what charge they brought. At first they said only that He was a criminal. Pilate told them to judge Him by their own law. They said it was not lawful for them to put anyone to death. Then they made charges a Roman would care about. Luke lists them: we found this man misleading our nation, forbidding us to give taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king (Luke 23:2). The second charge was a flat lie, as the whole crowd in the temple had heard on Tuesday.

Pilate went back inside and asked Jesus, are You the King of the Jews? Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). If it were, My servants would be fighting. Pilate said, so You are a king? Jesus said, You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice. Pilate said, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Then he went back out and told the leaders, I find no guilt in Him.

Outside the Bible: Pontius Pilate (*Background*)
In 1961, Italian archaeologists working in the Roman theater at Caesarea Maritima, on the coast of Israel, found a limestone block that had been reused in a later stairway. It carried part of a Latin inscription dedicating a building to the emperor Tiberius, and it named Pontius Pilatus as Prefect of Judea. It is the only inscription from Pilate’s lifetime that names him. The Roman historian Tacitus, writing around A.D. 115, also mentions him by name. He says the name Christians comes from “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus” (*Annals* 15.44). Tacitus was no friend of Christians. He calls their faith “a most mischievous superstition.” That makes his witness to the crucifixion under Pilate all the more valuable.

What it shows: Pilate found Jesus innocent, and said so, over and over. And Jesus told Pilate that He was a King, but not the kind who needs an army. His kingdom is built on truth, and it was standing right in front of a man who asked, what is truth?

151. Before Herod

Read it in: Luke 23:6-12
Where: Herod’s palace in Jerusalem

When Pilate heard Jesus was a Galilean, from Herod’s territory, he sent Him to Herod Antipas, who happened to be in Jerusalem for the feast. It was a way to pass the problem to someone else.

Herod was very glad to see Jesus. He had heard about Him for a long time and hoped to see Him do some sign. This was the same Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist. He questioned Jesus at length, but Jesus gave him no answer at all. The chief priests and scribes stood by, accusing Him fiercely. Herod and his soldiers mocked Him, dressed Him in a splendid robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. Luke adds that Herod and Pilate became friends that day, though they had been enemies before.

What it shows: Jesus had nothing to say to Herod. Herod had heard John preach for years and had silenced him. He wanted a show, not the truth. There comes a point where God stops speaking to those who refuse to listen.

152. Pilate Hands Him Over to Be Crucified

Read it in: Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16
Where: The Praetorium, at the Stone Pavement

Pilate called the chief priests, the rulers, and the people together. Neither he nor Herod had found Him guilty of anything deserving death. So he offered to punish Him and release Him.

It was the governor's custom at the feast to release one prisoner the crowd chose. Pilate had a notorious prisoner named Barabbas, who had been thrown into prison for an uprising in the city and for murder. Pilate thought the crowd would choose Jesus. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas. Barabbas means "son of the father." The guilty son of a human father went free, and the innocent Son of the heavenly Father died in his place.

While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message: "***Let there be*** nothing between you and that righteous ***man***; for I suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate asked the crowd, then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all shouted, let Him be crucified! He asked, why, what evil has He done? They shouted all the more, crucify Him!

John tells us Pilate then had Jesus flogged. Roman flogging was so brutal that some men died from it. The whip had several leather strips with pieces of bone or metal tied into them. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, dressed Him in a purple robe, and kept coming up to Him, saying, hail, King of the Jews, and striking Him in the face. Pilate brought Him out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and said to the crowd, "Look, the man!" (John 19:5). Perhaps he hoped the sight would satisfy them. It did not.

The leaders said, we have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God. When Pilate heard that, he was even more afraid. He asked Jesus where He was from. Jesus gave no answer. Pilate said, do You not know I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You? Jesus answered, you would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above.

From then on Pilate tried to release Him. But the leaders played their last card. If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. Pilate could not risk a report to Tiberius. He sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Stone Pavement, in Aramaic Gabbatha. John notes it was the Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour (John 19:14). Pilate said, "Look, your King!" (John 19:14). They cried out, take Him away, take Him away, crucify Him! Pilate said, shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, "We have no king except Caesar" (John 19:15).

Matthew tells us Pilate took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, I am innocent of this man's blood. All the people answered, His blood be on us and on our children. Then he released Barabbas, and after flogging Jesus, handed Him over to be crucified.

John's "sixth hour" and Mark's "third hour" for the crucifixion (Mark 15:25) have long been discussed. One common explanation is that John used Roman time, counting from midnight, which would put the sentence around six in the morning, and Mark used Jewish time, counting from sunrise, which would put the crucifixion around nine. Others think both writers were giving approximate times for a morning that moved fast. Either way, all four Gospels agree on the order of events.

What it shows: Everyone in this scene tried to wash their hands of Jesus, Pilate most of all. But no one can stay neutral about Him. The crowd chose a murderer over the Son of God. And Barabbas, the guilty man who walked free because Jesus took his place, is a picture of every one of us.

153. The Soldiers Mock Him

Read it in: Matthew 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19; John 19:2-3
Where: The Praetorium

The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole battalion before Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand. They knelt before Him and mocked Him: Hail, King of the Jews! They spit on Him, took the reed, and struck Him on the head with it again and again.

Isaiah had written seven hundred years before: I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I did not hide My face from disgrace and spitting (Isaiah 50:6).

What it shows: The soldiers thought they were making fun of a fake king. In fact they were kneeling before the real King of kings. One day, every knee will bow to Him in truth (Philippians 2:10-11).

Study Questions

1. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "not what I want, but what You ***want***." What is hardest for you to surrender to God's will right now?
2. Jesus was not captured; He gave Himself up. Why does that matter for how we understand the cross?
3. Peter denied Jesus and wept. Judas betrayed Jesus and despaired. What made the difference between them?
4. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" while Truth Himself stood before him. How do people today miss Jesus while asking the right questions?
5. Barabbas went free because Jesus took his place. In what way are you like Barabbas?

Chapter 31: The Cross

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.*
>
> Isaiah 53:5 (SLB)

Everything in the life of Jesus has been leading to this day. He said at the start that the Son of Man must be lifted up (John 3:14). He told His disciples three times that He would be killed in Jerusalem. He set His face toward the city, rode in on a donkey, and gave Himself up in the garden. Now He carries His cross to a hill outside the city wall.

All four Gospels tell the story of the crucifixion, and they tell it with restraint. They do not dwell on the gore. They tell us what happened, what was said, and what it meant. I will do the same.

154. The Way to Golgotha

Read it in: Matthew 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-33; John 19:16-17
Where: From the Praetorium to Golgotha, outside the city wall

After they had mocked Him, the soldiers took off the robe, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him. Condemned men carried the crossbeam of their own cross to the place of execution. John says Jesus went out bearing His own cross. But He had been up all night, beaten, and flogged, and at some point He could carry it no farther. The soldiers seized a man coming in from the country, Simon of Cyrene, a city in North Africa, and laid the cross on him to carry behind Jesus.

Mark adds that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), as if his readers would know them. Paul greets a Rufus in Rome (Romans 16:13). It may be that the man forced to carry the cross became a follower of the One who hung on it, and his family with him.

A large crowd followed, including women who were mourning and lamenting for Him. Jesus turned and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Luke 23:28). Days were coming when people would say blessed are the barren. Even on the road to His own death, He was thinking of others.

They brought Him to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull. The Latin word for skull, *calvaria*, gives us the name Calvary. It was outside the city walls, near a road, so that everyone passing by would see (Hebrews 13:12). They offered Him wine mixed with myrrh, a drink that dulled pain. When He tasted it, He would not drink it. He would face what was coming with a clear mind.

What it shows: The Lamb of God was led outside the camp, the way the sin offering was carried outside the camp in the Law (Leviticus 16:27). Jesus took the place of the rejected, so that rejected people could be brought in.

155. Crucified

Read it in: Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:18-27
Where: Golgotha

Mark says it was the third hour when they crucified Him, about nine in the morning. The Gospels say only, "they crucified Him." Their first readers knew exactly what that meant. Crucifixion was the cruelest death Rome had. Nails were driven through the wrists and the feet. The victim hung for hours, sometimes days, pushing up on his feet to breathe until he could not push anymore. It was so shameful that Roman citizens were not crucified, and polite Romans did not speak of it.

Outside the Bible: A Crucified Man Named Jehohanan (*Background*)
In 1968, workers building in northern Jerusalem at a place called Giv'at ha-Mivtar found a family tomb from the first century. One ossuary held the bones of a young man named Yehohanan, or Jehohanan. His right heel bone still had an iron nail through it, about four and a half inches long, bent at the tip, with bits of olive wood still attached. It is the clearest physical evidence we have of Roman crucifixion in the time of Jesus. It also shows that a crucified Jew could receive a proper family burial, which matches what the Gospels say about Jesus' burial.

They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. Isaiah had said He would be numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). And as they nailed Him to the cross, Jesus spoke the first of seven sayings from the cross.

> *And Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And dividing His garments, they cast a lot.* (Luke 23:34)

The soldiers divided His clothes by casting lots, fulfilling Psalm 22:18. John tells us His tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they did not tear it but gambled for it.

Pilate had a sign fastened to the cross with the charge against Him: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that everyone could read it. The chief priests asked Pilate to change it to say He claimed to be King of the Jews. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22).

People passing by shook their heads and mocked, just as Psalm 22:7 had said. You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! The chief priests and scribes mocked Him too. He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe. They did not understand that it was precisely because He would not save Himself that He could save others.

At first, both robbers joined in the insults (Matthew 27:44). But at some point, one of them changed. When the other kept railing at Jesus, saying, are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us, this one rebuked him. Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, but this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, "Remember me, Lord, when You come in Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus gave the second saying from the cross.

> *And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:43)

That man had no time to be baptized, to join a church, or to do a single good work. He simply turned to Jesus in faith, and Jesus promised him paradise that very day.

Near the cross stood His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He gave the third saying: "Woman, look, your son!" Then to the disciple: "Look, your mother!" (John 19:26-27). From that hour John took her into his own home. His brothers did not yet believe in Him, and Jesus made sure she would be cared for by someone who did.

What it shows: From the cross, Jesus prayed for the men who nailed Him there, saved a dying thief, and took care of His mother. Even in agony, He was giving. And the thief shows us that no one is too far gone and no one is too late, as long as there is breath to turn to Him.

156. Darkness, and the Death of Jesus

Read it in: Matthew 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37
Where: Golgotha

From the sixth hour, noon, until the ninth hour, three in the afternoon, darkness came over the whole land. It could not have been an eclipse, because Passover always fell at the full moon, when a solar eclipse is impossible. It was God's own sign of judgment, like the darkness over Egypt in the Exodus (Exodus 10:21-23) and the darkness the prophet Amos said would come at noon (Amos 8:9).

About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice the fourth saying from the cross.

> *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46)

These are the opening words of Psalm 22, a psalm David wrote a thousand years before, which describes a man mocked, surrounded, his hands and feet pierced, his clothes divided by lots, and which ends in triumph. In that moment, Jesus was bearing the sin of the world, and He was experiencing the separation from the Father that sin brings. "For He made the One who did not know sin ***to be*** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was forsaken so that we never would be.

Some who stood there heard Him and said, He is calling Elijah. Then Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said the fifth saying, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28), fulfilling Psalm 69:21. They put a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. When He had received it, He gave the sixth saying.

> *Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It has been finished." And having bowed **His** head, He delivered up the spirit.* (John 19:30)

In Greek it is one word, *tetelestai*. It was a word written on bills that had been paid in full. The work He came to do was done. The debt was paid.

Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice the seventh and last saying, "Father, into Your hands I will commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46, quoting Psalm 31:5). And having said this, He breathed His last. No one took His life from Him. He laid it down (John 10:18).

At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That curtain was a heavy veil, many feet high, that closed off the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest could go, once a year, with blood. Torn from top to bottom, by God's hand and not man's, it announced that the way into God's presence was now open, through the body of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19-20). The earth shook, rocks were split, and tombs were opened. Matthew says many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and, after His resurrection, came out of the tombs and went into the holy city and appeared to many (Matthew 27:52-53). Matthew gives no more detail, and Bible teachers offer different readings, but he reports it plainly as part of what happened.

When the centurion who stood facing Him saw how He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son" (Mark 15:39). Luke records him praising God and saying, certainly this man was righteous. The crowds who had gathered for the spectacle went home beating their chests. And the women who had followed Him from Galilee stood at a distance, watching.

Because the next day was a Sabbath, and a high day at that, the leaders asked Pilate to have the legs broken so the bodies could be taken down before sundown (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Breaking the legs meant the victim could no longer push up to breathe, and death came quickly. The soldiers broke the legs of the two robbers. But when they came to Jesus and saw He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. John stops his story to tell us he saw it himself and is telling the truth, so that we may believe. These things happened so the Scripture would be fulfilled: not one of His bones will be broken (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20), and they will look on Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

Outside the Bible: Outside Witnesses to the Crucifixion (*Text confirmed*)

Several writers outside the Bible confirm that Jesus was put to death. Tacitus, quoted in Chapter 30, says He "suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus" (*Annals* 15.44). Josephus, in a passage from about A.D. 93, writes that "when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him" (*Antiquities* 18.3.3). That passage, called the Testimonium Flavianum, is marked Disputed by most scholars, because some of its lines sound like a Christian wrote them, such as "He was [the] Christ." Most scholars believe Josephus wrote a shorter, neutral version that a later Christian copyist added to. But nearly all agree that the core of the passage, including Jesus' condemnation by Pilate, comes from Josephus himself. Elsewhere Josephus mentions "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" (*Antiquities* 20.9.1), a passage almost all scholars accept as genuine.

What it shows: The death of Jesus was not an accident or a tragedy that God could not stop. It was the plan of God from the beginning, foretold in detail by the prophets, and carried out by the free choice of Jesus Himself. He "Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). It is finished.

157. The Burial of Jesus

Read it in: Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42
Where: A new tomb in a garden near Golgotha

That evening, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He was a respected member of the council who had not agreed with their decision, a good and righteous man who was looking for the kingdom of God. John says he had been a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the leaders. Now, when it was most dangerous, he stepped out of the shadows.

Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead. He called the centurion and asked, and when the centurion confirmed it, Pilate gave the body to Joseph. The Roman officer in charge of the execution certified the death. Jesus did not faint or swoon on the cross. He died.

Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus by night three years before, came too, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. That was enough for a king's burial. Together they took the body down, wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, as was the Jewish custom, and laid it in a new tomb cut out of the rock, in a garden near the place where He was crucified. No one had ever been laid there. Isaiah had said He would be with a rich man in His death (Isaiah 53:9). They rolled a great stone against the entrance.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching and saw where He was laid. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes, and on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

What it shows: The two men who buried Jesus had both been secret followers. The cross made them bold. And the burial matters. Paul writes that the gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The burial is the proof that He truly died, and a known tomb is the place where an empty tomb could be checked.

158. The Tomb Is Sealed and Guarded

Read it in: Matthew 27:62-66
Where: The tomb near Golgotha

The next day, the Sabbath, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate. They said, sir, we remember how that deceiver said while He was still alive, after three days I will rise. So order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, or His disciples may come and steal Him away and tell the people He has been raised from the dead. Pilate said, "You have a guard; go, make ***it*** as secure as you know ***how***" (Matthew 27:65). So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Notice the irony. His enemies remembered His promise to rise better than His friends did. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors in despair. The leaders were posting guards.

What it shows: Every effort was made to keep Jesus in the tomb: a great stone, an official seal, and a guard of soldiers. None of it would matter on Sunday morning.

Study Questions

1. Jesus' first word from the cross was a prayer for forgiveness for those killing Him. Who do you need to forgive in the same way?
2. The thief on the cross could do nothing to earn salvation. What does his story teach about how anyone is saved?
3. Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" What was happening in that moment? What does it mean that He was forsaken for you?
4. Jesus said, "It is finished." What was finished? Is there anything you are still trying to add to what He finished?
5. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had followed Jesus in secret. What made them bold at the cross? Is there any area where you have been a "secret" follower?

Part Eight: Risen and Reigning

Chapter 32: The Empty Tomb

> *And as they became terrified and were bowing the face to the ground, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living **One** among the dead? He is not here, but He has been raised. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,"*
>
> Luke 24:5-6 (SLB)

Early on Sunday morning, the first day of the week, everything changed. The four Gospels tell of the resurrection from different angles, and at first their accounts can seem hard to put together. Women come to the tomb at different moments, angels are mentioned as one or two, and people run back and forth between the tomb and the city. But that is exactly what you would expect on a morning when no one knew what was happening and everyone was running.

Here is one careful way to fit the accounts together. I hold it loosely in the details. The central facts are not in doubt: the tomb was empty, angels announced that He was risen, and Jesus Himself appeared alive to many people.

159. The Women Find the Stone Rolled Away

Read it in: Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8
Where: The tomb in the garden

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and other women bought spices so they could go and anoint the body. Very early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, they set out, and they reached the tomb as the sun was rising. On the way they asked one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? It was very large.

Matthew tells us what had already happened. There was a great earthquake, and an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. The guards shook with fear and became like dead men. The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the witnesses in.

When the women looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. John tells us Mary Magdalene, seeing the open tomb, ran at once to tell Peter and John (John 20:1-2). The others went inside. They did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Mark says they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side. Luke says two men in dazzling clothes stood by them. One angel spoke, and the writers who mention one are speaking of him.

> *And he says to them, "Do not be greatly alarmed. You are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, the **One** who has been crucified. He has been raised; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him."*
> (Mark 16:6)

Luke records that the angels reminded them of His words in Galilee: the Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise. And they remembered His words. The angel told them to go quickly and tell His disciples, and Peter, that He was going ahead of them to Galilee. Notice

“and Peter.” The disciple who had denied Him was named, by himself, so he would know he had not been written off.

They went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell His disciples.

A Note on the Ending of Mark

The two oldest complete copies of Mark we have end at Mark 16:8: they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. Most copies continue with verses 9 to 20, which the SLB and this book include. Many scholars believe those verses were added early to round out the book, since they summarize appearances told in the other Gospels. Others believe they are original, or that Mark’s original ending was lost. Nothing in this book rests on Mark 16:9-20 alone. Everything in those verses can be found in the other Gospels or in Acts.

What it shows: The first witnesses of the empty tomb were women. In that culture, a woman’s testimony was given little weight in court. If someone were making up a story, they would never have chosen women as the first witnesses. The Gospels tell it this way because this is how it happened.

160. Peter and John Run to the Tomb

Read it in: Luke 24:12; John 20:1-10
Where: From the city to the tomb

Mary Magdalene had run to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, John. She told them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:2). She still thought someone had moved the body.

Peter and John ran together to the tomb. John, probably younger, outran Peter and got there first. He bent down and saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Peter arrived and went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.

This detail matters. Grave robbers would not have taken the time to unwrap a body soaked in seventy-five pounds of spices and leave the cloths behind. And they certainly would not have folded the face cloth. Then John went in too, and John says of himself, he saw and believed (John 20:8). For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

What it shows: John believed before he ever saw the risen Jesus. The empty tomb and the grave cloths left behind were enough. Something had happened in that tomb that no thief could explain.

161. Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

Read it in: Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18
Where: The garden by the tomb

Mary Magdalene had followed Peter and John back to the tomb. When they left, she stayed outside, weeping. As she wept, she bent down to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the feet. They asked her, woman, why are you

weeping? She said, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:13).

She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. Her eyes were full of tears, it was early, and she was not expecting a living man. He asked her why she was weeping and whom she was looking for. Thinking He was the gardener, she said, sir, if you carried Him away, tell me where you laid Him, and I will take Him away.

> *Jesus says to her, “Mary!” She, having turned, says to Him, “Rabbouni!” which is to say, “Teacher!”* (John 20:16)

He said her name, and she knew Him. The Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name, and they know His voice (John 10:3-4).

Jesus told her not to hold on to Him, because He had not yet ascended to the Father. Go to My brothers and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. For the first time, Jesus called His disciples “My brothers.” Mary went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord (John 20:18).

What it shows: The first person to see the risen Lord was a woman out of whom He had cast seven demons. Jesus did not appear first to Pilate, or Caiaphas, or even Peter. He appeared to a weeping woman in a garden and called her by name. He knows your name too.

162. Jesus Meets the Other Women

Read it in: Matthew 28:9-10
Where: On the way from the tomb

As the other women were running to tell the disciples, Jesus met them and said, greetings. They came up, took hold of His feet, and worshiped Him. He said, “Do not fear; go, tell My brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Matthew 28:10).

Luke tells us that when the women told the apostles, these words seemed to them like nonsense, and they did not believe them (Luke 24:11).

What it shows: The women took hold of His feet. He was not a ghost or a vision. He had a real body. And the disciples’ first reaction was disbelief. They were not gullible people expecting a resurrection. They had to be convinced.

163. The Guards’ Report

Read it in: Matthew 28:11-15
Where: Jerusalem

While the women were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. The priests met with the elders and came up with a plan. They gave a large sum of money to the soldiers and told them to say, His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep. If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. The

soldiers took the money and did as they were told. Matthew adds that this story was still being told among the Jews when he wrote his Gospel.

Think about the story they agreed on. If the soldiers were asleep, how did they know who took the body? Roman guards could be executed for sleeping on duty. And the disciples, who had run away in fear on Thursday night, would have had to sneak past an armed guard, roll away a huge stone, unwrap the body, fold the cloths, and carry it off. Then they would have had to spend the rest of their lives, and give up their lives, preaching what they knew was a lie.

What it shows: The leaders' own explanation admits the tomb was empty. Even the enemies of Jesus did not claim His body was still there. They only tried to explain why it was not.

164. The Road to Emmaus

Read it in: Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32
Where: The road from Jerusalem to Emmaus

That same day, two followers of Jesus were walking to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. One was named Cleopas. As they talked about everything that had happened, Jesus Himself came near and walked with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

He asked what they were discussing, and they stood still, looking sad. Cleopas said, are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know what has happened there these days? They told Him about Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word, and how the chief priests and rulers handed Him over to be crucified. "But we were hoping that it is He who is about to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Some women had gone to the tomb and found it empty and seen angels, and some of their friends had found it just as the women said, but Him they did not see.

Then Jesus said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:25-27). What a Bible study that must have been.

When they came near the village, He acted as if He were going farther, but they urged Him to stay with them, because it was almost evening. He went in to stay with them. When He reclined at the table with them, He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight.

> *And they said to one another, "Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, and while He was opening the Scriptures to us?"* (Luke 24:32)

What it shows: Jesus explained His death and resurrection from the Old Testament. The whole Bible, from Moses on, points to Him. And the two disciples recognized Him when He broke bread, just as He had done at so many meals with His followers. He still opens the Scriptures to those who walk with Him, and He still makes Himself known.

165. Jesus Appears to Peter

Read it in: Luke 24:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:5
Where: Jerusalem

That same hour, the two got up and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem in the dark. They found the eleven and those with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has truly been raised, and He has appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). Then the two told what had happened on the road, and how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

We are not told anything about what Jesus said to Peter when He appeared to him alone. Paul lists this appearance first in his summary of the witnesses: He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5). Whatever passed between Jesus and the disciple who had denied Him three times, it was between the two of them.

What it shows: Jesus sought out Peter on the first day. Before the public restoration we will see by the lake, there was a private meeting. When we fail Him, Jesus comes looking for us.

166. Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Read it in: Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25
Where: A locked room in Jerusalem

That evening, the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. While they were still talking about Peter and the Emmaus road, Jesus Himself stood among them and said, “Peace to you” (John 20:19).

They were startled and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit. He said, why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. He showed them His hands and His side. And while they still could not believe for joy and were amazed, He asked, do you have anything here to eat? They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate it in front of them (Luke 24:41-43).

John says the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said again, peace to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. It was a promise and a preview of the full gift that would come at Pentecost.

Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the others told him, we have seen the Lord, he said, unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe (John 20:25).

What it shows: The risen Jesus was not a ghost, a vision, or a feeling. He could be touched, He showed His wounds, and He ate fish. His body was the same body that died, now raised and glorified. And His first words to the men who had abandoned Him were not a rebuke, but peace.

Study Questions

1. The angel said, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead?” Where are people today looking for life in the wrong places?
2. Why does it matter that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women, and that the disciples did not believe them at first?
3. Mary Magdalene knew Jesus when He said her name. What does it mean to you that the risen Lord knows you by name?
4. The two on the road to Emmaus said their hearts burned as Jesus opened the Scriptures. When has God’s Word burned in your heart like that?
5. Jesus’ first words to His frightened disciples were “Peace to you.” What fear do you need to bring to the risen Jesus today?

Chapter 33: Forty Days and the Ascension

> *And Jesus, having come up, spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you; and look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age." Amen.*
>
> Matthew 28:18-20 (SLB)

Luke tells us in Acts that after His suffering, Jesus presented Himself alive to the apostles by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The Gospels and Paul record about ten separate appearances in those weeks, in Jerusalem and in Galilee, to individuals, to small groups, and once to more than five hundred people at the same time. Then, on the Mount of Olives, He was taken up into heaven.

167. Thomas Sees and Believes

Read it in: John 20:26-31
Where: A room in Jerusalem, one week later

Eight days later, the next Sunday, the disciples were inside again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked. Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace to you. Then He turned to Thomas and offered him exactly what he had asked for. Put your finger here, and see My hands. Reach out your hand, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.

We are not told whether Thomas actually touched Him. We are told what he said.

> *And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus says to him, "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed. Blessed **are** those who have not seen and have believed."* (John 20:28-29)

Thomas, the doubter, gave the clearest confession of who Jesus is anywhere in the Gospels: my Lord and my God. And Jesus accepted it. He did not correct Thomas or say only God should be called God. He received the worship as His due.

Then John tells us why he wrote his whole Gospel, in the words at the top of this book. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book, but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

What it shows: Jesus did not shame Thomas for his doubt. He met him where he was and gave him the evidence he needed. And He gave a blessing to everyone who would come after: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. That blessing is for you.

168. Breakfast by the Sea, and Peter Restored

Read it in: John 21:1-25
Where: The shore of the Sea of Galilee

The disciples went north to Galilee, as Jesus had told them. One evening Peter said, I am going fishing. Six others went with him: Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, and two others. They fished all night and caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, but they did not know it was Jesus. He called out, children, do you have any fish? They answered no. He said, cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. They did, and they could not haul it in because of the number of fish. It was the same thing that had happened three years before, when Jesus first called them (Luke 5:1-11).

John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7). Peter threw on his outer garment and jumped into the sea. The others came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. When they got to shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said, bring some of the fish you just caught. Peter hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said, "Come, have breakfast" (John 21:12). And He took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish.

After breakfast, Jesus turned to Peter. The last time Peter stood by a charcoal fire, he had denied Jesus three times. Now, by another charcoal fire, Jesus asked him three times.

> *Therefore when they had had breakfast, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Simon* ***son*** *of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He says to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You dearly." He says to him, "Feed My lambs."* (John 21:15)

Jesus asked a second time, Simon son of Jonah, do you love Me? Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. Tend My sheep. And a third time, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He asked a third time. "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17). Jesus said, feed My sheep.

Three denials, three questions, three commissions. Jesus did not pretend the denials never happened. He walked Peter through them, one by one, and gave him back his calling. Then He told Peter how he would die: when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. John explains this was to show by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. Early Christian writers say Peter was crucified in Rome under the emperor Nero, about thirty years later. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me" (John 21:19), the same words He had spoken at the start.

Peter turned and saw John and asked, Lord, what about him? Jesus said, if I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.

John ends his Gospel by saying that he is the disciple who wrote these things, and that if everything Jesus did were written down, the world itself could not contain the books.

What it shows: Failure is not final with Jesus. He came looking for Peter, cooked him breakfast, and gave him back his calling. And He gave Peter a command that keeps us from comparing ourselves with others: what is that to you? You follow Me.

169. The Great Commission

Read it in: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18
Where: A mountain in Galilee

The eleven disciples went to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted. Some think this was the appearance Paul mentions to more than five hundred at once, since a large gathering in Galilee would fit, and "some doubted" may refer to others in the crowd seeing Him for the first time.

Jesus came and spoke to them the words at the top of this chapter. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And look, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Mark's longer ending records a similar command: go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15).

Notice the shape of it. The command rests on His authority and is wrapped in His presence. The main verb is "make disciples." Going, baptizing, and teaching are how disciples are made. And "all the nations" means every people group on earth. The church that began with eleven men on a hillside in Galilee was sent to the whole world.

What it shows: The mission Jesus gave His first disciples is still the mission of His church. Every Christian has a part in it. And no one goes alone. "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age."

170. Appearances to the Five Hundred, to James, and to Paul

Read it in: 1 Corinthians 15:6-8
Where: Galilee, Jerusalem, and the Damascus road

Paul, writing about A.D. 55, gives a list of witnesses to the resurrection that he had received from the earliest church, probably within a few years of the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). He says Jesus appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote. Paul was saying, in effect, go ask them. Then He appeared to James, His own brother, the one who had not believed in Him during His ministry. Then to all the apostles. And last of all, Paul says, He appeared to me, on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9).

What it shows: The resurrection was not a private experience of a few. It was seen by individuals and groups, by friends and by skeptics like James and Paul, over a period of weeks, in different places. That is why the early church could preach it boldly in the same city where Jesus had been buried.

171. His Final Words

Read it in: Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8
Where: Jerusalem

Back in Jerusalem near the end of the forty days, Jesus said to them, these are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Those were the three parts of the Hebrew Bible. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

He told them to stay in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. In Acts, Luke records Him saying it this way.

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to* ***the*** *uttermost part of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

The disciples still asked, Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Jesus did not say there would be no kingdom for Israel. He said, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority (Acts 1:6-7). Their job was not to calculate the date. It was to be His witnesses.

What it shows: Jesus' last instructions were about two things: the Scriptures and the mission. He opened their minds to see Himself in the whole Old Testament, and He sent them to the whole world in the power of the Spirit.

172. The Ascension

Read it in: Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12
Where: The Mount of Olives, near Bethany

Then He led them out as far as Bethany, on the Mount of Olives. He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. In Acts, Luke adds that as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

While they were gazing into heaven, two men in white robes stood by them.

> *who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."* (Acts 1:11)

Zechariah had prophesied that on the day the Lord comes, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). He left from that mountain, and He will return to it.

Mark tells us He was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19). The One who was mocked as a king with a reed in His hand now sits on the throne of the universe. And Luke ends his Gospel with a picture of joy: they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God (Luke 24:52-53).

Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came, just as He promised, and Peter stood up in Jerusalem and preached the risen Christ to the same city that had crucified Him. Three thousand believed that day (Acts 2). The story of Jesus in the Gospels became the story of His church in Acts, and it has not stopped since.

What it shows: The last time the disciples saw Jesus on earth, His hands were raised in blessing over them. He is not gone. He is reigning, interceding for His people (Hebrews 7:25), and He is coming back in the same way they saw Him go.

Study Questions

1. Thomas went from doubt to the confession "My Lord and my God." What doubts have you had, and how has Jesus met you in them?
2. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" If He asked you that question today, how would you answer? What would He tell you to do?
3. When Peter asked about John, Jesus said, "What is that to you? You follow Me." When are you tempted to compare your path with someone else's?
4. What part are you playing in the Great Commission? What would it look like to make one disciple?
5. The angels said Jesus will come back in the same way He went. How does the promise of His return change the way you live today?

Chapter 34: The Whole Story, and Your Place in It

> *Jesus Christ **is** the same yesterday and today and forever.*
>
> Hebrews 13:8 (SLB)

We have walked with Jesus from before the beginning of the world to the Mount of Olives, one event at a time. Now it is worth stepping back to look at the whole story at once, the way you would step back from a painting after studying each brushstroke. What does it all add up to? And what does it mean for you?

Putting the four Gospels in order showed me how steady Jesus was, even when crowds pressed Him and the cross was days away. He never lost track of a single person and finished every step of His Father's plan. The same Savior holds my life together today.

The Story in One Breath

The eternal Son of God, the Word through whom all things were made, became a man. He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, in the line of David, as the prophets said. He grew up in an ordinary town, worked with His hands, and obeyed His parents. At about thirty, He was baptized by John and declared by the Father to be His beloved Son. He was tempted in every way we are and did not sin.

For about three and a half years He preached the kingdom of God, healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, welcomed sinners, and trained twelve men. He claimed to forgive sins, to be Lord of the Sabbath, to be one with the Father, and to be the great I AM. The common people heard Him gladly. The religious leaders plotted to kill Him.

He set His face toward Jerusalem, rode in on a donkey, cleared the temple, answered every trap, washed His disciples' feet, and gave them the bread and the cup. He prayed in agony in Gethsemane, gave Himself up to His enemies, was tried and condemned though innocent, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He prayed for those who killed Him, saved a dying thief, and cried out, "It is finished." He died, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

On the third day, He rose. The tomb was empty, the grave clothes were left behind, and He appeared alive to Mary Magdalene, to the women, to Peter, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the eleven, to Thomas, to seven by the sea, to more than five hundred at once, to James, and at last to Paul. After forty days, He was taken up into heaven, where He reigns now at the right hand of God. And He is coming back.

That is the life of Christ, in order.

What His Life Shows Us About Him

After walking through the whole story, a few things stand out.

- **He is fully God.** He forgave sins, accepted worship, commanded the wind and the sea, raised the dead, and said, "before Abraham came into being, I am." His enemies understood His claims and wanted to stone Him for them. Thomas fell at His feet and called Him "my Lord and my God," and Jesus accepted it.

- **He is fully man.** He was born, grew, got tired, slept in a boat, was hungry in the wilderness, thirsty at a well and on the cross, wept at a friend's tomb, and sweat drops like blood in a garden. He knows what it is to be human from the inside.
- **He came for sinners.** Tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, a Samaritan woman with five husbands, a demon-possessed man in a graveyard, a thief on a cross. Again and again, the people the religious world wrote off were the ones He sought out. "I did not come to call ***the*** righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).
- **He came to die.** From John the Baptist's first word, "the Lamb of God," to Jesus' own repeated predictions, His death was never an accident. He gave His life as a ransom for many. He laid it down, no one took it from Him.
- **He kept every promise.** He said He would rise on the third day, and He did. The prophets said He would be born in Bethlehem, enter Jerusalem on a donkey, be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, have His hands and feet pierced, have lots cast for His clothing, have no bone broken, and be buried with the rich. Every one of those came true.

What Comes Next

The life of Christ is not over. The same Jesus who was taken up into heaven will come back in the same way. Here is how I understand the Bible's order of what is still ahead, the pre-tribulation view I have taught in my studies on Daniel and Revelation.

1. **The Rapture.** Jesus will come for His church. "because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command," the dead in Christ will rise first, and those who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). That is the fulfillment of the promise He made in the upper room: I am coming again and will receive you to Myself (John 14:3).
2. **The Tribulation.** Seven years of judgment will come on the earth, the time Jesus described on the Mount of Olives and Daniel called the seventieth week (Daniel 9:27), with the worst of it in the last half (Matthew 24:21).
3. **His return in glory.** At the end of the Tribulation, Jesus will come back to the earth with power and great glory, with His church, and His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Revelation 19:11-16).
4. **His kingdom.** He will reign on the throne of David, as Gabriel promised Mary, and of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33; Revelation 20:4-6).
5. **The new heaven and new earth.** God will dwell with His people. He will wipe away every tear, and death will be no more (Revelation 21:1-4).

Faithful Christians disagree about some of the timing, and I respect that. But every believer can say this with confidence: Jesus is coming back, and we must be ready.

Your Place in the Story

Every person who met Jesus in the Gospels had to decide what to do with Him. Peter followed. The rich young ruler walked away. Nicodemus came slowly. Judas betrayed Him. Pilate tried to wash his hands of Him. The thief on the cross asked Him to remember him. Thomas fell at His feet.

You are in the story too. And the question Jesus asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi is the question He asks you: "who do you say Me to be?" (Matthew 16:15).

If you have never trusted Jesus, this is what the whole story is for. You do not have to clean yourself up first. The leper, the tax collector, and the thief did not. Here is what the Bible says.

- **You have sinned.** "For all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Like the older brother and the younger brother in the story of the prodigal son, we have all gone our own way.
- **Sin brings death.** "For the wages of sin ***is*** death, but the gift of God ***is*** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).
- **Jesus died and rose for you.** "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He paid the debt and cried, "It is finished."
- **Trust Him, and you will be saved.** "that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of ***the*** dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

If you are ready to trust Him, you can tell Him so right now, in your own words. Here is a prayer you can pray, if it says what is in your heart.

> *Lord Jesus, I have read about Your life, and I believe You are who You said You are, the Son of God. I know I have sinned and I cannot save myself. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins and for rising from the dead. I turn from my sin, and I put my trust in You alone. Forgive me, make me new, and be my Lord. Help me to follow You for the rest of my life. Please help me not forget what You have done for me. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

If you prayed that and meant it, tell someone. Find a church that teaches the Bible. Get baptized. And keep reading the Gospels. You will find more in them every time.

If you already know Him, let this walk through His life do what it did for the two on the road to Emmaus. Let your heart burn again. Go back and read the Gospels slowly, with the harmony at the back of this book as your guide. Tell your own people what the Lord has done for you. Take up your cross. Wash someone's feet. Feed His sheep. And keep watching for His return.

> *The One who testifies these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Yes, come, Lord Jesus!*
> (Revelation 22:20)

Study Questions

1. Try to tell the whole life of Jesus in your own words in five minutes, the way you would tell it to a friend. What parts stand out most to you?
2. Which person in the Gospels do you most identify with, and why?
3. What did you learn about Jesus in this book that you did not know or had never noticed before?
4. Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" How has your answer changed as you have read His life in order?
5. How should the promise of His return shape the way you spend this week?

Appendix A: The Whole Harmony at a Glance

This table lists all 172 events in this book in the order I believe they happened, with the passage in each Gospel that tells it. A dash means that Gospel does not record the event. Where an event is told outside the four Gospels, the other passage is given in parentheses after the title.

No.	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1	Luke Tells Us Why He Wrote	-	-	1:1-4	-
2	The Word Who Was in the Beginning	-	-	-	1:1-18
3	The Family Line of Jesus	1:1-17	-	3:23-38	-
4	Gabriel Appears to Zechariah	-	-	1:5-25	-
5	Gabriel Appears to Mary	-	-	1:26-38	-
6	Mary Visits Elizabeth	-	-	1:39-56	-
7	John the Baptist Is Born	-	-	1:57-80	-
8	An Angel Speaks to Joseph	1:18-25	-	-	-
9	The Birth of Jesus	-	-	2:1-7	-
10	Angels Appear to the Shepherds	-	-	2:8-20	-
11	Jesus Is Circumcised and Named	-	-	2:21	-
12	Jesus Is Presented at the Temple	-	-	2:22-38	-
13	The Wise Men Come to Worship	2:1-12	-	-	-
14	The Escape to Egypt and the Killing at Bethlehem	2:13-18	-	-	-
15	The Return to Nazareth	2:19-23	-	2:39-40	-
16	Jesus in the Temple at Twelve	-	-	2:41-50	-
17	Growing Up in Nazareth	-	-	2:51-52	-
18	John the Baptist Prepares the Way	3:1-12	1:1-8	3:1-18	-
19	Jesus Is Baptized	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23	-
20	Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13	-
21	John Says He Is Not the Christ	-	-	-	1:19-28
22	“Look, the Lamb of God”	-	-	-	1:29-34
23	Andrew, John, and Simon Peter Meet Jesus	-	-	-	1:35-42
24	Philip and Nathanael	-	-	-	1:43-51
25	Water Turned to Wine at Cana	-	-	-	2:1-11
26	A Few Days in Capernaum	-	-	-	2:12
27	Jesus Clears the Temple	-	-	-	2:13-22
28	Many Believe Because of His Signs	-	-	-	2:23-25
29	Nicodemus Comes at Night	-	-	-	3:1-21
30	John the Baptist’s Last Witness	-	-	-	3:22-36
31	John Is Imprisoned and Jesus Leaves Judea	4:12	1:14	3:19-20	4:1-4

No.	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
32	The Woman at the Well	-	-	-	4:5-42
33	Jesus Arrives in Galilee Preaching	4:17	1:14-15	4:14-15	4:43-45
34	The Royal Official's Son Is Healed	-	-	-	4:46-54
35	Rejected at Nazareth	-	-	4:16-30	-
36	Jesus Makes Capernaum His Home	4:13-16	-	4:31	-
37	Jesus Calls Four Fishermen	4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	-
38	A Demon Driven Out in the Synagogue	-	1:21-28	4:31-37	-
39	Peter's Mother-in-Law and Many Others Healed	8:14-17	1:29-34	4:38-41	-
40	The First Preaching Tour of Galilee	4:23-25	1:35-39	4:42-44	-
41	A Leper Is Cleansed	8:2-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	-
42	A Paralyzed Man Lowered Through the Roof	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	-
43	Matthew Is Called	9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32	-
44	A Question About Fasting	9:14-17	2:18-22	5:33-39	-
45	Healing at the Pool of Bethesda	-	-	-	5:1-47
46	Picking Grain on the Sabbath	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	-
47	The Man with the Withered Hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	-
48	Crowds Follow Him to the Sea	12:15-21	3:7-12	-	-
49	The Twelve Are Chosen	-	3:13-19	6:12-16	-
50	The Sermon on the Mount	5:1-7:29	-	6:17-49	-
51	A Roman Officer's Faith	8:5-13	-	7:1-10	-
52	A Widow's Son Raised at Nain	-	-	7:11-17	-
53	John Sends Messengers from Prison	11:2-19	-	7:18-35	-
54	Woe to the Unrepentant Towns, and Rest for the Weary	11:20-30	-	-	-
55	A Sinful Woman Anoints His Feet	-	-	7:36-50	-
56	Women Who Followed and Supported Him	-	-	8:1-3	-
57	His Family Comes to Take Him Home	-	3:20-21	-	-
58	The Charge That He Works by Beelzebul	12:22-37	3:22-30	-	-
59	The Sign of Jonah	12:38-45	-	-	-
60	His True Family	12:46-50	3:31-35	8:19-21	-
61	The Parables of the Kingdom	13:1-53	4:1-34	8:4-18	-
62	Jesus Calms the Storm	8:18, 23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	-
63	A Man Set Free from a Legion of Demons	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	-
64	A Daughter Raised and a Woman Healed	9:18-26	5:21-43	8:40-56	-
65	Two Blind Men and a Mute Man	9:27-34	-	-	-
66	A Last Visit to Nazareth	13:54-58	6:1-6	-	-

No.	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
67	The Twelve Are Sent to Preach	9:35-11:1	6:6-13	9:1-6	-
68	Herod and the Death of John the Baptist	14:1-12	6:14-29	9:7-9	-
69	Five Thousand Fed	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-14
70	Jesus Walks on the Water	14:22-33	6:45-52	-	6:15-21
71	Healings at Gennesaret	14:34-36	6:53-56	-	-
72	The Bread of Life	-	-	-	6:22-71
73	Tradition or the Command of God	15:1-20	7:1-23	-	7:1
74	The Faith of a Canaanite Woman	15:21-28	7:24-30	-	-
75	A Deaf Man Healed and Many Others	15:29-31	7:31-37	-	-
76	Four Thousand Fed	15:32-39	8:1-10	-	-
77	A Sign Refused, and a Warning About Leaven	16:1-12	8:11-21	-	-
78	A Blind Man Healed in Two Stages	-	8:22-26	-	-
79	Peter Confesses That Jesus Is the Christ	16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-21	-
80	Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection	16:21-28	8:31-9:1	9:22-27	-
81	The Transfiguration	17:1-13	9:2-13	9:28-36	-
82	A Boy Set Free When the Disciples Could Not Help	17:14-20	9:14-29	9:37-43	-
83	Jesus Again Foretells His Death	17:22-23	9:30-32	9:43-45	-
84	The Coin in the Fish's Mouth	17:24-27	-	-	-
85	Who Is the Greatest?	18:1-35	9:33-50	9:46-50	-
86	His Brothers Taunt Him	-	-	-	7:2-9
87	The Journey South and the Cost of Following	8:19-22	-	9:51-62	7:10
88	Teaching at the Feast	-	-	-	7:11-52
89	The Woman Caught in Adultery	-	-	-	7:53-8:11
90	The Light of the World	-	-	-	8:12-59
91	The Seventy Sent Ahead	-	-	10:1-24	-
92	The Good Samaritan	-	-	10:25-37	-
93	Martha and Mary	-	-	10:38-42	-
94	Teach Us to Pray	-	-	11:1-13	-
95	More Conflict with the Pharisees	-	-	11:14-54	-
96	Warnings to Be Ready	-	-	12:1-59	-
97	Repent or Perish	-	-	13:1-21	-
98	A Man Born Blind Receives His Sight	-	-	-	9:1-41
99	The Good Shepherd	-	-	-	10:1-21
100	The Feast of Dedication	-	-	-	10:22-39
101	Jesus Withdraws Beyond the Jordan	-	-	-	10:40-42
102	The Narrow Door and a Lament over Jerusalem	-	-	13:22-35	-
103	Dinner at a Pharisee's House	-	-	14:1-24	-

No.	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
104	The Cost of Following Him	-	-	14:25-35	-
105	The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son	-	-	15:1-32	-
106	The Shrewd Manager, and the Rich Man and Lazarus	-	-	16:1-31	-
107	Forgiveness, Faith, and Duty	-	-	17:1-10	-
108	Lazarus Raised from the Dead	-	-	-	11:1-44
109	The Plot to Kill Jesus	-	-	-	11:45-54
110	Ten Lepers Cleansed	-	-	17:11-19	-
111	The Coming of the Kingdom	-	-	17:20-37	-
112	Two Parables on Prayer	-	-	18:1-14	-
113	A Question About Divorce	19:1-12	10:1-12	-	-
114	Jesus Blesses the Children	19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17	-
115	The Rich Young Ruler	19:16-20:16	10:17-31	18:18-30	-
116	Jesus Foretells His Death a Third Time	20:17-28	10:32-45	18:31-34	-
117	Blind Bartimaeus	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	-
118	Zacchaeus	-	-	19:1-10	-
119	The Parable of the Ten Minas	-	-	19:11-28	-
120	Arrival at Bethany	-	-	-	11:55-12:1, 9-11
121	Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany	26:6-13	14:3-9	-	12:2-8
122	The Entry into Jerusalem	21:1-11	11:1-11	19:29-44	12:12-19
123	The Fig Tree Cursed and the Temple Cleared	21:12-19	11:12-18	19:45-48	-
124	Greeks Ask to See Jesus	-	-	-	12:20-50
125	The Withered Fig Tree	21:19-22	11:19-25	-	-
126	“By What Authority?”	21:23-22:14	11:27-12:12	20:1-19	-
127	Taxes to Caesar	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26	-
128	The Sadducees and the Resurrection	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40	-
129	The Greatest Commandment	22:34-40	12:28-34	-	-
130	Whose Son Is the Christ?	22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44	-
131	Woe to the Scribes and Pharisees	23:1-39	12:38-40	20:45-47	-
132	The Widow’s Two Coins	-	12:41-44	21:1-4	-
133	The Olivet Discourse	24:1-25:46	13:1-37	21:5-38	-
134	Judas Agrees to Betray Him	26:1-5, 14-16	14:1-2, 10-11	22:1-6	-
135	Preparing the Passover	26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	-
136	The Meal Begins, and the Disciples Argue	26:20	14:17	22:14-16, 24-30	-
137	Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet	-	-	-	13:1-20
138	The Betrayer Is Named	26:21-25	14:18-21	22:21-23	13:21-30
139	The Lord’s Supper (also 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)	26:26-29	14:22-25	22:17-20	-
140	Peter’s Denial Foretold	26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-38	13:31-38

No.	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
141	The Upper Room Teaching	-	-	-	14:1-16:33
142	Jesus Prays for His Disciples and for Us	-	-	-	17:1-26
143	Agony in the Garden	26:30, 36-46	14:26, 32-42	22:39-46	18:1
144	The Arrest	26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-12
145	Before Annas	-	-	-	18:12-14, 19-23
146	Before Caiaphas and the Council	26:57, 59-68	14:53, 55-65	22:54, 63-65	18:24
147	Peter Denies Him Three Times	26:58, 69-75	14:54, 66-72	22:54-62	18:15-18, 25-27
148	The Council Condemns Him at Dawn	27:1	15:1	22:66-71	-
149	The Death of Judas (also Acts 1:18-19)	27:3-10	-	-	-
150	Before Pilate	27:2, 11-14	15:1-5	23:1-5	18:28-38
151	Before Herod	-	-	23:6-12	-
152	Pilate Hands Him Over to Be Crucified	27:15-26	15:6-15	23:13-25	18:39-19:16
153	The Soldiers Mock Him	27:27-30	15:16-19	-	19:2-3
154	The Way to Golgotha	27:31-34	15:20-23	23:26-33	19:16-17
155	Crucified	27:35-44	15:24-32	23:33-43	19:18-27
156	Darkness, and the Death of Jesus	27:45-56	15:33-41	23:44-49	19:28-37
157	The Burial of Jesus	27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-56	19:38-42
158	The Tomb Is Sealed and Guarded	27:62-66	-	-	-
159	The Women Find the Stone Rolled Away	28:1-8	16:1-8	24:1-8	-
160	Peter and John Run to the Tomb	-	-	24:12	20:1-10
161	Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene	-	16:9-11	-	20:11-18
162	Jesus Meets the Other Women	28:9-10	-	-	-
163	The Guards' Report	28:11-15	-	-	-
164	The Road to Emmaus	-	16:12-13	24:13-32	-
165	Jesus Appears to Peter (also 1 Corinthians 15:5)	-	-	24:33-35	-
166	Jesus Appears to the Disciples	-	16:14	24:36-43	20:19-25
167	Thomas Sees and Believes	-	-	-	20:26-31
168	Breakfast by the Sea, and Peter Restored	-	-	-	21:1-25
169	The Great Commission	28:16-20	16:15-18	-	-
170	Appearances to the Five Hundred, to James, and to Paul (also 1 Corinthians 15:6-8)	-	-	-	-
171	His Final Words (also Acts 1:3-8)	-	-	24:44-49	-
172	The Ascension (also Acts 1:9-12)	-	16:19-20	24:50-53	-

Appendix B: A Timeline of the Life of Christ

The Gospels give us the order of events far more clearly than they give us dates. The dates below are approximate. The first column follows the view I lean toward, with the crucifixion in A.D. 33. The second column follows the other common view, with the crucifixion in A.D. 30. Both views agree on the order, and both fit the four Passovers in John's Gospel, which give a ministry of about three and a half years.

Event	If the cross was in A.D. 33	If the cross was in A.D. 30
Jesus is born in Bethlehem	About 6 to 4 B.C.	About 6 to 4 B.C.
The flight to Egypt; Herod the Great dies	About 4 B.C.	About 4 B.C.
Jesus in the temple at twelve	About A.D. 7 to 9	About A.D. 7 to 9
John the Baptist begins to preach (Luke 3:1)	A.D. 28 or 29	A.D. 26 or 27
Jesus is baptized and tempted	Late A.D. 29	Late A.D. 26
First Passover; the temple cleared (John 2:13)	Spring A.D. 30	Spring A.D. 27
Nicodemus; the woman at the well	A.D. 30	A.D. 27
John is imprisoned; the Galilean ministry begins	Late A.D. 30 or early A.D. 31	Late A.D. 27 or early A.D. 28
The Sermon on the Mount; the Twelve chosen	A.D. 31	A.D. 28
The feeding of the 5,000, near Passover (John 6:4)	Spring A.D. 32	Spring A.D. 29
Peter's confession; the Transfiguration	Summer A.D. 32	Summer A.D. 29
The Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2)	October A.D. 32	October A.D. 29
The Feast of Dedication (John 10:22)	December A.D. 32	December A.D. 29
Lazarus raised; ministry in Perea	Early A.D. 33	Early A.D. 30
The triumphal entry	Sunday, March 29, A.D. 33	Sunday, April 2, A.D. 30
The Last Supper and Gethsemane	Thursday night, April 2, A.D. 33	Thursday night, April 6, A.D. 30
The crucifixion	Friday, April 3, A.D. 33	Friday, April 7, A.D. 30
The resurrection	Sunday, April 5, A.D. 33	Sunday, April 9, A.D. 30
The ascension, forty days later (Acts 1:3)	About May 14, A.D. 33	About May 18, A.D. 30
Pentecost (Acts 2:1)	About May 24, A.D. 33	About May 28, A.D. 30

The exact calendar dates for the last week depend on how the Jewish calendar fell in each year, which scholars work out from the new moon. Treat them as the dates most often given, not as settled facts.

Appendix C: Places Jesus Went

- **Bethlehem.** The town of David, about six miles south of Jerusalem, where Jesus was born (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7).
- **Egypt.** Where Joseph took Mary and the child to escape Herod (Matthew 2:13-15).
- **Nazareth.** A small hill town in lower Galilee, about seventy miles north of Jerusalem, where Jesus grew up and where He was twice rejected.
- **The Jordan River and Bethany beyond the Jordan.** Where John baptized, on the east side of the river (John 1:28).
- **The wilderness of Judea.** The dry, rocky land west of the Dead Sea, where Jesus was tempted for forty days.
- **Cana.** A village in Galilee near Nazareth, where Jesus turned water into wine and later healed an official's son from a distance.
- **Capernaum.** A fishing town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It became Jesus' home base during His Galilean ministry (Matthew 4:13).
- **The Sea of Galilee.** A freshwater lake about thirteen miles long, also called the Lake of Gennesaret and the Sea of Tiberias. Many of His miracles and much of His teaching happened on or near it.
- **Bethsaida.** A town near where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee, home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:44).
- **Sychar in Samaria.** Where Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well (John 4:5-6).
- **Nain.** A village in southern Galilee where Jesus raised a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17).
- **The country of the Gerasenes.** The eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the mostly Gentile region called the Decapolis, where Jesus freed the demon-possessed man.
- **Tyre and Sidon.** Gentile port cities on the Mediterranean coast, where Jesus healed the Canaanite woman's daughter.
- **Caesarea Philippi.** A town near the springs of the Jordan at the foot of Mount Hermon, where Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ.
- **The mountain of the Transfiguration.** The Gospels call it only a high mountain. Tradition names Mount Tabor. Many scholars think Mount Hermon fits better, since it stands near Caesarea Philippi.
- **Perea.** The land east of the Jordan, where Jesus taught during the last months before the cross.
- **Jericho.** An oasis city about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem, where Jesus healed Bartimaeus and called Zacchaeus.
- **Ephraim.** A town near the wilderness where Jesus withdrew after raising Lazarus (John 11:54).
- **Bethany.** A village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles from Jerusalem (John 11:18), home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
- **Jerusalem.** The holy city, where Jesus came for the feasts, cleared the temple, taught in its courts, and was crucified and raised.
- **The Mount of Olives and Gethsemane.** The ridge east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. Gethsemane, an olive grove on its slope, is where Jesus prayed and was arrested. He ascended from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).
- **Golgotha.** The place of the skull, just outside the city wall, where Jesus was crucified. The tomb was in a garden nearby (John 19:41).
- **Emmaus.** A village about seven miles from Jerusalem, where the risen Jesus broke bread with two disciples (Luke 24:13).

Appendix D: Words to Know

- **Apostle.** One who is sent. The name Jesus gave the Twelve (Luke 6:13).
- **Christ.** The Greek word for the Hebrew Messiah, meaning Anointed One, the King God promised to send.
- **Denarius.** A Roman silver coin, about a day's wage for a laborer.
- **Disciple.** A learner or follower who lives with and learns from a teacher.
- **Feast of Dedication.** The winter feast remembering the cleansing of the temple in 164 B.C., known today as Hanukkah (John 10:22).
- **Feast of Tabernacles.** The fall feast when Israel lived in booths to remember the wilderness years (John 7:2).
- **Gospel.** Good news. Also the name for each of the four books about Jesus.
- **Harmony.** An arrangement of the four Gospels into one account in the order the events happened.
- **Kingdom of God.** God's rule. It came near in the person of Jesus, and it will come in full when He returns to reign.
- **Ossuary.** A stone box for bones. Jewish families in Jesus' day placed a person's bones in one about a year after burial.
- **Parable.** A story from everyday life that teaches a truth about God and His kingdom.
- **Passover.** The spring feast remembering Israel's rescue from Egypt, when the blood of a lamb protected each household (Exodus 12). Jesus died at Passover.
- **Pharisees.** A strict Jewish party that kept the Law of Moses along with a large body of oral tradition.
- **Preparation Day.** The day before the Sabbath, our Friday, when meals and work were finished ahead of the day of rest (Mark 15:42).
- **Rabbi.** Teacher. A title of respect.
- **Rapture.** The event when Jesus comes for His church and believers are caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The word comes from the Latin for caught up.
- **Sabbath.** The seventh day, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, set apart for rest.
- **Sadducees.** A Jewish party tied to the priestly families. They did not believe in the resurrection (Matthew 22:23).
- **Samaritans.** People of the region between Judea and Galilee, of mixed descent, who worshiped on Mount Gerizim. Most Jews of the day avoided them.
- **Sanhedrin.** The ruling council of the Jews in Jerusalem, led by the high priest.
- **Scribes.** Experts in the Law of Moses who copied, taught, and applied it.
- **Son of Man.** The title Jesus used for Himself more than any other, taken from Daniel 7:13-14.
- **Synagogue.** A local meeting place for prayer and the reading of Scripture.
- **Synoptic Gospels.** Matthew, Mark, and Luke, called that because they tell much of the story from a similar point of view.
- **Tax collector.** A Jew who collected taxes for Rome or for Herod, often charging extra. They were seen as traitors.
- **Tetrarch.** A ruler over part of a region. Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.
- **Tribulation.** The seven years of judgment on the earth before Jesus returns in glory, the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27.

Appendix E: Sources and Credits

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Quotations from outside the Bible were checked word for word against these public domain translations.

- **Flavius Josephus** (about A.D. 37 to 100), *Antiquities of the Jews and The Jewish War, translated by William Whiston (1737).* Cited in chapters 3, 4, 5, 7, 16, 24, 25, 28, and 31.
- **Cornelius Tacitus** (about A.D. 56 to 120), *Annals*, translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (1876). Cited in chapters 30 and 31.

Other sources named in the text:

- **Tatian** (wrote about A.D. 170), whose *Diatessaron* was the first known harmony of the four Gospels.
- **Eusebius** (about A.D. 260 to 339), bishop of Caesarea, whose *Church History* (3.5.3) records that the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella before the Romans destroyed the city in A.D. 70.
- **Archaeology.** The Pilate stone found at Caesarea in 1961, the burial of Jehohanan found in Jerusalem in 1968, the site at Kursi uncovered in 1970, the Caiaphas ossuary found in 1990, the Pool of Siloam uncovered in 2004, and the excavations at the Pool of Bethesda and the synagogue at Capernaum. These are described from published reports and are labeled Background in the text.

Each outside source in this book carries one of three labels. **Text confirmed means the quoted words were checked against a published translation of the ancient text. Disputed** means scholars disagree about the source or what it means. **Background** means it adds context but does not prove the Bible's account by itself.

About This Book

The Life of Christ in Order weaves Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into one story, told in the order the events happened. It follows Jesus from before the beginning of the world, through His birth in Bethlehem, His baptism and temptation, three and a half years of teaching and miracles, the last week in Jerusalem, the cross, the empty tomb, and the ascension from the Mount of Olives.

The book is built around 172 numbered events. Each one tells you where to read it in every Gospel that records it and where it happened, retells the event in plain words, and ends with what it shows us about Jesus. Where the Gospels tell an event differently, the book explains how the accounts fit together. Where history and archaeology add something, from Josephus and Tacitus to the Pilate stone and the Pool of Siloam, the outside source is labeled honestly as confirmed, disputed, or background.

Every chapter ends with study questions for personal reading or small groups. The back of the book has the whole harmony in one table, a timeline, the places Jesus went, words to know, the sources used, and a Scripture index.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Scripture Index

This index lists every Bible passage that is named with its book somewhere in the text, with the pages where it appears.

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