MATTHEW

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Look, your King comes: the promised Son of David,
His kingdom, His cross, and His empty tomb

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Matthew Bible Study

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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 Study

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 study 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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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the Gospel of Matthew. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I came to see Jesus not only as my Savior but as my King through years of studying who He is. The more I studied, the clearer it became that He is Lord over all of it. Matthew presents Jesus as King. That is who I answer to.

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, and it is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. It opens with a family line that reaches back to Abraham and David, and it closes with the risen Jesus sending His followers to all the nations. In between, Matthew shows us the King: His birth, His teaching, His power, His rejection, His death, and His resurrection. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Matthew. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Matthew. Matthew was a Jewish man writing first to Jewish readers, and he expects his readers to know the Old Testament. Again and again he says that something happened so that what the prophets said "might be fulfilled." If we skip over those Old Testament roots, we miss the main point of the book: Jesus is the King God promised to Israel. Matthew also arranges his book with care. He gathers Jesus' teaching into five long sermons, and he places them between the stories of what Jesus did. When we read a saying of Jesus, we should ask where it sits in that flow and who He was speaking to at the time.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Matthew is a record of real events, written by a man who walked with Jesus, and this study takes him at his word. Jesus really was born of a virgin, really healed the

sick and calmed the storm, really died on a Roman cross, and really rose bodily from the dead. When Jesus tells a parable, the text tells us it is a parable, and we read it that way. When Matthew tells us what happened, we read it as history. And when God makes a promise to Israel, I believe He means it and will keep it.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Matthew has 28 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: twenty-eight weeks, or about seven months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together. A few chapters are long (chapters 5, 10, 13, 26 and 27), and a group may want to give those two weeks each.
- Three shorter terms: chapters 1 to 10 (the birth of the King, His sermon, and His power), chapters 11 to 20 (the King rejected and the training of the twelve), and chapters 21 to 28 (the King in Jerusalem, His death and His resurrection). A break between terms gives the group time to rest and invite others.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be

answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Matthew touch painful subjects: the killing of the children of Bethlehem (2:16-18), lust, divorce and remarriage (5:27-32 and 19:3-12), families divided over Jesus (10:34-37), sin in the church and forgiveness (18:15-35), and the suffering and death of Jesus (chapters 26 and 27). If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Someone in your group may have lost a child, been through a divorce, or been hurt by a family member or a church. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the Gospel of Matthew. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Matthew

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament and the first of the four Gospels. The word gospel means good news. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell the good news of Jesus Christ from a different angle. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the Synoptic Gospels, from a word that means seen together, because they tell many of the same events in much the same order. John writes in a different way. Matthew is the Gospel of the King. He shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the promised Son of David who has the right to sit on David's throne.

Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than any other Gospel writer. Over and over he uses words like these: "so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled" (1:22). Bible teachers call these the fulfillment formulas. They show that Jesus' birth, His home towns, His ministry of healing, His teaching in parables, His entry into Jerusalem, and even His betrayal were all foretold. Matthew wants his readers to see that the God of Israel has kept His word.

Matthew also uses a phrase no other New Testament writer uses: "the kingdom of the heavens." Many Bibles translate it the kingdom of heaven. It appears over thirty times in Matthew. Mark and Luke say "the kingdom of God" in the same places, so the two phrases mean the same thing. Many Jewish people in that day spoke of heaven in place of saying the name of God out of reverence, and Matthew, writing for Jewish readers, does the same. The kingdom is God's rule through His King. It was near in the person of Jesus, it is entered now by repentance and faith, and it will come in its full, visible form on the earth when Jesus returns to reign.

Matthew gives us the heart of his message in Peter's confession:

Matthew 16:16 (SLB)

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matthew also arranges his book around five long sermons of Jesus: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5 to 7), the sending of the twelve (chapter 10), the parables of the kingdom (chapter 13), the teaching on greatness and forgiveness (chapter 18), and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24 and 25). Each one ends with nearly the same words: "when Jesus had finished" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

Matthew has 28 chapters and 1,071 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Birth of the King (chapters 1 and 2)

- Chapter 1: The King's Family Line and Birth
- Chapter 2: The Wise Men and the Flight to Egypt

Part Two: The King Prepares (chapters 3 and 4)

- Chapter 3: John the Baptist Prepares the Way
- Chapter 4: Tested in the Wilderness

Part Three: The King's Teaching (chapters 5 to 7)

- Chapter 5: The Sermon on the Mount: The Heart of the Law
- Chapter 6: The Sermon on the Mount: Giving, Prayer, and Treasure
- Chapter 7: The Sermon on the Mount: Two Roads

Part Four: The King's Power and His Messengers (chapters 8 to 10)

- Chapter 8: Authority Over Sickness and Storm
- Chapter 9: Authority to Forgive
- Chapter 10: The Twelve Sent Out

Part Five: The King Opposed (chapters 11 to 13)

- Chapter 11: John's Question and Jesus' Invitation
- Chapter 12: Lord of the Sabbath
- Chapter 13: Parables of the Kingdom

Part Six: The King Trains His Disciples (chapters 14 to 18)

- Chapter 14: Five Thousand Fed and a Walk on the Water
- Chapter 15: Clean Hearts and a Gentile Mother's Faith
- Chapter 16: Peter's Confession
- Chapter 17: The Transfiguration
- Chapter 18: Greatness and Forgiveness

Part Seven: On the Road to Jerusalem (chapters 19 and 20)

- Chapter 19: Marriage, Children, and Riches
- Chapter 20: The Last Will Be First

Part Eight: The King in Jerusalem (chapters 21 to 25)

- Chapter 21: The King Comes to Jerusalem
- Chapter 22: Questions in the Temple
- Chapter 23: Woes to the Hypocrites
- Chapter 24: The Olivet Discourse: Signs of His Coming
- Chapter 25: Be Ready: Virgins, Talents, Sheep and Goats

Part Nine: The Death and Resurrection of the King (chapters 26 to 28)

- Chapter 26: The Last Supper and Gethsemane
- Chapter 27: The Crucifixion
- Chapter 28: He Is Risen

Background of the Book

Author: The book itself does not name its author, but the early church agreed from the start that Matthew wrote it. Matthew, also called Levi, was a tax collector whom Jesus called to follow Him (9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), and he became one of the twelve apostles (10:3). Tax collectors worked for Rome and were hated by their own people, so it is striking that Matthew is the only Gospel writer who calls him "Matthew the tax collector" (10:3). He did not hide where he came from. A tax collector would also be used to keeping careful records, and Matthew's Gospel is carefully ordered. Some modern scholars doubt that Matthew wrote it, mostly because they believe the writer used Mark's Gospel and think an apostle would not need to. I take the early church's witness at its word. Nothing in the book argues against it, and it is not hard to believe that an apostle would gladly use another faithful account alongside what he saw himself.

Who it was written to: Matthew wrote mainly for Jewish readers. He does not stop to explain Jewish customs the way Mark does. He quotes the Old Testament more than any other Gospel writer, traces Jesus' line back to Abraham and David, and keeps showing that Jesus fulfills what the prophets said. But Matthew's Gospel is not only for Jews. Gentiles show up again and again with surprising faith: the Magi (2:1-12), a Roman centurion (8:5-13), a Canaanite mother (15:21-28), and a centurion at the cross (27:54). The book ends with Jesus sending His disciples to "make disciples of all the nations" (28:19).

The setting: Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and grew up in Nazareth in Galilee, in the north. Most of His ministry in Matthew takes place around the Sea of Galilee, with Capernaum as His home base, before He goes south to Jerusalem for the last week of His life. The land was under the rule of Rome. Herod the Great ruled as king under Rome when Jesus was born, and after Herod died his sons ruled parts of the land. Judea was later governed by a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate in Jesus' day. Among the Jewish people there were several religious groups we will meet often: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes. I will explain each of them the first time they appear.

When and where it was written: Matthew does not tell us when he wrote. Most of those who hold that Matthew wrote it date it about A.D. 50 to 60, before the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus' words about the temple's coming fall (24:1-2) read like a prophecy still waiting to happen, not a report of something already past. Scripture does not tell us where Matthew wrote. Some suggest Judea, and others suggest Antioch in Syria, where there was a large church with both Jewish and Gentile believers (Acts 11:19-26).

The kingdom of heaven: Matthew speaks of "the kingdom of the heavens" more than thirty times. It means the rule of God, from heaven, through His King. In Matthew it has a present side and a future side. It was "drawn near" when the King Himself came (3:2; 4:17). People enter it now by repentance and faith, and those who belong to it live in a new way (chapters 5 to 7). But its full, visible form is still future. The Old Testament prophets promised a King from David's line who would reign over Israel and the nations on the earth (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:6-7). I believe that promise will be kept to the letter when Jesus returns in glory and reigns for a

thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). Israel's leaders rejected the King at His first coming, but God has not cast off His people. There is still a future for the nation of Israel (Romans 11:25-29).

Purpose: Matthew writes to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah and King of the Jews, the Son of David and the Son of God. He shows how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, how Israel's leaders rejected Him, and how He went to the cross to "give His life as a ransom for many" (20:28). Then He rose from the dead with "All authority" (28:18) and sent His followers into all the world. Matthew wants every reader to bow before this King, follow Him, and tell others about Him.

Chapter 1: The King's Family Line and Birth

Scripture

1:1-17 ***The*** book of ***the*** genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers. And Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez fathered Hezron, and Hezron fathered Aram. And Aram fathered Amminadab, and Amminadab fathered Nahshon, and Nahshon fathered Salmon. And Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, and Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David the king. And David the king fathered Solomon by the ***wife*** of Uriah. And Solomon fathered Rehoboam, and Rehoboam fathered Abijah, and Abijah fathered Asa. And Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat fathered Jehoram, and Jehoram fathered Uzziah. And Uzziah fathered Jotham, and Jotham fathered Ahaz, and Ahaz fathered Hezekiah. And Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, and Manasseh fathered Amon, and Amon fathered Josiah. And Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers at ***the time of*** the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, and Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel. And Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, and Abiud fathered Eliakim, and Eliakim fathered Azor. And Azor fathered Zadok, and Zadok fathered Akim, and Akim fathered Eliud. And Eliud fathered Eleazar, and Eleazar fathered Matthan, and Matthan fathered Jacob. And Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David ***are*** fourteen generations, and from David until the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon until the Christ fourteen generations.

1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was thus: for when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found having ***a child*** in ***the*** womb from ***the*** Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being righteous and not willing to make her a public example, purposed to send her away secretly. And while he was pondering these things, look, an angel of ***the*** Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary ***as*** your wife, for that which has been conceived in her is 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." And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, the virgin will have ***a child*** in ***the*** womb, and will bear a son, and they will call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." And Joseph, having been awakened from sleep, did as the angel of ***the*** Lord commanded him, and took his wife, and he was not knowing her until she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called His name Jesus.

Chapter 1 Preview

Most of us would skip a list of names if we found one at the start of a book. Matthew puts one there on purpose. Before he tells us anything Jesus said or did, he shows us who Jesus is: the son of David, the royal line of Israel's kings, and the son of Abraham, the man God promised would bless all the nations. The family line is Matthew's way of showing us the rightful King.

Then Matthew tells us how Jesus was born. Mary was engaged to Joseph, and before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, a righteous man, planned to

end the engagement quietly, but an angel told him the truth in a dream. The child would be called Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins. Matthew shows us that this was what Isaiah had promised long before: a virgin would bear a son, and He would be "God with us."

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 ***The*** *book of* ***the*** *genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.*

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." A genealogy is a family line, a record of who a person descends from. For a Jewish reader, this was not boring. It was a man's proof of who he was and what he had a right to.

Matthew gives Jesus three names right away. Jesus was His given name. Christ is a title, not a last name. It comes from the Greek word Christos, which means anointed one. In Hebrew the same title is Messiah. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed with oil when God set them apart for their work. The Jewish people were waiting for the Anointed One, the great King God had promised.

Then Matthew calls Jesus "son of David, son of Abraham." Those are the two men God made His biggest promises to. God promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). God promised David that one of his sons would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Matthew is telling us from the first line that Jesus is the One both promises were pointing to.

1:2-6 *Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers. And Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez fathered Hezron, and Hezron fathered Aram. And Aram fathered Amminadab, and Amminadab fathered Nahshon, and Nahshon fathered Salmon. And Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, and Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David the king. And David the king fathered Solomon by the* ***wife*** *of Uriah.*

The first part of the list runs from Abraham to King David. Most of these names come from the history in Genesis, Ruth and 1 Chronicles (1 Chronicles 1:34; 2:1-15).

Did you notice the women? Jewish family lines usually listed only the men. Matthew names four women before he gets to Mary: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and "the wife of Uriah," who was Bathsheba. Tamar had a child by her father-in-law Judah (Genesis 38). Rahab was a Canaanite who had lived as a harlot in Jericho (Joshua 2). Ruth was from Moab, a nation that was not allowed into the assembly of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3). Bathsheba was the woman David took in adultery before he had her husband killed (2 Samuel 11).

Why would Matthew put these women in the King's family line? I believe he wants us to see grace. God did not build the line of His Son out of perfect people. He used sinners and outsiders, Gentiles and Jews. Matthew does not even call Bathsheba by name. He calls her the wife of Uriah, as if to remind us of David's sin. If God could work through that family, He can work through yours, and He can save you.

Old Testament links: 1 Chronicles 2:4 (alluded to); 2 Samuel 12:24 (alluded to); 1 Chronicles 2:10 (alluded to); Ruth 4:18 (alluded to); Ruth 4:21 (alluded to); 1 Chronicles 1:34 (alluded to)

1:7-11 *And Solomon fathered Rehoboam, and Rehoboam fathered Abijah, and Abijah fathered Asa. And Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat fathered Jehoram, and Jehoram fathered Uzziah. And Uzziah fathered Jotham, and Jotham fathered Ahaz, and Ahaz fathered Hezekiah. And Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, and Manasseh fathered Amon, and Amon fathered Josiah. And Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers at* ***the time of*** *the deportation to Babylon.*

This part of the list covers the kings of Judah from Solomon down to the time Babylon carried the people away. Some of these kings were godly, like Hezekiah and Josiah. Many were wicked, like Manasseh, who sacrificed his own son to a false god (2 Kings 21:1-6). God kept His promise to David through all of them.

If you compare this list with 1 Kings and 2 Kings, you will see that Matthew leaves out a few names. Between Jehoram and Uzziah there were three more kings: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (2 Kings 8:24; 12:21; 14:21). That was not a mistake. Jewish family lines often skipped generations, and the word "fathered" can mean was the ancestor of. Matthew shaped his list into three groups of fourteen to make it easy to remember (1:17).

"The deportation to Babylon" was the great disaster of Israel's history. In 586 B.C. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and carried the people away. From that day on, no son of David sat on a throne in Jerusalem. That is why this family line matters so much. The throne had been empty for almost six hundred years.

Old Testament links: 1 Chronicles 3:10 (alluded to); 1 Chronicles 3:13-14 (alluded to); 1 Chronicles 3:15-16 (alluded to); Jeremiah 27:20 (alluded to); 1 Kings 15:24 (alluded to); 1 Kings 22:50 (alluded to)

1:12-16 *And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, and Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel. And Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, and Abiud fathered Eliakim, and Eliakim fathered Azor. And Azor fathered Zadok, and Zadok fathered Akim, and Akim fathered Eliud. And Eliud fathered Eleazar, and Eleazar fathered Matthan, and Matthan fathered Jacob. And Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

The last part of the list runs from the exile to Jesus. Jeconiah was a king of Judah so wicked that God said none of his descendants would prosper sitting on David's throne (Jeremiah 22:30). Zerubbabel led the people back from Babylon and rebuilt the temple (Ezra 3:8). Most of the names after him are not found anywhere else in the Bible. Matthew may have taken them from family records kept by Joseph's family.

Look closely at verse 16. All the way down the list, the pattern is the same: so-and-so "fathered" so-and-so. But when Matthew gets to Joseph, he changes the words. He does not say Joseph fathered Jesus. He calls Joseph "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." In Greek the word for whom is feminine. Jesus was born of Mary, not fathered by Joseph. Matthew is already getting us ready for the virgin birth.

Luke also gives a family line for Jesus (Luke 3:23-38), and it is different from Matthew's after David. Matthew traces the line through Solomon, and Luke traces it through another son of David named Nathan. Bible teachers have two common ways to explain this. Many believe Matthew gives Joseph's line, the legal and royal line, while Luke gives Mary's line, with Joseph named in Luke as Heli's son-in-law. Others believe both lists are Joseph's, with one showing his legal line to the throne and the other his natural line, perhaps through a custom like the one in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, where a man raised up a son for his brother who died. Either way, Jesus is a true son of David. Through Joseph, His legal father, He has the legal right to David's throne. Through Mary, He is David's flesh and blood. And because Jesus was not Joseph's natural son, the curse on Jeconiah's descendants did not fall on Him.

Old Testament links: 1 Chronicles 3:17 (alluded to); Ezra 3:2 (alluded to)

1:17 *So all the generations from Abraham to David **are** fourteen generations, and from David until the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon until the Christ fourteen generations.*

Matthew sums up his list in three groups of fourteen generations. The first runs from Abraham to David, the rise of the nation to its king. The second runs from David to the exile, the fall of the kingdom. The third runs from the exile to Christ, the coming of the true King.

Why fourteen? Matthew does not tell us. Some point out that the Hebrew letters in the name David add up to fourteen, since Hebrew letters were also used as numbers. That may be part of it, but we can't be sure. What we can say is that the list is carefully arranged to show that history was moving toward a goal. God was not caught off guard by the exile, and He did not forget His promise. When the time was right, He sent the King.

1:18 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was thus: for when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found having **a child** in **the** womb from **the** Holy Spirit.*

Now Matthew tells us how Jesus was born. Mary "had been betrothed to Joseph." A betrothal in that day was much stronger than an engagement today. It was a binding agreement, often made by the families, and it usually lasted about a year. The couple were called husband and wife, and only a divorce could end it, but they did not yet live together or come together as husband and wife.

During that time Mary "was found having a child in the womb from the Holy Spirit." Matthew says it plainly. Mary was a virgin. No man was the father of her child. The Holy Spirit formed the body of Jesus in her womb. Luke tells the same story from Mary's side, where the angel tells her that the power of the Most High would overshadow her (Luke 1:34-35).

The virgin birth is not a small detail. Jesus did not begin to exist in Mary's womb. As the Son of God He has always existed (John 1:1-2). At His conception He took on a full human nature, without ceasing to be God. That is why He could be both truly God and truly man, and why He could take our place without sin of His own.

1:19 *And Joseph her husband, being righteous and not willing to make her a public example, purposed to send her away secretly.*

Put yourself in Joseph's place. The woman he was going to marry was pregnant, and he knew the child was not his. Under the Law, he could have shamed her in public, and the Law even allowed death for unfaithfulness during a betrothal (Deuteronomy 22:23-24), though in Joseph's day that was rarely carried out.

Joseph was "righteous," which means he wanted to do what was right before God. But he was also kind. He was "not willing to make her a public example." So he planned to "send her away secretly," to give her a quiet divorce in front of a few witnesses. Joseph shows us that being righteous and being merciful go together. He did not want to hurt Mary, even when he thought she had wronged him.

1:20 *And while he was pondering these things, look, an angel of **the** Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary **as** your wife, for that which has been conceived in her is from **the** Holy Spirit.*

God stepped in. "While he was pondering these things," an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. Joseph had not rushed. He was thinking it through, and God met him there.

The angel called him "Joseph, son of David." That was no accident. Joseph was in the royal line, and the child he would raise would be the heir. The angel told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because the child "is from the Holy Spirit." Mary had not been unfaithful. She was carrying the Son of God. Joseph would have to live with the whispers of people who did not believe it. Many of us are called to obey God when others don't understand.

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

"You will call His name Jesus." Naming the child was the father's job. By naming Him, Joseph would adopt Jesus as his legal son and give Him his place in the line of David.

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua, or Joshua, which means the Lord saves. The angel tells us why He would have that name: "for He Himself will save His people from their sins." Many in Israel wanted a Messiah who would save them from Rome. Jesus came to save them from something much worse, their sins. That is still our greatest need today. Our worst enemy is not a government or a person. It is our own sin, and only Jesus can save us from it.

1:22-23 *And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, the virgin will have **a child** in **the** womb, and will bear a son, and they will call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

Here is the first of Matthew's fulfillment formulas: "so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled." Matthew uses words like this again and again. He wants his Jewish readers to see that Jesus is the One the Scriptures promised.

The quote is from Isaiah 7:14. Seven hundred years before Jesus, Isaiah gave a sign to King Ahaz of the house of David: "the virgin will have a child in the womb, and will bear a son." Some say the Hebrew word in Isaiah only means young woman. But the Jewish scholars who translated Isaiah into Greek before Jesus was born chose the Greek word parthenos, which means virgin, and Matthew uses that same word. Under the Holy Spirit, Matthew tells us exactly what Isaiah meant. Bible teachers differ on whether Isaiah's sign also had a near meaning in Ahaz's own day, but Matthew makes it clear that its full meaning is the virgin birth of Jesus.

His name would be "Immanuel," which Matthew translates for us: "God with us." Jesus was not just a messenger from God. He was God Himself, come to live among us. Matthew begins his Gospel with "God with us," and he ends it with Jesus saying, "I am with you all the days" (28:20).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 7:14 (quoted)

1:24-25 *And Joseph, having been awakened from sleep, did as the angel of **the** Lord commanded him, and took his wife, and he was not knowing her until she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called His name Jesus.*

Joseph woke up and obeyed. He did not argue or ask for a second sign. He "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." Joseph does not say a single word in the whole Bible, but his actions say a great deal. He was a man of quiet, ready obedience.

He "took his wife," bringing Mary into his home as his wife. But "he was not knowing her until she had brought forth her firstborn son." To know in this way is the Bible's polite way of speaking of the physical union of husband and wife (Genesis 4:1). Joseph kept Mary a virgin until Jesus was born, so no one could doubt that the child was from God. The word until points to a normal marriage after that, and Matthew later names Jesus' brothers and mentions His sisters (13:55-56). Some churches teach that Mary stayed a virgin all her life, but I believe the plain reading of the text is that she and Joseph had other children.

Then Joseph "called His name Jesus," just as the angel said. With that, the Son of God took His place as the legal son of Joseph, heir to the throne of David.

Chapter 1 Summary

Matthew opens with the family line of Jesus Christ, son of David and son of Abraham. He traces the line from Abraham to David, from David to the exile in Babylon, and from the exile to Christ, in three groups of fourteen generations. He names four women in the line, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah, showing the grace of God at work through sinners and outsiders. When

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Joseph, a righteous and merciful man, planned to divorce her quietly, but an angel told him in a dream to take Mary as his wife and to name the child Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins. All of this fulfilled Isaiah's promise that the virgin would bear a son called Immanuel, God with us. Joseph obeyed, kept Mary a virgin until the birth, and named the child Jesus.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What two men does Matthew name in the first verse, and what promises had God made to each of them? (1:1)

2. Which four women does Matthew name in the family line, and what does that tell you about God's grace? (1:3-6)

3. Why was the deportation to Babylon such an important turning point in Israel's history? (1:11-12, 17)

4. How does Matthew change his wording when he comes to Joseph and Mary, and why? (1:16)

5. What was a betrothal in that day, and how was it different from an engagement today? (1:18-19)

6. What does Joseph's plan to divorce Mary quietly tell you about his character? (1:19)

7. What does the name Jesus mean, and what did the angel say He would save His people from? (1:21)

8. What does "Immanuel" mean, and how does Matthew end his Gospel with the same idea? (1:23; 28:20)

9. God used people with broken pasts in the family line of His Son. How does that encourage you about your own past?

10. Joseph obeyed God even though others might not understand. Is there something God is asking you to do that would take that kind of quiet obedience?

Chapter 2: The Wise Men and the Flight to Egypt

Scripture

2:1-12 Now when Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in ***the*** days of Herod the king, look, Magi from ***the*** east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the ***One*** who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him." And having heard ***this***, Herod the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And having gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he was inquiring of them where the Christ is born. And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will go forth ***One*** leading, who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Then Herod, having secretly called the Magi, ascertained exactly from them the time of the appearing star. And having sent them to Bethlehem, he said, "Having gone, search carefully for the child; and when you have found ***Him***, bring word back to me, so that I also, having come, may worship Him." And having heard the king, they went away; and look, the star which they saw in the east was going before them, until, having come, it stood over where the child was. And having seen the star, they rejoiced ***with*** exceedingly 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. And having been divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew into their country by another way.

2:13-23 And when they had withdrawn, look, an angel of ***the*** Lord appears in a dream to Joseph, saying, "Having arisen, take the child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to seek the child to destroy Him." And having arisen, he took the child and His mother by night and withdrew into Egypt, and he was there until the death of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Then Herod, having seen that he had been mocked by the Magi, was greatly enraged; and having sent forth, he killed all the boys who ***were*** in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained exactly from the Magi. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping ***for*** her children; and she was not willing to be comforted, because they are no more." And when Herod had died, look, an angel of ***the*** Lord appears in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Having arisen, take the child and His mother, and go into ***the*** land of Israel; for those seeking the life of the child have died." And having arisen, he took the child and His mother and came into ***the*** land of Israel. And having heard that Archelaus reigns over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there; and having been divinely warned in a dream, he withdrew into the districts of Galilee, and having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that "He will be called a Nazarene."

Chapter 2 Preview

Chapter 1 told us who Jesus is. Chapter 2 shows us how the world responded to Him. Wise men from the east, Gentiles who knew little of the Scriptures, traveled a long way to worship the

newborn King. King Herod, who sat on the throne in Jerusalem, wanted Him dead. And the chief priests and scribes, who knew exactly where the Messiah would be born, did not walk the few miles to Bethlehem to see Him.

Then God protected His Son. An angel warned Joseph to take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Herod, in a jealous rage, killed the boys of Bethlehem. After Herod died, the family came back and settled in Nazareth in Galilee. Matthew shows us four times in this chapter that even these hard events happened just as the prophets had said.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-2 *Now when Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in **the** days of Herod the king, look, Magi from **the** east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the **One** who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."*

Jesus was born "in Bethlehem of Judea," a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. It was the hometown of King David (1 Samuel 16:1). The King was born in the city of the King.

"In the days of Herod the king." This was Herod the Great. He was not from the line of David. He was an Idumean, from the people descended from Esau, and Rome made him king of the Jews. He was a great builder, and he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem on a grand scale. He was also cruel and jealous. He had one of his own wives and several of his own sons put to death because he feared they wanted his throne. Herod died about 4 B.C. That sounds strange, since B.C. means before Christ. The reason is that the people who later worked out our calendar were off by a few years. Jesus was most likely born a year or two before Herod died.

The Magi were wise men from the east, most likely from Persia or Babylon. They studied the stars and served as advisers to kings. Matthew does not say how many there were. We often say three because of the three gifts, but Scripture doesn't tell us. They saw "His star" and came to worship the One "born King of the Jews." How did Gentiles in the east know to look for a Jewish King? We don't know for sure. Many Jews had lived in Babylon since the exile, and Daniel had served as the chief of the wise men there (Daniel 2:48). Long before, Balaam, a prophet from the east, had spoken of a star that would come from Jacob (Numbers 24:17).

Bethlehem was no accident. Centuries earlier Micah 5:2 had named this small town as the place the Messiah would come from, "from you for Me One will go out to be ruler over Israel," and in verses 5-6 the chief priests will point Herod to that very verse.

Old Testament links: Micah 5:2 (fulfilled); Numbers 24:17 (alluded to)

2:3-4 *And having heard **this**, Herod the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And having gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he was inquiring of them where the Christ is born.*

Herod "was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Herod was troubled because he was the king of the Jews, at least in Rome's eyes, and now someone was asking about a King born to that throne.

The people of Jerusalem were troubled because they knew what Herod did when he felt threatened.

Herod called together "the chief priests and scribes of the people." The chief priests were the leading priests in Jerusalem, including the high priest and his family. The scribes were experts in the Law of Moses, who copied it, studied it, and taught it. Notice what Herod asked them: where "the Christ" would be born. Herod understood that the Magi were asking about the Messiah.

2:5-6 *And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will go forth **One** leading, who will shepherd My people Israel.'"*

The religious leaders knew the answer right away. They quoted Micah 5:2: Bethlehem, though small, would be the birthplace of a ruler "who will shepherd My people Israel." Matthew combines Micah's words with words God spoke about David in 2 Samuel 5:2. The King would be a Shepherd, like David, the shepherd boy who became king.

Here is the sad part. These men knew the Bible. They could quote chapter and verse about where the Messiah would be born. But not one of them went with the Magi to find Him. Bethlehem was only a short walk away. It is possible to know the right answers about Jesus and never come to Him. Knowing about Him is not the same as worshiping Him.

Old Testament links: Micah 5:2 (quoted); 2 Samuel 5:2 (alluded to)

2:7-8 *Then Herod, having secretly called the Magi, ascertained exactly from them the time of the appearing star. And having sent them to Bethlehem, he said, "Having gone, search carefully for the child; and when you have found **Him**, bring word back to me, so that I also, having come, may worship Him."*

Herod "secretly called the Magi." He wanted to know exactly when the star first appeared, so he could work out how old the child would be. Then he sent the Magi on to Bethlehem with a lie. He told them to bring word back, "so that I also, having come, may worship Him." Herod had no plan to worship. He planned to kill.

Herod's words sound religious, but his heart was full of murder. That should warn us. People can use the language of faith to cover what they really want. God sees the heart.

2:9-10 *And having heard the king, they went away; and look, the star which they saw in the east was going before them, until, having come, it stood over where the child was. And having seen the star, they rejoiced **with** exceedingly great joy.*

The star "was going before them, until, having come, it stood over where the child was." This was no ordinary star. Ordinary stars do not move ahead of travelers and stop over one house. Some have suggested a comet or a joining of planets, but those would not stop over a single house in Bethlehem. I believe this was a special light God provided, much like the pillar of fire that led Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21).

When they saw it, "they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." Matthew piles up words for joy. These Gentile seekers had traveled for months, and now God was leading them right to the King.

2:11 *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.*

"Having come into the house." By now the family was living in a house, not a stable. Jesus is called a child here, not a newborn baby. The Magi most likely came some months after His birth, which also explains why Herod later killed boys up to two years old. Christmas scenes put the shepherds and the wise men side by side, but the shepherds came on the night He was born (Luke 2:8-16), and the Magi came later.

They "worshiped Him." They bowed down to the ground before a small child. Notice that they worshiped Him, not Mary His mother. Then they gave Him "gold and frankincense and myrrh." These were costly gifts fit for a king. Many Bible teachers have seen meaning in each one: gold for a king, frankincense, a sweet incense used in worship, for God, and myrrh, a spice used in burial, for the One who would die. Matthew does not explain the gifts, so we should hold those meanings loosely. It may be that God used these gifts to pay for the family's trip to Egypt.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 60:6 (alluded to)

2:12 *And having been divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew into their country by another way.*

God warned the Magi "in a dream not to return to Herod," so they went home another way. They had come to worship, and they obeyed God rather than the king. We never hear about them again. But they remind us that from the very beginning, Jesus came for the nations too. The first people in Matthew to worship Jesus were Gentiles.

2:13-14 *And when they had withdrawn, look, an angel of **the** Lord appears in a dream to Joseph, saying, "Having arisen, take the child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to seek the child to destroy Him." And having arisen, he took the child and His mother by night and withdrew into Egypt,*

Again an angel came to Joseph in a dream. "Take the child and His mother, and flee into Egypt." Notice that Matthew keeps saying "the child and His mother." Joseph is not the child's father, and Matthew is careful not to say so.

Egypt was outside Herod's reach, and many Jews lived there in that day, so a Jewish family could find a home and work. Joseph did not wait until morning. He got up and left "by night." Once again, he obeyed God right away. God did not stop Herod from being wicked, but He kept His Son safe through the obedience of one faithful man.

2:15 *and he was there until the death of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."*

Here is Matthew's second fulfillment formula. The quote is from Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt I called My Son." In Hosea, God was speaking of the nation of Israel, which He called His son and brought out of Egypt in the exodus (Exodus 4:22). How could that be about Jesus?

Matthew is showing us a pattern. Jesus is the true Son of God, and His life follows the path of Israel. Israel went down into Egypt and came out. Jesus did too. Israel passed through the waters and was tested in the wilderness for forty years. In the next two chapters, Jesus is baptized in the Jordan and tested in the wilderness for forty days. Where Israel failed, Jesus obeyed. He is everything Israel was meant to be.

Old Testament links: Hosea 11:1 (quoted)

2:16 *Then Herod, having seen that he had been mocked by the Magi, was greatly enraged; and having sent forth, he killed all the boys who **were** in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained exactly from the Magi.*

When Herod saw that the Magi had not come back, he "was greatly enraged." He "killed all the boys who were in Bethlehem and in all its vicinity, from two years old and under." Bethlehem was a small town, and most Bible teachers estimate that perhaps a dozen or two boys were killed. No other ancient writer records this event, but it fits everything we know about Herod. A man who would kill his own sons would not think twice about killing the children of a small village.

This is one of the most painful verses in the Bible. We should not rush past it. Real families lost their little boys. The coming of the King brought out the full evil of a jealous ruler, and the innocent suffered. Scripture does not hide that kind of pain from us, and neither should we.

2:17-18 *Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping **for** her children; and she was not willing to be comforted, because they are no more."*

Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15. Ramah was a town north of Jerusalem. Rachel was the wife of Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and she was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19). In Jeremiah, the people of Judah were being gathered at Ramah to be carried off to Babylon, and Jeremiah pictured Rachel weeping for her children who were lost.

Notice that Matthew changes his usual wording here. He does not say this happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. He says "Then was fulfilled what was spoken." God did not cause Herod's evil, but He knew it would come, and His Word had already spoken of a mother's grief. And the very next verses in Jeremiah give hope. God tells Rachel to stop weeping, because her children will come back (Jeremiah 31:16-17). In the same chapter, God promises a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). The child who escaped Herod's sword would one day bring that new covenant through His own blood (Matthew 26:28).

For anyone who has lost a child, these verses tell us God sees that grief. He does not explain it away. He wrote it into His Word.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 31:15 (quoted)

2:19-21 *And when Herod had died, look, an angel of **the** Lord appears in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Having arisen, take the child and His mother, and go into **the** land of Israel; for those seeking the life of the child have died." And having arisen, he took the child and His mother and came into **the** land of Israel.*

Herod died. The man who tried to kill the King could not stop God's plan. The angel told Joseph, "those seeking the life of the child have died." Those words echo what God told Moses when it was safe to go back to Egypt (Exodus 4:19). Jesus is like Moses, the deliverer who escaped a king who killed baby boys (Exodus 1:22; 2:1-10).

Once again Joseph got up and went. Every time God spoke, Joseph obeyed.

Old Testament links: Exodus 4:19 (alluded to)

2:22-23 *And having heard that Archelaus reigns over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there; and having been divinely warned in a dream, he withdrew into the districts of Galilee, and having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that "He will be called a Nazarene."*

After Herod died, his kingdom was split among three of his sons. "Archelaus" ruled Judea, and he was as cruel as his father. Rome later removed him for it. So Joseph was afraid to go back to Judea, and after another warning in a dream, he took the family north to "the districts of Galilee." They settled in "a city called Nazareth," the town Mary and Joseph had come from (Luke 2:4, 39).

"He will be called a Nazarene." There is no Old Testament verse with these exact words. Notice Matthew says "the prophets," plural. He is summing up what several prophets said. Nazareth was a small, looked-down-on town. Later a man asked, "Can any good thing be out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). To be called a Nazarene was to be scorned, and the prophets said the Messiah would be despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 22:6). Many also see a play on the Hebrew word netzer, which means branch, the word Isaiah used for the Messiah who would come from the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). Either way, the King of glory grew up in a humble town that people mocked.

Chapter 2 Summary

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the king. Magi from the east saw His star and came to Jerusalem to worship the newborn King of the Jews. Herod was troubled and learned from the chief priests and scribes that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, as Micah had written. Herod secretly sent the Magi to find the child, pretending he wanted to worship Him. The star led the Magi to the house, where they worshiped Jesus and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh, and then they went home another way after God warned them in a dream. An angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt, fulfilling Hosea's words, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Herod

killed the boys of Bethlehem two years old and under, and Jeremiah's words about Rachel weeping were fulfilled. After Herod died, Joseph brought the family back and, warned about Archelaus, settled in Nazareth, so that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Who were the Magi, and what were they looking for when they came to Jerusalem? (2:1-2)

2. Why was Herod troubled at their news, and why was all Jerusalem troubled with him? (2:3)

3. The chief priests and scribes knew where the Christ would be born. What did they do with that knowledge? (2:4-6)

4. What did Herod say he wanted to do, and what did he really plan? (2:8, 16)

5. Where were Jesus and His family when the Magi came, and about how old was Jesus? (2:11, 16)

6. How does Jesus' trip to and from Egypt follow the pattern of Israel's history? (2:13-15)

7. What do the words from Jeremiah about Rachel weeping tell you about how God sees grief? (2:17-18)

8. Why did Joseph settle in Nazareth, and what did it mean to be called a Nazarene? (2:22-23)

9. The religious leaders knew the Bible but did not go to Jesus. In what ways can we know a lot about Jesus and still keep our distance from Him?

10. Joseph obeyed God quickly every time He spoke. What keeps you from obeying God right away, and what would help you obey sooner?

Chapter 3: John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Scripture

3:1-12 And in those days comes John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." For this is the ***one*** who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "***The*** voice of ***one*** crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of ***the*** Lord; make His paths straight.'" And John himself had his garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were being baptized in the Jordan by him, confessing their sins. And having seen many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruits worthy of repentance; and do not presume to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham ***as*** father'; for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And already also the ax is laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and is thrown into fire. I indeed baptize you with water to repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry; He Himself will baptize you with ***the*** Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork ***is*** in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into the barn; but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire."

3:13-17 Then Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him. But John was hindering Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" And answering, Jesus said to him, "Permit ***it*** now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permits Him. 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."

Chapter 3 Preview

About thirty years pass between chapter 2 and chapter 3 (Luke 3:23). Jesus has grown up in Nazareth, and now God sends a prophet to get the people ready for Him. John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judea with one urgent message: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." Crowds came out to him, confessed their sins, and were baptized in the Jordan River. When the proud religious leaders came, John warned them that being children of Abraham would not save them. Only real repentance, shown by a changed life, would do.

Then Jesus Himself came to be baptized. John did not want to do it, because he knew Jesus had no sin to confess. But Jesus insisted, and as He came up out of the water, heaven opened, the Spirit came down on Him like a dove, and the Father spoke: "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased." The King was ready to begin His work.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And in those days comes John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*

"In those days comes John the Baptist." This is not John the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John. This John was the son of Zechariah the priest and his wife Elizabeth, and he was a relative of Jesus, born about six months before Him (Luke 1:5-17, 36). He is called "the Baptist" because he baptized people.

He preached "in the wilderness of Judea," the dry, rocky land west of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. Why the wilderness? In Israel's history, the wilderness was where God met His people after the exodus, and the prophets said God would meet them there again. John did not go to the temple or to the big cities. He made people come out to him, away from the comforts of home, to hear a hard message.

3:2 *and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near."*

John's message was short: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." To repent means to change your mind, but in the Bible it is much more than a new opinion. It is a turning around, a change of heart about sin and about God that leads to a change of life. It is not just feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and turning to God.

"The kingdom of the heavens." Many Bibles say the kingdom of heaven. Matthew uses this phrase over thirty times, and Mark and Luke say "the kingdom of God" in the same places (Mark 1:15). It means God's rule, from heaven, through His promised King. The Jewish people knew the prophets had promised a kingdom: a Son of David reigning in righteousness, Israel restored, and the nations coming to worship God (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44). John said that kingdom "has drawn near." Why? Because the King was about to appear. The kingdom was near because He was near. In Matthew, the kingdom is offered to Israel in the person of Jesus. It is entered now by repentance and faith, and it will come in its full, visible form on the earth when Jesus returns to reign (Revelation 20:4-6).

3:3 *For this is the **one** who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "**The** voice of **one** crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of **the** Lord; make His paths straight.'"*

Matthew tells us John was the one Isaiah spoke of: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'" This is from Isaiah 40:3. In the ancient world, before a king traveled, workers went ahead to fill in holes, level the bumps, and straighten the road. John's job was to prepare the road into people's hearts by calling them to repent.

Look at whose way John prepares. In Isaiah 40:3, the One coming is the LORD, Israel's God. John prepares the way for Jesus. Matthew is telling us plainly that Jesus is the Lord God of Israel come in the flesh.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 40:3 (quoted)

3:4 *And John himself had his garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

John looked like a prophet. His clothing was "of camel's hair," with "a leather belt around his waist." That is how the Bible describes the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). The last book of the Old Testament promised that God would send Elijah the prophet before the great day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6). Jesus later said John was the Elijah who was to come, for those willing to receive it (Matthew 11:14). John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), though he was not Elijah come back from the dead (John 1:21).

"Locusts and wild honey." Locusts were a kind of grasshopper the Law allowed people to eat (Leviticus 11:22). This was the food of a poor man living off the land. John did not live for comfort. His whole life said that something more important was coming.

Old Testament links: 2 Kings 1:8 (alluded to)

3:5-6 *Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were being baptized in the Jordan by him, confessing their sins.*

People came from everywhere: "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan." No prophet had spoken in Israel for about four hundred years, since the days of Malachi. Now a prophet had come, and the people flocked to hear him.

They were "being baptized in the Jordan by him, confessing their sins." To baptize means to dip or immerse in water. Jews already had washings for being made clean, and later Jewish writings speak of Gentiles being immersed when they became Jews, though we can't be sure how early that custom began. But John called Jews, God's own people, to be baptized as if they were outsiders who needed to start over. John's baptism was a public sign of repentance. It did not wash away sin. It showed that a person had turned from sin and was getting ready for the coming King. Notice that confession went with it. Repentance is not a secret feeling. It names the sin and turns from it.

3:7 *And having seen many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?*

Then John saw "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism." These were the two great religious parties in Israel. The Pharisees were strict keepers of the Law of Moses, and they added many rules of their own, called the traditions of the elders, to make sure they never broke it. They were respected by the common people. The Sadducees were fewer but powerful. Many of them were wealthy priests who ran the temple. They accepted only the five books of Moses as Scripture and did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits (Acts 23:8). The two groups usually did not get along, but here they came together.

John did not welcome them. He called them a "Brood of vipers," a nest of poisonous snakes. "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Like snakes running ahead of a field fire, they wanted to escape God's judgment without changing their hearts. John saw through them.

3:8 *Therefore produce fruits worthy of repentance;*

"Therefore produce fruits worthy of repentance." Real repentance shows itself. A fruit tree is known by what it grows. If a person has truly turned to God, their life will show it: in how they treat people, how they handle money, how they speak. Luke records some of the practical examples John gave (Luke 3:10-14).

This does not mean we earn God's forgiveness by good works. The fruit does not make the tree alive. It shows that the tree is alive. John was telling them not to come just for the water, but to show a changed life.

3:9 *and do not presume to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham **as** father'; for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*

"We have Abraham as father." Many Jews in that day believed that being descended from Abraham was enough to keep them safe in God's judgment. John knocked that idea down. "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." God did not need them. He could make children for Abraham out of the rocks on the riverbank.

This is a warning for us too. No one is saved because of their family, their church, or their heritage. Having believing parents is a great gift, but God has no grandchildren. Each of us must come to Him personally.

3:10 *And already also the ax is laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and is thrown into fire.*

"Already also the ax is laid at the root of the trees." Picture a woodsman with his ax resting against the base of a tree, ready to swing. Judgment was close. "Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and is thrown into fire." John's message was not soft. He warned of real judgment for those who refused to repent. Jesus would use the same picture later (Matthew 7:19).

3:11 *I indeed baptize you with water to repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry; He Himself will baptize you with **the** Holy Spirit and fire.*

John pointed away from himself. "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry." Carrying a master's sandals was the lowest job a servant did. John, the greatest prophet of his day, said he was not worthy to do even that for Jesus.

"He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John baptized with water. Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. That happened at Pentecost, when the risen Christ poured out the Spirit on His people (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4, 33). What about the fire? Some see the tongues like fire at Pentecost and the Spirit's work of cleansing. Others see fire as judgment on those who refuse Him. Those who hold this view point to the context: John is speaking to a mixed crowd, and he speaks of fire in the verse before and the verse after. Both views have support. Either way, Jesus brings the Spirit to those who repent and judgment to those who will not.

3:12 *His winnowing fork **is** in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into the barn; but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire."*

"His winnowing fork is in His hand." After grain was harvested and beaten, the farmer used a winnowing fork to toss it into the air. The wind blew away the light chaff, the husks, and the heavy wheat fell back to the threshing floor. John says Jesus will do that with people. He will "gather His wheat into the barn," but "the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire."

"Unquenchable fire" is fire that cannot be put out. Jesus Himself spoke of hell this way (Mark 9:43). This is not a pleasant subject, but John spoke of it plainly, and so should we. There are two destinies, and every person ends up in one of them.

3:13-14 *Then Jesus comes from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him. But John was hindering Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"*

Now Jesus came "from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him." This was the moment John had been waiting for.

But "John was hindering Him." John tried to stop Him. "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" John knew that Jesus had no sin to confess. John was baptizing sinners, and Jesus was not one. In fact, John felt that he was the one who needed what Jesus could give.

3:15 *And answering, Jesus said to him, "Permit **it** now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permits Him.*

"Permit it now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Why was Jesus baptized if He had no sin? Jesus did not explain it all, but the Bible gives us several reasons. He was doing everything God required of a faithful Israelite, obeying the Father in every way. He was standing with sinners, the very people He came to save, taking His place beside them in the water as He would later take their place on the cross (Isaiah 53:12). And His baptism was the public start of His ministry, when the Father would show Him to Israel (John 1:31-34).

Jesus' baptism also sets an example for us. If the sinless Son of God was willing to be baptized in obedience to the Father, how much more should we, who have been forgiven, follow Him in baptism? Baptism does not save us. Repentance and faith in Christ come first, and baptism is the obedient public step that follows.

3:16 *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.*

"Jesus immediately went up from the water." The words "went up from the water" fit well with baptism by immersion, going down into the water and coming up out of it.

Then "the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him." The Spirit did not become a bird. He came down in a form that looked like a dove. This was the anointing of the Anointed One. Isaiah had said the Spirit of the LORD would

rest on the Branch from Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-2), and that the Spirit of the Lord God would be upon the Messiah to preach good news (Isaiah 61:1). The King was now publicly anointed for His work.

3:17 *And look, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased."*

"And look, a voice out of the heavens." The Father spoke from heaven: "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased." These words echo two Old Testament passages. Psalm 2:7 speaks of God's King as His Son. Isaiah 42:1 speaks of God's chosen Servant in whom His soul is pleased, and on whom He puts His Spirit. Jesus is both: the royal Son and the suffering Servant.

Notice that all three Persons of the Trinity are here. The Son stands in the water, the Spirit comes down like a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven. There is one God, who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see it plainly at the start of Matthew, and Jesus will tell us to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" at the end (28:19).

Jesus had not yet preached a sermon or done a miracle in public, and the Father was already well pleased with Him. His thirty quiet years in Nazareth pleased God. That is worth remembering when our own lives feel ordinary.

Old Testament links: Psalm 2:7 (alluded to); Isaiah 42:1 (alluded to)

Chapter 3 Summary

John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judea, calling people to repent because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near. He was the voice Isaiah spoke of, preparing the way of the Lord, and he dressed and lived like the prophet Elijah. People from Jerusalem, Judea and the Jordan region came to be baptized, confessing their sins. John warned the Pharisees and Sadducees that being children of Abraham would not save them. They needed to bear fruit worthy of repentance, because judgment was near. John said the One coming after him was mightier and would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, gathering His wheat and burning the chaff. Jesus came to be baptized, and though John tried to stop Him, Jesus said it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness. As He came up from the water, the heavens opened, the Spirit came down like a dove, and the Father declared Him to be His beloved Son.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What was John's message, and what does it mean to repent? (3:2)

2. What is "the kingdom of the heavens," and why did John say it had drawn near? (3:2)

3. How did John's clothing and food connect him to the prophet Elijah? (3:4)

4. Who were the Pharisees and Sadducees, and why did John call them a brood of vipers? (3:7)

5. What did John mean by "fruits worthy of repentance"? (3:8)

6. Why was being a descendant of Abraham not enough to save a person? (3:9)

7. Why did John try to stop Jesus from being baptized, and how did Jesus answer him? (3:14-15)

8. How do we see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism? (3:16-17)

9. Is there anything in your life you have been sorry about but have not really turned away from? What would real repentance look like there?

10. If you have trusted Christ, have you followed Him in baptism? If not, what is holding you back?

Chapter 4: Tested in the Wilderness

Scripture

4:1-11 Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. And having fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. And having come, the ***one*** tempting said to Him, "If You are ***the*** Son of God, speak, so that these stones may become loaves." But answering, He said, "It has been written: 'Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through ***the*** mouth of God.'" Then the devil takes Him into the holy city, and sets Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and says to Him, "If You are ***the*** Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it has been written, 'He will give orders to His angels concerning You, and on ***their*** hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it has been written: 'You shall not test ***the*** Lord your God.'" Again the devil takes Him to an exceedingly high mountain, and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and says to Him, "All these things I will give You, if, falling down, You will worship me." Then Jesus says to him, "Go away, Satan; for it has been written: 'You shall worship ***the*** Lord your God, and Him alone you shall serve.'" Then the devil leaves Him, and look, angels came and were ministering to Him.

4:12-25 And having heard that John had been delivered up, Jesus withdrew into Galilee. And having left Nazareth, having come, He dwelt in Capernaum, which ***is*** by the sea, in ***the*** territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, ***the*** way of ***the*** sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those sitting in ***the*** region and shadow of death, light has dawned on them." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." And walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And He says to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately, having left the nets, they followed Him. And having gone on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the ***son*** of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And immediately, having left the boat and their father, they followed Him. And Jesus was going around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. And the report of Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, gripped by various diseases and torments, and those being demonized, and those being epileptic, and paralytics; and He healed them. And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan.

Chapter 4 Preview

Right after the Father's voice said, "This is My Son" (3:17), the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. After forty days without food, Jesus faced three temptations. Satan tried to get Him to use His power for Himself, to put God to the test, and to take the kingdoms of the world without the cross. Each time Jesus answered with the same weapon, the Word of God, quoting the book of Deuteronomy. Where Adam fell in a garden and Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus stood firm.

Then Jesus began His public ministry. He moved to Capernaum in Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah's promise of a great light dawning on the Gentile region of the north. He preached the same message John had preached, called His first four disciples from their fishing boats, and went all through Galilee teaching, preaching, and healing. Word about Him spread, and great crowds came from every direction.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.*

"Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil." Notice the word then. This happened right after His baptism. The highest moment was followed by the hardest test. That is often how it is in our lives too.

Notice also who led Him. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. God was not trying to make Jesus fall. The Greek word for tempt can also mean test. Satan tempted Jesus to sin, but God was testing Him to prove that He was the faithful Son. The word devil means the slanderer or accuser. He is a real being, a fallen angel, the enemy of God and of God's people, not just an idea or a force of evil.

4:2 *And having fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

"Having fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry." To fast means to go without food in order to seek God. Moses fasted forty days on the mountain when God gave the Law (Exodus 34:28), and Elijah went forty days in the strength of the food God gave him (1 Kings 19:8). Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness.

Matthew's simple words "He was hungry" remind us that Jesus was fully human. He felt real hunger, real weakness, and real need. The devil came at Him when He was weakest. He does the same with us. When we are tired, hungry, lonely, or hurting, we should expect temptation and be ready for it.

Old Testament links: Exodus 34:28 (alluded to)

4:3 *And having come, the **one** tempting said to Him, "If You are **the** Son of God, speak, so that these stones may become loaves."*

"If You are the Son of God, speak, so that these stones may become loaves." The word if here does not mean the devil doubted it. It carries the sense of since. Since You are the Son of God, why go hungry? Use Your power. Take care of Yourself.

What was wrong with making bread? Jesus would later feed thousands with bread. The problem was not the bread. The problem was the devil's suggestion that Jesus act on His own, apart from the Father's will, to meet His own needs. The Spirit had led Him into the wilderness. Jesus would wait on the Father to provide. Satan often tempts us to meet a real need in a wrong way.

4:4 *But answering, He said, "It has been written: 'Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through **the** mouth of God.'"*

Jesus answered, "It has been written." He did not argue. He did not use His own power. He answered the way any believer can, with Scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses reminded Israel that God let them hunger in the wilderness and then fed them with manna, to teach them that "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through the mouth of God."

Food keeps the body alive for a time. God's Word gives life that lasts forever. Jesus would rather go hungry and obey His Father than eat and disobey. How often do we let the needs of the body crowd out our time with God?

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 8:3 (quoted)

4:5-6 *Then the devil takes Him into the holy city, and sets Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and says to Him, "If You are **the** Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it has been written, 'He will give orders to His angels concerning You, and on **their** hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"*

Next the devil took Jesus "into the holy city," Jerusalem, and set Him "on the pinnacle of the temple." This was a high point on the temple buildings, perhaps the corner that looked down into the deep valley below. Then the devil quoted Scripture himself. He used Psalm 91:11-12: God will command His angels to catch You. So jump. Prove that God will protect You. Let the crowds in the temple see a miracle.

Did you notice that the devil can quote the Bible? He quoted it out of context, and he left out part of it. Psalm 91 promises God's care to those who trust Him, not to those who show off and dare God to rescue them. This is a warning for us. A verse pulled out of its setting can be used to say almost anything. That is why we must read the Bible in context.

Old Testament links: Psalm 91:11-12 (quoted)

4:7 *Jesus said to him, "Again it has been written: 'You shall not test **the** Lord your God.'"*

Jesus answered with Scripture again, and this time He used Scripture to explain Scripture. "Again it has been written: 'You shall not test the Lord your God.'" This is from Deuteronomy 6:16, where Moses reminded Israel how they tested God at Massah, demanding water and asking whether the LORD was among them or not (Exodus 17:7).

To test God in this sense means to force His hand, to put ourselves in danger and demand that He prove Himself. Real faith trusts God without needing to stage a test. Jesus knew His Father loved Him. He did not need to jump off a building to find out.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 6:16 (quoted)

4:8-9 *Again the devil takes Him to an exceedingly high mountain, and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and says to Him, "All these things I will give You, if, falling down, You will worship me."*

The third temptation was the boldest. The devil took Jesus "to an exceedingly high mountain, and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory." Then he made his offer: "All these things I will give You, if, falling down, You will worship me."

Jesus did not argue that the kingdoms were not the devil's to give. Elsewhere Jesus calls Satan "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). Since Adam's fall, Satan has held a kind of power over this world (1 John 5:19). And the Father had already promised the kingdoms to His Son (Psalm 2:8). What Satan offered was a shortcut. Jesus could have the crown without the cross. All He had to do was bow once.

That is still the devil's offer. He promises us what God has promised, but faster and without suffering, if we will just bend a little. It is always a lie.

4:10 *Then Jesus says to him, "Go away, Satan; for it has been written: 'You shall worship **the** Lord your God, and Him alone you shall serve.'"*

"Go away, Satan." Satan means adversary, the one who stands against. Jesus sent him away with one more verse: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone you shall serve." This is from Deuteronomy 6:13. God alone deserves worship. Jesus would not bow to anyone but His Father, even if refusing meant the road to the cross.

Notice that all three of Jesus' answers come from Deuteronomy 6 to 8. These are the chapters where Moses reminded Israel what they should have learned in their forty years in the wilderness. Israel was God's son (Exodus 4:22), and Israel failed the test. Jesus is God's Son, and He passed it. Where Adam fell in a garden with everything he needed, Jesus stood firm in a wilderness with nothing.

Could Jesus have sinned? Bible teachers have discussed that for centuries. Some believe He could have sinned but did not. Others believe that because He is God, He could not sin, though the temptation was still real. Both agree on what Hebrews tells us: He "has been tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Because He faced temptation and won, He can help us when we are tempted.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 6:13 (quoted)

4:11 *Then the devil leaves Him, and look, angels came and were ministering to Him.*

"Then the devil leaves Him." He did not leave for good. Luke tells us he left "until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). But he lost this battle. James tells us that when we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). Jesus showed us how.

"Angels came and were ministering to Him." The angels did not come when Satan dared Jesus to jump. They came when Jesus had obeyed. God takes care of His own in His own time and His own way. If you are in a wilderness season today, remember that God has not forgotten you.

4:12 *And having heard that John had been delivered up, Jesus withdrew into Galilee.*

"Having heard that John had been delivered up." John the Baptist had been arrested. Matthew tells us why later. John had told Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great who ruled Galilee, that it was not right for him to have his brother's wife (Matthew 14:3-4). John's ministry was ending, and Jesus' public ministry in Galilee was beginning.

"Jesus withdrew into Galilee." He did not run from danger out of fear, since Herod Antipas also ruled Galilee. He went where the Father sent Him, to the region where most of His ministry would take place.

4:13-16 *And having left Nazareth, having come, He dwelt in Capernaum, which **is** by the sea, in **the** territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, **the** way of **the** sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those sitting in **the** region and shadow of death, light has dawned on them."*

Jesus left Nazareth and made His home in "Capernaum, which is by the sea." Capernaum was a fishing town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake about thirteen miles long. It became His home base.

This area was once the land of the tribes of "Zebulun and Naphtali." Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1-2. These northern tribes were the first to be overrun by the Assyrians, about seven hundred years earlier, and many Gentiles had settled there. That is why it was called "Galilee of the Gentiles." The Jews of Jerusalem looked down on Galileans. But Isaiah had promised that the people "sitting in darkness saw a great light." The light of the world came first to the place people least expected.

Read the next verses in Isaiah, and you will see who that light is. Isaiah 9:6-7 tells of a child born to us, a son given, who will sit on the throne of David forever. Matthew wants us to know that the King had come.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 9:1-2 (quoted)

4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near."*

"From that time Jesus began to preach." This marks a major turning point in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus' message was the same as John's: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." The kingdom was near because the King had come. The call was the same as it is today: turn from your sin and turn to God.

Matthew will use the words "From that time Jesus began" one more time, in 16:21, when Jesus begins to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Those two moments divide the story of His ministry.

4:18-20 *And walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And He says to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately, having left the nets, they followed Him.*

"Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother." These men had already met Jesus earlier. John's Gospel tells us Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist and brought his brother Simon to Jesus (John 1:35-42). Now Jesus called them to leave their work and follow Him full time.

"Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus spoke their language. They knew how to fish. Now He would teach them to bring people to God. Notice the promise: "I will make you." We do not make ourselves into soul winners. Jesus does that as we follow Him.

"Immediately, having left the nets, they followed Him." They left their business and their way of earning a living. Following Jesus always costs something, and it is always worth it.

4:21-22 *And having gone on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the* ***son*** *of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And immediately, having left the boat and their father, they followed Him.*

Jesus called another pair of brothers, "James the son of Zebedee and John his brother." They were in the boat with their father, mending their nets. This John later wrote the Gospel of John, three letters, and the book of Revelation. Mark tells us the family had hired servants, so they were not poor (Mark 1:20).

"Having left the boat and their father, they followed Him." This was even harder than leaving nets. They left their father. Jesus does not call everyone to leave home and family, but He does call everyone to put Him first, even before family (Matthew 10:37). These four fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John, became the core of the twelve.

4:23 *And Jesus was going around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.*

This verse is a summary of Jesus' ministry, and Matthew repeats it almost word for word in 9:35. Jesus was "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people."

A synagogue was a local Jewish meeting place for prayer, reading Scripture, and teaching. Every town of any size had one. Any qualified man could be invited to read and teach, so Jesus often taught there.

"The gospel of the kingdom" is the good news that the King had come and the kingdom was near. The healings were signs that backed up the message. The prophets had said that when God's kingdom came, the blind would see, the deaf would hear, and the lame would leap (Isaiah 35:5-6). Jesus' miracles showed that the King was here.

4:24 *And the report of Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, gripped by various diseases and torments, and those being demonized, and those being epileptic, and paralytics; and He healed them.*

"The report of Him went out into all Syria." Syria was the large Roman province to the north of Galilee. People brought "all who were ill." Matthew lists many kinds of suffering: diseases, "torments," people "being demonized," people "being epileptic," and "paralytics." And "He healed them."

"Demonized" means under the control of demons, evil spirits who serve Satan. The Bible treats these as real, and it also treats illness as real. Matthew lists them side by side and does not mix them up. Not every sickness is caused by a demon, and not every demon brings sickness. Jesus had power over all of it.

The word translated epileptic comes from a Greek word tied to the moon, because people in that day thought the moon caused seizures. Matthew is describing the illness the way people knew it.

4:25 *And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan.*

"Great crowds followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond the Jordan." Decapolis means ten cities. It was a region of mostly Gentile cities east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. "Beyond the Jordan" was the land on the east side of the river. People came from the north and south, from Jewish and Gentile lands.

This verse sets the stage for chapter 5. With crowds pressing in from everywhere, Jesus went up on a mountain and taught His disciples what life in His kingdom looks like.

Chapter 4 Summary

After His baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days, He was hungry, and the devil tempted Him to turn stones into bread, to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, and to worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world. Each time Jesus answered with Scripture from Deuteronomy, and the devil left Him while angels came to serve Him. When John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and made His home in Capernaum, fulfilling Isaiah's promise of a great light in Galilee of the Gentiles. He began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." He called Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Him and become fishers of men. He went through all Galilee teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease, and great crowds followed Him from all around.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Who led Jesus into the wilderness, and why is that important? (4:1)

2. What was wrong with the devil's suggestion to turn stones into bread? (4:3-4)

3. How did the devil misuse Scripture in the second temptation, and how did Jesus answer? (4:5-7)

4. What shortcut did Satan offer Jesus in the third temptation? (4:8-10)

5. What book of the Bible did Jesus quote all three times, and why does that matter? (4:4, 7, 10)

6. Why was Galilee called "Galilee of the Gentiles," and what did Isaiah promise for it? (4:15-16)

7. What did Jesus promise Peter and Andrew when He called them? (4:19)

8. What three things was Jesus doing as He went through Galilee? (4:23)

9. Jesus answered every temptation with Scripture. Which verses could you learn by heart to help you in the temptations you face most?

10. The first disciples left their nets right away. What might Jesus be asking you to leave behind to follow Him more closely?

Chapter 5: The Sermon on the Mount: The Heart of the Law

Scripture

5:1-12 And having seen the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He had sat down, His disciples came to Him. And having opened His mouth, He was teaching them, saying, "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. 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. Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute ***you***, and say every evil word against you, lying, on account of Me. Rejoice and exult, for your reward ***is*** great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets who ***were*** before you.

5:13-20 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what will it be salted? It is no longer strong for anything, except to be thrown out and to be trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city lying on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket, but on the lampstand, and it shines for all who ***are*** in the house. Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who ***is*** in the heavens. Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth pass away, one iota or one stroke will by no means pass away from the law until everything happens. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whoever does and teaches ***them***, this one will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. For I say to you that unless your righteousness abounds more than ***that*** of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

5:21-32 You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not murder'; and 'Whoever murders will be liable to the judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'Fool,' will be liable to the Gehenna of fire. Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then, having come, offer your gift. Be agreeing with your accuser quickly, while you are with him on the way, lest the accuser deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans. You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw ***it*** from you; for it is better for you that one of your members perish, and not ***that*** your whole body be thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and

throw ***it*** from you; for it is better for you that one of your members perish, and not ***that*** your whole body be thrown into Gehenna. And it was said, 'Whoever sends away his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever sends away his wife, except for a matter of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a ***woman*** who has been sent away commits adultery.

5:33-48 Again, you heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not swear falsely, but you shall pay your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, not to swear at all: neither by heaven, because it is ***the*** throne of God; nor by the earth, because it is ***the*** footstool of His feet; nor by Jerusalem, because it is ***the*** city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black. But let your word be 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no'; and what is more than these is from the evil ***one***. You heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you, not to resist the evil ***person***; but whoever will strike you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to the ***one*** wanting to sue you and to take your tunic, yield to him the cloak also. And whoever compels you ***to go*** approximately 1,620 yards (one mile), go with him two. Give to the ***one*** asking you, and do not turn away from the ***one*** wanting to borrow from you. You heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those cursing you, do good to those hating you, and pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you, so that you may be sons of your Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens; for He makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on righteous and unrighteous. For if you love those loving you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what more do you do? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father who ***is*** in the heavens is perfect.

Chapter 5 Preview

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 hold the Sermon on the Mount, the longest of Jesus' sermons in the Bible and the first of the five great sermons in Matthew. The King has come, and now He tells His followers what life in His kingdom looks like. He begins with the Beatitudes, eight blessings on people the world overlooks: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the hungry for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. Then He tells His followers they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Before we go any further, we need to be clear about one thing. The Sermon on the Mount is not a ladder we climb to earn our way into heaven. No one has ever kept it perfectly except Jesus. It describes how citizens of the kingdom live, and it shows us how much we need a Savior. In the second half of the chapter, Jesus shows that He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. Then He takes six teachings people had heard and shows that God's Law reaches past our actions to our hearts: anger, lust, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love for our enemies. He ends with a standard none of us can reach on our own: "you shall be perfect, just as your Father who is in the heavens is perfect."

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *And having seen the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He had sat down, His disciples came to Him.*

"Having seen the crowds, He went up on the mountain." Matthew does not tell us which mountain. Tradition points to a hillside near Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Many Bible teachers see a picture here of Moses, who went up Mount Sinai to receive the Law (Exodus 19:3). Jesus, the greater Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15), goes up a mountain and gives His people the true meaning of that Law.

"When He had sat down." Jewish teachers sat to teach. "His disciples came to Him." A disciple is a learner, a student who follows a teacher. The sermon was spoken first to His disciples, with the crowds listening in (7:28). It is teaching for people who already belong to the King.

5:2 *And having opened His mouth, He was teaching them, saying,*

"Having opened His mouth, He was teaching them." That is a Jewish way of saying something serious and important is about to be said. The words that follow are some of the most famous ever spoken.

Before we read them, let me ask a question. Who is this sermon for? Some say it is a set of rules for getting into heaven. Some say it is only for a future kingdom age and not for us. Most Bible teachers, including many who look for a future kingdom on earth, believe it speaks to every follower of Jesus today. It shows us the character of those who belong to the King. We will never live it out by our own strength. We live it out as He changes us from the inside, by His Spirit.

5:3 *"Blessed **are** the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The word blessed means happy in the deepest sense, favored by God. It is not a feeling that comes and goes. It is the good state of a person God has smiled on.

Who are the poor in spirit? They are people who know they have nothing to offer God. They come to Him with empty hands, like a beggar. This is where the kingdom starts. The proud man thinks he does not need God's help. The poor in spirit know they need everything. Jesus says the kingdom belongs to them. Notice that the first and eighth blessings both say "theirs is the kingdom," so the whole list is about the people of the kingdom.

5:4 *Blessed **are** those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." This is not only grief over death, though God comforts that too. It is mourning over sin, our own and the world's. The person who is poor in spirit sees his sin, and it breaks his heart.

The world tells us not to think about it and just have fun. Jesus says the ones who grieve over sin are the blessed ones, because they will be comforted. God comforts them now with forgiveness,

and one day He will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4). If your heart is heavy over sin, that is a good sign. God is at work in you.

5:5 *Blessed **are** the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under God's control. A meek person does not push to get his own way or fight for his own rights. He trusts God to take care of him. Moses was called very meek (Numbers 12:3), and Jesus called Himself meek and lowly in heart (11:29).

Jesus is quoting Psalm 37:11, which says the humble will possess the land. The world thinks the pushy and powerful will get the earth. Jesus says the meek will. I believe this will be fulfilled to the letter when Jesus returns and reigns on the earth, and His people reign with Him (Revelation 5:10).

Old Testament links: Psalm 37:11 (alluded to)

5:6 *Blessed **are** those who hunger and thirst **for** righteousness, for they will be filled.*

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Most of us have never been truly starving, but in Jesus' day many people knew what real hunger felt like. Jesus says His people want righteousness that badly. They want to be right with God and to live right before Him.

That longing is a gift. Those who have it "will be filled." God satisfies the hungry heart. He fills us with the righteousness of Christ, given to us when we believe (Romans 3:22), and He keeps making us more like Him as we grow. And one day, when we see Him, the hunger will be fully satisfied.

5:7 *Blessed **are** the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." Mercy is kindness toward those who are hurting or who do not deserve it. A merciful person forgives, helps, and does not keep score.

Does this mean we earn God's mercy by being merciful? No. The first Beatitude already told us we come to God with empty hands. But people who have received God's mercy become merciful. And Jesus will warn us that a person who refuses to show mercy shows that he does not know God's mercy (6:14-15; 18:23-35). The mercy we show is the mark that we have received it.

5:8 *Blessed **are** the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." In the Bible, the heart is the center of a person: the mind, will, and feelings. To be pure in heart means to be clean on the inside and single-minded toward God, not just clean on the outside. The Pharisees worked hard at outward purity. Jesus looks at the heart.

"They will see God." No sinful man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). But those God has made pure will see Him face to face (1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4). How does a heart become pure? Not by trying harder. God cleans it through faith in Christ (Acts 15:9), and then we keep it clean by walking with Him.

Old Testament links: Psalm 24:4 (alluded to)

5:9 *Blessed **are** the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Notice that Jesus does not say peace lovers. He says peacemakers. Many people love peace but do nothing to make it. A peacemaker works to bring people together, first with God through the gospel, and then with each other.

"They will be called sons of God." In that culture, a son was like his father. God is the great Peacemaker. He made peace with us through the blood of His Son (Colossians 1:20). When we make peace, we show the family likeness. If you are the person in your family or church who brings calm and healing, God sees it.

5:10 *Blessed **are** those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted on account of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." To be persecuted means to be hunted down, harassed, or punished. Notice the reason: "on account of righteousness." Jesus is not blessing people who suffer because they are rude or foolish. He is blessing those who suffer because they live for God.

This blessing ends just as the first one did: "theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The Beatitudes begin and end with the kingdom. A person who lives like the first seven Beatitudes will not always be welcome in this world. The world did not welcome the King, and it will not always welcome His people.

5:11 *Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute **you**, and say every evil word against you, lying, on account of Me.*

Now Jesus turns from they to you. "Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute you, and say every evil word against you, lying, on account of Me." He is speaking straight to His disciples, and to us.

Notice two important phrases: lying, and "on account of Me." The blessing is for those who are falsely accused because they belong to Jesus. If what people say about us is true, it is not persecution. It is just correction, and we should repent. But when people lie about us because we follow Jesus, we are in very good company. And notice that Jesus says "on account of Me." Who else could say that? Only God can ask people to suffer for His sake.

5:12 *Rejoice and exult, for your reward **is** great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets who **were** before you.*

"Rejoice and exult." Rejoice when you are persecuted? That sounds strange. Jesus gives two reasons. First, "your reward is great in the heavens." God sees what His people suffer, and He will reward them. Second, "thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Those who suffer for Jesus stand in a long line of faithful people like Jeremiah, who was thrown into a pit (Jeremiah 38:6).

We are not saved by suffering, and rewards in Scripture are not salvation. But God does promise to reward faithfulness. The apostles later rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41).

5:13 *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, with what will it be salted? It is no longer strong for anything, except to be thrown out and to be trampled by men.*

"You are the salt of the earth." In Jesus' day, salt had two main uses. It added flavor, and it kept meat from spoiling. There was no refrigeration. Jesus' followers are meant to be salt in the world, slowing the rot of sin and making life better for those around them.

"If the salt becomes tasteless, with what will it be salted?" Pure salt does not lose its saltiness. But the salt in that day was often mixed with other minerals. When the salt washed out, what was left looked like salt but was useless. It was thrown on the road to be walked on. A believer who blends in with the world so completely that no one can tell the difference has lost his saltiness. He may still look like salt, but he does no good.

5:14 *You are the light of the world. A city lying on a mountain cannot be hidden.*

"You are the light of the world." Jesus later said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). We are not the source of the light. We reflect His light, like the moon reflects the sun.

"A city lying on a mountain cannot be hidden." Towns in Israel were often built on hills, and at night their lamps could be seen for miles. A follower of Jesus is not supposed to be a secret agent. If Christ really lives in you, people will eventually see it.

5:15 *Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket, but on the lampstand, and it shines for all who **are** in the house.*

"Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket." The lamps of that day were small clay bowls of olive oil with a wick. The basket was a measuring bowl for grain. Putting it over a lamp would put the light out. No one lights a lamp just to cover it.

"But on the lampstand, and it shines for all who are in the house." Most homes were one room, so one lamp lit up the whole house. Our light is meant to shine first where we live: in our families, our work, our neighborhoods. Fear, shame, or just wanting to fit in can make us cover our light. Jesus says, put it on the stand.

5:16 *Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who **is** in the heavens.*

"Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who is in the heavens." Notice the goal. People see our good works, but the glory goes to God, not to us.

This might sound like it contradicts 6:1, where Jesus warns against doing good works to be seen by men. It does not. The difference is the motive. In 5:16 the goal is that God gets the glory. In 6:1 the goal is that we get the glory. We are to live in a way that makes people think well of our Father, not of ourselves.

5:17 *Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.*

"Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets." "The law or the prophets" was a way of saying the whole Old Testament. Some people thought Jesus was tearing it down, because He did not keep the Pharisees' extra rules. Jesus said plainly that He had not come to abolish it.

"I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament in every way. He kept the Law perfectly. He did what its prophecies foretold. He was what its sacrifices and feasts pictured. And He showed what the Law really meant. When He died as the perfect sacrifice, the shadows gave way to the real thing (Hebrews 10:1). That is why believers today do not offer animal sacrifices. The Law was not thrown away. It was fulfilled in Christ.

5:18 *For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth pass away, one iota or one stroke will by no means pass away from the law until everything happens.*

"Truly I say to you." The word truly is the Hebrew word amen. Jesus uses it to mark a solemn statement. "One iota or one stroke will by no means pass away from the law until everything happens." The iota was the smallest Greek letter, standing for the smallest Hebrew letter, the yod. The stroke was a tiny mark that set one Hebrew letter apart from another, something like the tail on a Q.

Jesus could not have spoken more strongly about the Bible. Every word, every letter, every mark matters. God's Word will stand until all of it is fulfilled. That is why we read it carefully and take it at its word.

5:19 *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whoever does and teaches **them**, this one will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens." Notice that Jesus does not say such a person is shut out of the kingdom. He says he will be "called least" there. God takes His Word seriously, and so should those who teach it.

"Whoever does and teaches them, this one will be called great." Notice the order: does, then teaches. A teacher must live what he teaches. I teach the Bible myself, and this verse is a sober warning to me. James says teachers will be judged more strictly (James 3:1). Living God's Word matters as much as explaining it.

5:20 *For I say to you that unless your righteousness abounds more than **that** of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Unless your righteousness abounds more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." This would have shocked the crowd. The scribes and Pharisees were thought to be the most righteous people in Israel. They tithed even their garden herbs (23:23). How could anyone do better than that?

The answer is not to try harder than the Pharisees. Their righteousness was outward, and it was their own. The righteousness that gets a person into the kingdom is a different kind. It starts with being given Christ's righteousness when we believe (Philippians 3:9). Then God changes our hearts, so that we obey from the inside out. The next verses show what Jesus means by a righteousness that goes deeper than the outside.

5:21 *You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not murder'; and 'Whoever murders will be liable to the judgment.'*

Now Jesus gives six examples. Each one starts with words like "You heard that it was said," and then Jesus says, "But I say to you." He is not correcting the Law of Moses. He is correcting the way it was being taught and showing its true depth. And notice His authority. The rabbis quoted other rabbis. Jesus said, "I say to you."

The first example is murder. "You shall not murder" is the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13). The teachers of that day stopped at the act. If you did not kill anyone, you were fine. "Whoever murders will be liable to the judgment," meaning he would face the local court.

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:13 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:17 (quoted); Exodus 21:12 (alluded to)

5:22 *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'Fool,' will be liable to the Gehenna of fire.*

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment." Jesus goes to the root. Murder starts with anger in the heart. A man who hates his brother is already guilty in God's eyes (1 John 3:15).

Raca was an Aramaic insult meaning empty-head or good-for-nothing. Calling someone that made you "liable to the Sanhedrin," the highest Jewish court, a council of about seventy leaders in Jerusalem. Fool was even worse, a word that attacked a person's character before God. That makes a person "liable to the Gehenna of fire." Gehenna was the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem, where wicked kings once sacrificed children to false gods (Jeremiah 7:31). It became a

picture of the place of final judgment, which we call hell. Jesus is telling us that the words we use and the anger behind them are serious before God.

The words "without cause" are in the Greek copies the SLB follows but not in some of the oldest. Either way, the Bible elsewhere shows there is a right kind of anger at sin (Ephesians 4:26). Jesus is warning against the angry contempt that wants to hurt.

5:23-24 *Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then, having come, offer your gift.*

Jesus gives a practical example. Picture a man at the temple about to offer a sacrifice. Then he remembers "that your brother has something against you." Jesus says, stop. "Leave your gift there before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then, having come, offer your gift."

God cares more about broken relationships than about our religious activity. We cannot be right with God while we refuse to make things right with people we have wronged. Notice that it is the other person who has something against you. If you know you have hurt someone, do not wait for them to come to you. Go to them. Worship can wait. Reconciliation cannot.

5:25-26 *Be agreeing with your accuser quickly, while you are with him on the way, lest the accuser deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans.*

"Be agreeing with your accuser quickly, while you are with him on the way." In that day, a person who owed a debt could be taken to court and thrown into prison until it was paid. Jesus says settle it before you get to the judge.

"You will by no means come out from there until you pay the last quadrans." The quadrans was the smallest Roman coin, worth only a tiny part of a day's wage. The point is plain: deal with conflict quickly, before it gets worse. There is also a deeper warning. Each of us is on the way to meet the Judge of all the earth. We should make peace with God now, while there is still time.

5:27 *You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery.'*

The second example is adultery. "You shall not commit adultery" is the seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14). Adultery is sexual relations between a married person and someone other than his or her spouse. Many in Jesus' day thought that as long as they did not commit the act, they were pure.

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:14 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:18 (quoted)

5:28 *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus is not talking about noticing that someone is attractive. He is talking about looking in order to lust, letting the eyes feed a desire for what God has forbidden.

In our day of screens and pornography, this verse has never been more needed. Sin starts in the heart, often through the eyes, long before it shows up in actions. If this is a battle for you, you are not alone, and you are not beyond help. Confess it to God, who forgives (1 John 1:9), and ask a trusted believer to help you fight it.

5:29-30 *And if your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw **it** from you; for it is better for you that one of your members perish, and not **that** your whole body be thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw **it** from you; for it is better for you that one of your members perish, and not **that** your whole body be thrown into Gehenna.*

"If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out." Jesus does not mean we should cut off parts of our body. A blind man can still lust in his heart. Jesus is using strong words to make a strong point. The right eye and right hand were thought to be the most valuable. Even if the thing that leads us into sin is as precious to us as an eye or a hand, we must get rid of it.

What does that look like today? It may mean getting rid of a phone, cancelling a service, ending a relationship, or changing a habit. Whatever it costs, it is worth it. "It is better for you that one of your members perish, and not that your whole body be thrown into Gehenna." Sin is not something to play with.

5:31 *And it was said, 'Whoever sends away his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'*

The third example is divorce. "Whoever sends away his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." This refers to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. A certificate of divorce was a written paper that set a woman free to marry again. Moses gave this rule to protect women, who could otherwise be thrown out of their homes with no rights at all.

By Jesus' day, Jewish teachers argued over what reason was good enough for divorce. One school, following a teacher named Shammai, said only serious sexual sin. Another school, following a teacher named Hillel, said a man could divorce his wife for almost anything, even burning his dinner. Many men were treating the certificate as a simple permission slip to get rid of a wife.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 24:1 (quoted)

5:32 *But I say to you that whoever sends away his wife, except for a matter of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a* ***woman*** *who has been sent away commits adultery.*

"But I say to you that whoever sends away his wife, except for a matter of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery." Jesus raises the standard. God never intended marriage to be thrown away. In that day, a woman sent away almost had to remarry to survive, and Jesus says the man who sent her away without good cause is guilty of pushing her into a second marriage that God does not recognize.

"Sexual immorality" translates the Greek word porneia, a broad word that covers sexual sin of many kinds. Jesus gives this as the one exception here. Bible teachers who love God's Word have read this passage in a few different ways. Many believe that when a spouse commits sexual immorality, the innocent spouse may divorce and is free to remarry. Others believe Jesus allows divorce in that case but not remarriage. Still others believe the exception refers only to sin during the betrothal period, like what Joseph thought had happened with Mary in chapter 1, and that marriage itself cannot be dissolved. Paul adds another case, where an unbelieving spouse leaves (1 Corinthians 7:15), and teachers differ over what that means for remarriage. Jesus comes back to this subject in chapter 19.

Here is what is plain. God hates the breaking of marriage, and He means for it to last for life. Divorce is never something to take lightly. And God's grace reaches those who have been through divorce, whether they were sinned against or did the sinning. If you are in that place, the gospel is for you too. If you are in danger in your home, please get help and get safe. Talk with a godly pastor about your situation, and do not carry it alone.

5:33 *Again, you heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not swear falsely, but you shall pay your oaths to the Lord.'*

The fourth example is oaths. "You shall not swear falsely, but you shall pay your oaths to the Lord." This sums up passages like Leviticus 19:12 and Numbers 30:2. An oath was a solemn promise that called on God as a witness. The Law said that if you swore by God, you had to keep your word.

The problem was that people found loopholes. They made a habit of swearing by things other than God's name, so they could break the promise later. They were keeping the letter of the Law while being dishonest.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:12 (quoted); Numbers 30:2 (alluded to)

5:34-35 *But I say to you, not to swear at all: neither by heaven, because it is* ***the*** *throne of God; nor by the earth, because it is* ***the*** *footstool of His feet; nor by Jerusalem, because it is* ***the*** *city of the great King.*

"But I say to you, not to swear at all." Jesus cuts through the loopholes. You cannot swear "by heaven," because "it is the throne of God." You cannot swear "by the earth," because "it is the footstool of His feet" (see Isaiah 66:1). You cannot swear "by Jerusalem," because "it is the city of

the great King" (see Psalm 48:2). Everything belongs to God. There is no promise you can make that leaves Him out.

Does this mean a Christian can never take an oath in court? Believers have disagreed on that. Some take this verse to mean no oaths at all. Most believe Jesus is forbidding the careless, tricky oaths of everyday speech, not solemn oaths before a court. God Himself swore by Himself (Hebrews 6:13), and Jesus answered under oath at His trial (26:63-64). Either way, the main point is honesty.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 66:1 (alluded to); Psalm 48:2 (alluded to)

5:36 *Nor shall you swear by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black.*

"Nor shall you swear by your head, because you are not able to make one hair white or black." People would swear by their own life or head. But you do not even control the color of your hair. Your life is in God's hands, not yours. Even when you swear by yourself, you are swearing by something that belongs to God.

5:37 *But let your word be 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no'; and what is more than these is from the evil* ***one****.*

Jesus tells us to let our word be a simple yes or a simple no. A believer should be so honest that he never needs an oath to be believed. When he says yes, he means yes. When he says no, he means no. James repeats this teaching almost word for word (James 5:12).

"What is more than these is from the evil one." The need for oaths comes from a world full of lies, and the father of lies is the devil (John 8:44). A person whose word is good is a living witness to the God of truth.

5:38 *You heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'*

The fifth example is revenge. "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." This comes from the Law of Moses (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20). In the Law, it was a rule for judges. It made sure punishment fit the crime and was not more. It actually limited revenge. But people had turned it into a personal right to get even.

Old Testament links: Exodus 21:24 (quoted); Leviticus 24:20 (quoted); Deuteronomy 19:21 (quoted)

5:39 *But I say to you, not to resist the evil* ***person****; but whoever will strike you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

"But I say to you, not to resist the evil person." Jesus is speaking of personal insults, not of governments, police, or self-defense against murder. Romans 13:1-4 says God gave the government the sword to punish evil.

"Whoever will strike you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also." Since most people are right-handed, a blow to the right cheek usually meant a backhanded slap. In that culture, it was an insult more than an attack. Jesus says do not slap back. Do not answer insult with insult. That

does not mean a person must stay in a dangerous or abusive situation. It means we do not take personal revenge. We leave that to God (Romans 12:19).

5:40 *And to the **one** wanting to sue you and to take your tunic, yield to him the cloak also.*

"To the one wanting to sue you and to take your tunic, yield to him the cloak also." The tunic was the inner garment, like a long shirt. The cloak was the heavy outer garment, which was also a blanket at night. The Law said a poor man's cloak could not be kept overnight (Exodus 22:26-27). Jesus says, rather than fight to protect your rights, be willing to give even more than what is demanded.

The point is not that we never stand up for what is right. Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen more than once (Acts 16:37; 22:25). The point is that we do not live to protect our own stuff and our own pride.

5:41 *And whoever compels you **to go** approximately 1,620 yards (one mile), go with him two.*

"Whoever compels you to go approximately 1,620 yards (one mile), go with him two." A Roman soldier had the right to force a Jew to carry his gear for one Roman mile, a little less than our mile. The Jewish people hated this. It reminded them they were under a foreign power. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross in this way (27:32).

Jesus says, go two. When you have to serve, serve gladly and go beyond what is required. That is what turns an enemy's demand into a chance to show the love of Christ. This is where we get the saying about going the extra mile.

5:42 *Give to the **one** asking you, and do not turn away from the **one** wanting to borrow from you.*

"Give to the one asking you, and do not turn away from the one wanting to borrow from you." Jesus' followers should be generous people. The Law told Israel to lend freely to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

Does this mean we must give everything anyone asks for? Other parts of Scripture help us. Paul says the man who refuses to work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Giving money to feed someone's addiction does not help him. But the heart Jesus wants is open-handed, not tight-fisted. Our default should be to help, not to look for reasons not to.

5:43 *You heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

The sixth example is love. "You shall love your neighbor" comes from Leviticus 19:18. But the Old Testament never says "hate your enemy." That was added by teachers who decided that "neighbor" meant only a fellow Jew, or only people like them. Then they reasoned that if you love your neighbor, you are free to hate everyone else. Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan answers the question of who our neighbor is (Luke 10:25-37).

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:18 (quoted)

5:44 *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those cursing you, do good to those hating you, and pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you,*

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those cursing you, do good to those hating you, and pray for those mistreating you and persecuting you." Love in this verse is agape, the self-giving love that seeks the good of another, whether or not they deserve it. It is not a warm feeling. It is a choice that shows up in action.

Notice what that love does. It blesses, it does good, and it prays. It is hard to stay bitter at someone you are praying for. Jesus did all of this Himself. On the cross He prayed for the very men who nailed Him there (Luke 23:34). Stephen did the same as he was being stoned (Acts 7:60). If you are struggling to love someone who hurt you, start by praying for them.

5:45 *so that you may be sons of your Father who **is** in **the** heavens; for He makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on righteous and unrighteous.*

"So that you may be sons of your Father who is in the heavens." We do not become God's children by loving our enemies. We become God's children by faith in Christ (John 1:12). But loving our enemies shows that we are His children, because it is what our Father does.

"He makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on righteous and unrighteous." God is good to people who hate Him. Every sunrise and every rain shower is a gift from God to a world that mostly ignores Him. Bible teachers call this common grace. If God does that, His children should too.

5:46-47 *For if you love those loving you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what more do you do? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*

"If you love those loving you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for Rome. Many of them cheated, charging more than they should and keeping the extra. They were hated as traitors and thieves. Matthew himself had been one (9:9).

Jesus' point is simple. Loving people who love you back is not special. Everyone does that. "If you greet your brothers only, what more do you do?" A greeting in that day was a blessing, a wish for peace. Even the worst people are nice to their friends. A follower of Jesus is called to do more, to love people who give nothing back.

5:48 *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father who **is** in the heavens is perfect.*

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father who is in the heavens is perfect." This verse sums up the whole chapter. The word perfect means complete, whole, mature. In context, Jesus is talking about love. God's love is complete. It reaches even His enemies. Our love should be like His.

Can any of us do this? Not on our own. If we read this chapter honestly, it should bring us back to the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3). God's standard is His own perfection, and

we fall short every day (Romans 3:23). That is exactly why we need Jesus. He kept this standard perfectly, and He gives His righteousness to all who believe in Him. Then His Spirit begins to grow this kind of love in us. The Sermon on the Mount does not tell us how to get into the kingdom by trying harder. It shows us what the King is like, and what He makes His people become.

Chapter 5 Summary

Jesus went up on a mountain and taught His disciples what life in His kingdom looks like. He blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness and for His sake. He called His followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and told them to let their light shine so that others would glorify their Father. He said He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them, and that the righteousness of His people must go beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees. Then He gave six examples of how God's Law reaches the heart: anger is the root of murder, lust is adultery of the heart, divorce is not to be taken lightly, our word should be honest without oaths, we should not take personal revenge, and we must love even our enemies. He ended by calling His followers to be perfect, as their Father in heaven is perfect.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. Who was Jesus speaking to when He gave this sermon, and who was listening in? (5:1-2; 7:28)

2. What does it mean to be "poor in spirit," and why do you think Jesus started there? (5:3)

3. What two things did salt do in Jesus' day, and how are believers like salt? (5:13)

4. What did Jesus mean when He said He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it? (5:17-18)

5. How can anyone have a righteousness greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees? (5:20)

6. What does Jesus say about anger, and what should we do if a brother has something against us? (5:22-24)

7. How does Jesus' teaching on lust and divorce show that God cares about the heart and not just actions? (5:28-32)

8. How should a believer respond to personal insults and to enemies? (5:39-44)

9. Is there someone you need to be reconciled to? What step could you take this week? (5:23-24)

10. Which of the Beatitudes do you most need God to grow in your life right now, and why?

Chapter 6: The Sermon on the Mount: Giving, Prayer, and Treasure

Scripture

6:1-18 Beware not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them; otherwise indeed, you have no reward with your Father who ***is*** in the heavens. Therefore whenever you do charity, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you are doing charity, do not let your left ***hand*** know what your right ***hand*** is doing, so that your charity may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the wide streets, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you that they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who ***is*** in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when praying, do not babble like the Gentiles; for they think that they will be heard in their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him. 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.' For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And whenever you fast, do not be gloomy like the hypocrites; for they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men ***to be*** fasting. Truly I say to you that they have their reward in full. But you, when fasting, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to men ***to be*** fasting, but to your Father who ***is*** in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

6:19-34 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore if the light that ***is*** in you is darkness, how great ***is*** the darkness! No one is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and wealth. Because of this I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, nor for your body, what you will put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body ***more*** than the clothing? Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? And which of you, being anxious, is able to add approximately 1.5 feet (one cubit) to his lifespan? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe the lilies of the field, how they grow: they do not labor, nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. But if God so

clothes the grass of the field, which is ***here*** today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, ***will He*** not much more ***clothe*** you, you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For the nations seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 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.

Chapter 6 Preview

In chapter 5, Jesus showed that God's Law reaches past our actions to our hearts. In chapter 6 He turns to our religious life and our daily life, and He asks the same question about both: who are you living for? He takes three acts of worship every Jew knew well: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. He warns that all three can be done to be seen by people, and if that is our goal, the applause of people is all the reward we will get. Done in secret, for the Father, they bring His reward. In the middle of this teaching, Jesus gives His disciples a model prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer.

In the second half of the chapter, Jesus turns to money and worry. We cannot store up treasure on earth and in heaven at the same time, and we cannot serve both God and wealth. Then He speaks tenderly to people who are anxious about food, drink and clothing. Look at the birds. Look at the flowers. Your Father knows what you need. Seek first His kingdom, and trust Him with tomorrow.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1 *Beware not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them; otherwise indeed, you have no reward with your Father who **is** in the heavens.*

"Beware not to do your charity before men in order to be seen by them." Charity here means acts of righteousness, especially giving to the poor. The key words are "in order to be seen by them." Jesus is not saying we can never do good where others can see. In 5:16 He told us to let our light shine. The question is why we are doing it.

"Otherwise indeed, you have no reward with your Father." God does reward His people. But if our goal is to impress people, then their opinion is the only reward we get. Before you serve, give, or pray in public, it is worth asking yourself who you are doing it for.

6:2 *Therefore whenever you do charity, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

"Do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do." We do not know of any custom of blowing real trumpets when someone gave money. Jesus is most likely using a figure of speech, the way we talk about someone blowing his own horn. The point is clear: do not make a show of your giving.

A "hypocrite" was an actor on a stage, a man who wore a mask and played a part. Jesus uses this word for people who play the part of being godly while their hearts are somewhere else. "They have their reward in full." This was a business phrase written on receipts. It meant paid in full. They wanted the praise of men, they got it, and the account is closed. There is nothing more coming from God.

6:3-4 *But when you are doing charity, do not let your left **hand** know what your right **hand** is doing, so that your charity may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*

"Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." This is a picture of giving so quietly that even you hardly notice it. Do not keep a running list in your head of all the good you have done. Give, and then forget about it.

"So that your charity may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." God sees what no one else sees. The gift no one knows about, the help you gave without telling anyone, the check you wrote and never mentioned, God saw all of it. And He will reward it. Some of that reward may come in this life, but most of it waits for the day when Christ judges His people's works and gives rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10). That judgment is not about whether we are saved. It is about how we served.

6:5 *And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the wide streets, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you that they have their reward in full.*

"When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites." Notice that Jesus says "when you pray," not if you pray. He expects His followers to pray. Devout Jews prayed at set times each day. Some made sure the hour of prayer caught them "on the corners of the wide streets," where the most people would see them.

"Truly I say to you that they have their reward in full." They wanted to be known as men of prayer, and they were. But God was not listening, because they were not really talking to Him. They were talking to the crowd.

This does not mean public prayer is wrong. Jesus prayed in public, and the early church prayed together (Acts 4:24). The problem is praying for an audience.

6:6 *But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who **is** in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

"Enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret." The inner room was a storeroom, often the only room in a house with a door. It was the most private place a person had.

Jesus wants us to have a private prayer life. What we are when no one is watching is what we really are. A person who only prays in public does not really pray. Find a place where you can be alone with God, shut the door, and talk to Him. "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." Time alone with God is never wasted.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 26:20 (alluded to)

6:7 *And when praying, do not babble like the Gentiles; for they think that they will be heard in their many words.*

"When praying, do not babble like the Gentiles; for they think that they will be heard in their many words." Here Jesus warns against a different problem. The pagans around Israel repeated the names of their gods and the same phrases over and over, hoping to wear the gods down. The prophets of Baal cried out from morning until noon (1 Kings 18:26).

Jesus is not against long prayers. He prayed all night once (Luke 6:12). And He is not against asking more than once (Luke 18:1-8). He is against empty words said like a magic formula, as though the number of words is what gets God's attention. Prayer is talking with a Father, not working a machine.

6:8 *Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him.*

"Do not be like them; for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him." You might ask, if God already knows what I need, why pray at all? It's simple. Prayer is not about giving God information. It is about a relationship with Him. A loving father knows what his children need, and he still wants them to come and ask. When we pray, we learn to depend on Him, and we see His answers as gifts from His hand.

6:9 *Therefore you, pray in this way: 'Our Father who **is** in the heavens, let Your name be sanctified;*

"Therefore you, pray in this way." Jesus gives His disciples a model. In Luke, He gave it when a disciple asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). It can be prayed word for word, and many believers do. But Jesus said "in this way." It is a pattern for all our prayers.

"Our Father who is in the heavens." Jesus teaches us to call God Father. The Jews of that day rarely spoke to God that way in prayer. Jesus invites His followers into the same close relationship He has with the Father. Notice that it is our Father. We pray as part of a family. And He is "in the heavens." He is near as a Father, but He is also great, high above us.

"Let Your name be sanctified." To sanctify means to set apart as holy. God's name stands for who He is. The first thing we ask is not for ourselves. We ask that God would be honored as holy, in our lives and in the world.

6:10 *let Your kingdom come; let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth.*

"Let Your kingdom come." This is a prayer for the King to come and reign. In one sense the kingdom came near when Jesus came. But the kingdom in its fullness is still future. Every time we

pray these words, we are praying for the day Jesus returns, puts down every enemy, and reigns on the earth (Revelation 11:15; 20:4-6). The church has been praying it for two thousand years, and God will answer it.

"Let Your will come about, as in heaven, also on the earth." In heaven, God's will is done perfectly, gladly and right away. We pray that it would be done that way here. That includes in my own life. We cannot honestly pray "Your will" for the world while refusing it in our own hearts.

6:11 *Give us today our daily bread.*

"Give us today our daily bread." After three requests for God's glory, the prayer turns to our needs. And it starts with the most basic one, food. God cares about the ordinary needs of our bodies.

Notice the words today and daily. Like the manna God gave Israel in the wilderness, one day at a time (Exodus 16:4), we ask for what we need for today. This teaches us to live in daily trust. Even if your pantry is full, everything you have comes from God's hand. Every meal is a gift.

6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.*

"Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." Sin is pictured here as a debt, something we owe God and cannot pay. Every one of us needs to pray this prayer. Luke's version speaks of sins (Luke 11:4). Our greatest need is not food. It is forgiveness.

"As we also forgive our debtors." This is a hard line to pray honestly. We are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive others. Jesus explains this line in verses 14 and 15.

6:13 *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.'*

"Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil." God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13). But He does allow testing. This line is the prayer of a person who knows how weak he is. Lord, keep me out of situations where I will fall. And when temptation comes, rescue me. "The evil" can mean evil in general or the evil one, Satan. The Greek can be read either way, and both are true. We need to be rescued from both.

"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages. Amen." The prayer ends where it began, with God's glory. The kingdom is His, the power to answer is His, and the glory belongs to Him forever. These words echo David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11, where David gave God the greatness, the might, the splendor and the kingdom.

These closing words are found in the Greek copies the SLB follows, called the Received Text. Most of the older Greek copies do not have them, and many modern Bibles put them in brackets or a footnote. Luke's version of the prayer does not have them either (Luke 11:2-4). No teaching of the faith rests on these words alone. Everything they say is taught plainly elsewhere in Scripture, and God's people have prayed them together for many centuries.

Old Testament links: 1 Chronicles 29:11 (alluded to)

6:14 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;*

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Of all the lines in the prayer, Jesus chose to explain this one. A trespass is a false step, a sin.

Does this mean we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others? No. We are forgiven by grace, through faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). But a person who has truly been forgiven by God becomes a forgiving person. Jesus will tell a parable in chapter 18 about a servant forgiven a huge debt who refused to forgive a small one (18:23-35). God's forgiveness changes our hearts.

6:15 *but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This is a sobering verse. A heart that refuses to forgive shows that it has not understood God's forgiveness. We cannot hold tightly to bitterness and at the same time walk in fellowship with God.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending nothing happened, or trusting someone who is still dangerous, or skipping the consequences of a crime. It means letting go of our right to get even and leaving that person in God's hands. If someone has hurt you badly, forgiveness may be a long road. Ask God to help you take the first step.

6:16 *And whenever you fast, do not be gloomy like the hypocrites; for they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men* ***to be*** *fasting. Truly I say to you that they have their reward in full.*

"Whenever you fast, do not be gloomy like the hypocrites." Again Jesus says whenever, not if. The Law required only one fast a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29). But the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12).

"They disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to be fasting." Some would leave their hair messy, skip washing, and even put ashes on their faces so everyone would know they were fasting. They wanted credit for being spiritual. And again, "they have their reward in full."

6:17-18 *But you, when fasting, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to men* ***to be*** *fasting, but to your Father who* ***is*** *in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

"Anoint your head and wash your face." In that day people put olive oil on their hair as part of grooming. Jesus says, when you fast, look normal. Get cleaned up, comb your hair, and go about your day.

"So that you may not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret." Fasting is between you and God. It is a way of saying that we want God more than food. Many believers today rarely fast. Jesus assumed His followers would. If you have never fasted, you might start by skipping one meal and using that time to pray.

6:19 *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal;*

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." In Jesus' day, wealth was often kept in fine clothing, which moths could eat; in metal and grain, which rust and rot could ruin; and in houses with mud walls, which thieves could dig through.

Everything we own on earth is temporary. It wears out, breaks down, gets stolen, or gets left behind when we die. Jesus is not saying it is a sin to own things or to save money. He is saying not to make earthly things our treasure, the thing our lives are built around.

6:20 *but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal;*

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal." How do we store up treasure in heaven? By using what God has given us for His purposes: giving to His work, helping the poor, serving others, telling people about Jesus. Paul told rich believers to be rich in good works and generous, storing up a good foundation for the future (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Treasure in heaven is safe. No market crash, no fire, and no thief can touch it. We cannot take our money with us, but we can send it ahead.

6:21 *for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is one of the most searching verses in the Bible. Our hearts follow our treasure. If you want to know what you really love, look at where your money and time go.

This also works the other way. If you want your heart to care more about God's kingdom, start putting your treasure there. Our hearts follow our giving.

6:22 *The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light;*

"The lamp of the body is the eye." The eye is like a window that lets light into the body. "If your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light." A single eye is one that is focused on one thing, clear and undivided. The word was also used for being generous.

In context, Jesus is still talking about money. A person whose eye is fixed on God, and who is generous with what he has, will have his whole life filled with light.

6:23 *but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore if the light that **is** in you is darkness, how great **is** the darkness!*

"But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness." In Jewish speech, an evil eye meant a greedy, stingy eye, one that always wanted more (Proverbs 28:22). Greed darkens the whole person.

"If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" This is a frightening thought. If the very thing that should guide you is broken, you will walk in the dark and not even know it. Greed blinds people. Many have wandered from the faith because they loved money (1 Timothy 6:10).

6:24 *No one is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and wealth.*

"No one is able to serve two masters." A slave belonged to one master. He could not belong fully to two at the same time. "Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other."

"You are not able to serve God and wealth." Notice that Jesus does not say we should not. He says we cannot. Money is a terrible master. It always promises security and always wants more. We will either use money to serve God, or we will end up using God to get money. There is no middle ground. Which one is your master?

6:25 *Because of this I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you will eat and what you will drink, nor for your body, what you will put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body **more** than the clothing?*

"Because of this I say to you, do not be anxious for your life." "Because of this" ties worry to what Jesus just said. Worry is a sign that we are serving wealth. If God is our master, then He is responsible for taking care of us.

To be anxious means to be pulled in different directions, to have a divided mind. Jesus names the basic needs: food, drink, and clothing. "Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the clothing?" If God gave you life and a body, the greater gifts, can't you trust Him for the smaller things that keep them going?

6:26 *Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*

"Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them." Jesus points to the birds flying overhead. They do not farm. Yet God feeds them.

Jesus is not saying we should not work. Birds work hard to find food. He is saying birds do not worry. "Are you not much more valuable than they?" God is not the birds' Father, but He is yours. If He takes care of sparrows, He will take care of His children (10:29-31).

6:27 *And which of you, being anxious, is able to add approximately 1.5 feet (one cubit) to his lifespan?*

"Which of you, being anxious, is able to add approximately 1.5 feet (one cubit) to his lifespan?" A cubit was a measure of about a foot and a half, the length from a man's elbow to the tip of his finger. Here it is used for time, as if adding a little more to the length of a life.

Worry does not add one moment to your life. In fact, it often takes away from it. Worry changes nothing about tomorrow, but it steals the joy and strength of today.

6:28-29 *And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe the lilies of the field, how they grow: they do not labor, nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these.*

"Why are you anxious about clothing? Observe the lilies of the field." The lilies were the wildflowers that covered the hills of Galilee in the spring. "They do not labor, nor do they spin." They do not make thread or weave cloth.

"Not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these." Solomon was the richest king in Israel's history, famous for his splendor (1 Kings 10:4-7). Yet a simple wildflower, dressed by God, is more beautiful than Solomon in his finest robes. God is a God who clothes things with beauty.

6:30 *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is **here** today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, **will He** not much more **clothe** you, you of little faith?*

"If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven." Wood was scarce in Israel, so dried grass and flowers were used to fuel clay ovens. Something beautiful one day was burned up the next. If God puts that much care into something that lasts only a day, "will He not much more clothe you, you of little faith?"

"You of little faith." Jesus says this gently. Worry is not just a feeling. At its root it is a faith problem. It is forgetting how good and how faithful our Father is.

6:31-32 *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For the nations seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?'" These are the questions that fill so many people's minds. Jesus gives two reasons not to be ruled by them.

First, "the nations seek after all these things." The nations here means the Gentiles, the people who do not know God. When believers are consumed by these worries, we are living like people who have no heavenly Father. Second, "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." He is not unaware or uncaring. He knows. That should settle our hearts.

6:33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Here is the cure for worry. Put God first. Make His rule in your life and His righteousness your first concern, and He will take care of the rest.

This is not a promise that believers will be rich. Paul knew hunger and need while serving God faithfully (Philippians 4:11-12). It is a promise that our Father will give us what we truly need while we seek Him. Many have found that when they put God first in their giving, their time, and their decisions, He has never failed them.

6:34 *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about its own things. Sufficient for the day* ***is*** *its trouble.*

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about its own things." Most of what we worry about has not happened yet, and much of it never will. God gives grace for today, not for tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, His grace will be there too.

"Sufficient for the day is its trouble." Jesus is honest. Each day has its share of trouble. Life in this world is not easy. But we only have to carry one day at a time, and we do not carry it alone. If you are worried about tomorrow, give it to the Father today, and do the next right thing.

Chapter 6 Summary

Jesus warned His disciples not to practice their righteousness to be seen by people. When they give to the poor, they should not make a show of it but give in secret, and their Father who sees in secret will reward them. When they pray, they should not pray for an audience or babble empty words, but pray to their Father privately, who knows what they need. He gave them a model prayer that begins with God's name, His kingdom and His will, and then asks for daily bread, forgiveness, and rescue from temptation and evil. He warned that those who will not forgive others will not be forgiven. When they fast, they should look normal, so that only the Father knows. Jesus told them to store up treasure in heaven, not on earth, because their hearts follow their treasure, and they cannot serve both God and wealth. He told them not to worry about food or clothing, because the Father who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies knows what they need. They are to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and trust Him with tomorrow.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What three acts of worship does Jesus talk about in 6:1-18, and what is the danger in each one?

2. What does it mean that the hypocrites "have their reward in full"? (6:2, 5, 16)

3. Why do we pray if our Father already knows what we need? (6:8)

4. What do the first three requests of the Lord's Prayer focus on, and what do the last three focus on? (6:9-13)

5. What does Jesus say about forgiving others, and how does that fit with salvation by grace? (6:14-15)

6. What is the difference between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven? (6:19-21)

7. Why can't a person serve both God and wealth? (6:24)

8. What lessons does Jesus draw from the birds and the lilies? (6:26-30)

9. Look at where your money and time went last month. What does that tell you about where your heart is? (6:21)

10. What are you most anxious about right now? What would it look like to seek first His kingdom in that area? (6:33-34)

Chapter 7: The Sermon on the Mount: Two Roads

Scripture

7:1-12 Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you measure, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the splinter that ***is*** in the eye of your brother, but the beam in your own eye you do not notice? Or how will you say to your brother, 'Allow me to cast out the splinter from your eye,' and look, the beam ***is*** in your eye? Hypocrite! First cast out the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter from the eye of your brother. Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor throw your pearls before the pigs, so that they do not trample them with their feet, and having turned, tear you to pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there of you who, if his son asks him ***for*** bread, will give him a stone? And if he asks ***for*** a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know ***how*** to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who ***is*** in the heavens give good things to those who ask Him? Therefore all things whatever you desire that men do to you, so you also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

7:13-29 Enter through the narrow gate; for wide ***is*** the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. Because narrow ***is*** the gate and constricted the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it. And beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? So every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits. A good tree is not able to produce evil fruits, nor a rotten tree to produce good fruits. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire. So then, by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.' 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. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain came down, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and they struck against that house; and it fell, and its fall was great." 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.

Chapter 7 Preview

Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount with teaching about how we treat others and a strong call to decide. He warns against judging others with a harsh, self-righteous spirit while ignoring our own sin. He encourages His followers to keep asking, seeking and knocking, because the Father

loves to give good gifts to His children. And He sums up how we should treat people in what we call the Golden Rule.

Then Jesus brings the whole sermon to a point of decision. There are two gates and two roads, one wide and leading to destruction, one narrow and leading to life. There are two kinds of trees, two kinds of fruit, and two kinds of people who call Him Lord. And there are two builders, one on the rock and one on the sand. The crowds were amazed, because Jesus did not teach like the scribes. He taught with authority.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.*

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." This is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and one of the most misused. Many people use it to mean that no one should ever say anything is wrong. But that cannot be what Jesus meant. In this same chapter He tells us to watch out for false prophets and to judge them by their fruit (7:15-20). In verse 6 He tells us to recognize dogs and pigs. Elsewhere He tells us to "judge the righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

What Jesus forbids is the harsh, critical, self-righteous spirit that is quick to condemn others and blind to its own faults. It is the attitude that looks down on people and assumes the worst. That kind of judging is not ours to do. God alone knows the heart, and He is the final Judge (James 4:12).

7:2 *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you measure, it will be measured back to you.*

"With what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you measure, it will be measured back to you." Picture a merchant measuring out grain. If he uses a small, stingy measure for others, he should expect the same to be used for him.

If we are harsh and unforgiving toward others, we should not be surprised when people treat us the same way, and God takes notice of the standard we use (Romans 2:1). If we are gracious and fair, we will be treated that way. This should make us careful. Before we criticize, we should ask how we would feel if that same standard were used on us.

7:3 *And why do you look at the splinter that **is** in the eye of your brother, but the beam in your own eye you do not notice?*

"Why do you look at the splinter that is in the eye of your brother, but the beam in your own eye you do not notice?" Jesus uses humor here to make a serious point. Picture a man with a wooden beam, a large piece of lumber, sticking out of his eye, trying to see a tiny speck of sawdust in someone else's.

Jesus grew up as the son of a carpenter (13:55), and He knew all about beams and splinters. The point is that we often see small faults in others while ignoring big faults in ourselves. In fact, the sins that bother us most in others are often the ones we struggle with ourselves.

7:4 *Or how will you say to your brother, 'Allow me to cast out the splinter from your eye,' and look, the beam* ***is*** *in your eye?*

"How will you say to your brother, 'Allow me to cast out the splinter from your eye,' and look, the beam is in your eye?" The man with the beam is offering to help. He wants to be the eye doctor. But he cannot even see straight himself.

This is the attitude of someone who loves to correct others but never examines his own life. He is eager to point out what is wrong with everyone else. It is easy to be that person. Before we offer to fix anyone else, we should take an honest look in the mirror.

7:5 *Hypocrite! First cast out the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter from the eye of your brother.*

"Hypocrite! First cast out the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter from the eye of your brother." Notice that Jesus does not say never help your brother with his splinter. He says deal with your own sin first. Then you will be able to help.

The goal is to help, not to condemn. A splinter in the eye hurts, and it needs to come out. But removing something from someone's eye takes a gentle hand and a clear view. Paul says the same thing. Those who are spiritual should restore a brother caught in sin "in a spirit of gentleness," watching themselves so they are not tempted too (Galatians 6:1). Humble, honest self-examination comes first. Then gentle help.

7:6 *Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor throw your pearls before the pigs, so that they do not trample them with their feet, and having turned, tear you to pieces.*

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor throw your pearls before the pigs." Dogs in that day were not house pets. They were wild scavengers that roamed the streets. Pigs were unclean animals under the Law. Both were pictures of people who treat holy things with contempt.

What does this mean? Jesus has just warned us against harsh judging. Now He balances it. We are not to be harsh, but we are also not to be foolish. Some people, after hearing the truth again and again, mock it and attack those who bring it. Jesus later told His disciples to shake the dust off their feet when a town refused them (10:14). We keep loving such people and praying for them, but we do not keep forcing holy things on people who trample them. It takes wisdom to know the difference, and that wisdom comes from God.

7:7 *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." In Greek these are commands that keep going: keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Jesus is calling us to keep praying and not give up.

Notice that the words build on each other. Asking is speaking to God. Seeking adds effort. Knocking adds persistence, like standing at a door until it opens. Coming right after the warning

about judging, this may also tell us where to get the wisdom we need to handle splinters and pigs. We ask God for it.

7:8 *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." This is a promise. God answers His children.

Does that mean God gives us everything we ask for? No. Sometimes His answer is yes. Sometimes it is wait. And sometimes it is no, because He has something better, the way a wise parent sometimes says no. John tells us God answers when we ask according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). But no one who keeps coming to God in honest prayer is ever turned away empty.

7:9-10 *Or what man is there of you who, if his son asks him **for** bread, will give him a stone? And if he asks **for** a fish, will he give him a serpent?*

"What man is there of you who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?" The small round loaves of that day could look a bit like stones. "If he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Some fish in the Sea of Galilee looked a bit like snakes.

Jesus asks the fathers in the crowd a simple question. Would any of you play a cruel trick like that on your hungry child? Of course not. Even the worst father wants to give his children good things.

7:11 *If you then, being evil, know **how** to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who **is** in the heavens give good things to those who ask Him?*

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those who ask Him?" Notice that Jesus says "being evil." He does not flatter people. Even the best human fathers are sinners. Yet even sinful fathers love to give their kids good gifts.

If imperfect fathers do that, how much more will our perfect Father in heaven? Luke tells us one of the best gifts the Father gives is the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Some of us had fathers who were cruel, absent or harsh. If that is your story, this verse tells you God is not like that. He is the Father you always needed.

7:12 *Therefore all things whatever you desire that men do to you, so you also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets.*

"Therefore all things whatever you desire that men do to you, so you also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets." This is the verse we call the Golden Rule. Other teachers in history said something like it in a negative way: don't do to others what you don't want done to you. Jesus said it in a positive way. Don't just avoid hurting people. Go and do good to them, the good you would want done for you.

"For this is the law and the prophets." Jesus says this rule sums up how the whole Old Testament teaches us to treat each other. He says it again later when He gives the two great commandments, to love God and love your neighbor (22:37-40). The Golden Rule does not save us. But a person whom God has saved will try to live it.

7:13 *Enter through the narrow gate; for wide **is** the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it.*

"Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it." Now Jesus calls for a decision. There are only two roads. The wide road is easy to get on. It has room for every belief, every lifestyle, and every sin. Most people are on it. But it ends in destruction.

This is not a popular message today. Many want to believe that every road leads to God. Jesus said plainly that the broad road leads to destruction, no matter how many people are on it. Popularity is not proof of truth.

7:14 *Because narrow **is** the gate and constricted the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it.*

"Because narrow is the gate and constricted the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it." The narrow gate is Jesus Himself. He said, "I am the door" (John 10:9), and "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The way is "constricted," which means pressed in, hard. Following Jesus is not always easy. It means turning from sin and following Him even when it costs us.

"Few are those who find it." Notice the word find. It must be sought. But it is not hidden. Jesus is standing at the gate, inviting everyone to come in. The question is whether we will.

7:15 *And beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." A prophet speaks for God. A false prophet claims to speak for God but does not. Jesus warns that false teachers will come to the narrow road and try to pull people off it.

Notice that they do not look like wolves. They look like sheep. They seem gentle, kind and godly. They use the right words. But inside they are "ravenous," hungry to devour. They want money, power, or followers for themselves. Peter and Paul both warned the church that such teachers would come (Acts 20:29-30; 2 Peter 2:1-3). They are still with us today.

7:16 *You will know them by their fruits. Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?*

"You will know them by their fruits." How do we tell a false prophet from a true one? Look at the fruit. "Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?" Thorn bushes grow small berries that might look like grapes from a distance, but up close you can tell. A thistle cannot grow figs.

What is the fruit? It includes what a teacher teaches, whether it lines up with God's Word (Deuteronomy 13:1-4), and how he lives. Does his life show the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)? Or does it show greed, pride, and sin? Over time, the fruit always shows.

7:17-18 *So every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits. A good tree is not able to produce evil fruits, nor a rotten tree to produce good fruits.*

"Every good tree produces good fruits, but the rotten tree produces evil fruits." This is a law of nature. What a tree is on the inside determines what it grows on the outside. "A good tree is not able to produce evil fruits, nor a rotten tree to produce good fruits."

This applies to false prophets, but it applies to all of us too. Our lives show what we really are. That is why we need new hearts. A bad tree cannot make itself good by gluing apples to its branches. It needs a new nature. That is what God gives when we are born again (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus does not mean a good tree never has a bad apple. Believers still sin. He is talking about the overall pattern of a life.

7:19-20 *Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire. So then, by their fruits you will know them.*

"Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into fire." These are the very words John the Baptist used (3:10). The warning is serious. False teachers will face God's judgment, and so will everyone whose life shows they never truly knew God.

"So then, by their fruits you will know them." Jesus repeats the point from verse 16 to make sure we get it. Do not be fooled by smooth words or impressive shows. Look at the fruit.

7:21 *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of My Father who **is** in **the** heavens.*

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens." This is one of the most sobering verses in the Bible. Calling Jesus Lord with our lips is not enough. Saying "Lord, Lord" twice shows these people were very sure of themselves.

"But the one who does the will of My Father." Does this mean we are saved by doing good works? No. The will of the Father is first of all that we believe in the Son (John 6:40). But real faith always produces a changed life. Notice also that Jesus calls God "My Father." No ordinary teacher could say that. And Jesus is the One people will stand before on that day.

7:22 *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?'*

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?'" "That day" is the day of judgment. Notice the word many. This is not a small group.

These people pointed to their religious work, and impressive work at that. They preached, they did powerful things, and they did it all in Jesus' name. But notice what they leaned on. They pointed to what they had done. Not one of them pointed to what Jesus had done for them. They were trusting their works, not the Savior.

7:23 *And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.'*

"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.'" These are some of the most frightening words in Scripture. Jesus does not say that He knew them once and they lost it. He says, "I never knew you." They never had a real relationship with Him at all.

To know someone in the Bible means more than knowing about them. It means a personal relationship. Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3). These people did religious work, but their lives were marked by "lawlessness," living by their own rules instead of God's. The question is not how much you have done for Jesus, but whether you truly know Him.

Jesus is using the words of Psalm 6:8, "Depart from me, all who work iniquity." David spoke them to his enemies, and on that day the Son of David will speak them as Judge.

Old Testament links: Psalm 6:8 (quoted)

7:24 *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.*

"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." Jesus ends with a story. Two men build houses. From the outside, they may have looked the same. The difference was the foundation.

The wise man built "on the rock." He dug down deep, as Luke tells us (Luke 6:48), which took more time and more work. Notice what makes him wise. He "hears these words of Mine and does them." Hearing is not enough. Many people hear sermons every week. The wise person puts Jesus' words into practice.

7:25 *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.*

"The rain came down, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and they fell against that house." In Israel, dry stream beds could become raging rivers in a sudden storm. Notice that the storm hit the wise man's house too. Following Jesus does not keep us from storms. Sickness, loss, hardship and temptation come to everyone.

"And it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock." The difference is not whether storms come. It is what you are standing on when they do. Jesus is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). A life built on Him and His words will stand through anything, including the final storm of God's judgment.

7:26-27 *And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain came down, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and they struck against that house; and it fell, and its fall was great."*

"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand." The foolish man heard the same words. He just did not do them. Building on sand was quicker and easier. For a while, his house looked fine.

"And it fell, and its fall was great." Jesus ends His sermon with a crash. This is a sobering ending, and it is meant to be. The sermon is not a set of nice ideas to admire. It is a call to build your life on Jesus. Which foundation are you building on?

7:28-29 *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.*

"When Jesus had finished these words." This is the first of five times Matthew uses this phrase to close one of Jesus' great sermons (11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). "The crowds were astonished at His teaching." They were amazed, even shocked.

Why? "For He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The scribes quoted earlier teachers. They would say that this rabbi said this and that rabbi said that. Jesus did not quote anyone but Scripture. He said, "But I say to you" (5:22). He spoke as the One who gave the Law in the first place. He spoke as the Judge on the last day. He spoke as God. And that leaves each of us with the same choice the crowd had. We cannot just admire Him as a good teacher. We must either bow to His authority or walk away from it.

Chapter 7 Summary

Jesus warned against harsh, self-righteous judging, telling His followers to remove the beam from their own eye before helping a brother with his splinter, while also using wisdom about those who trample holy things. He urged them to keep asking, seeking and knocking, because their Father in heaven gives good things to those who ask Him. He summed up the Law and the Prophets in the Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated. Then He set before them two gates and two roads, the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to life. He warned of false prophets who look like sheep but are wolves, and taught that they will be known by their fruit. He warned that not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the Father's will, and that many who did religious works will hear, "I never knew you." He ended with the wise man who built on the rock and the foolish man who built on the sand. The crowds were amazed, because He taught with authority.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What kind of judging does Jesus forbid in 7:1-5, and what kind does He still expect His followers to do? (7:1-6, 15-20)

2. What is the point of the picture of the splinter and the beam? (7:3-5)

3. What do the words ask, seek and knock teach us about prayer? (7:7-8)

4. How does Jesus use earthly fathers to teach us about our heavenly Father? (7:9-11)

5. How is the Golden Rule different from simply not hurting others? (7:12)

6. What is the difference between the wide gate and the narrow gate, and where does each road lead? (7:13-14)

7. How can we recognize false prophets? (7:15-20)

8. What did the people in 7:22 point to, and why did Jesus say He never knew them? (7:21-23)

9. What storms are you facing right now, and what foundation are you standing on as you face them? (7:24-27)

10. Is there a beam in your own life that God is asking you to deal with before you try to help others with theirs?

Chapter 8: Authority Over Sickness and Storm

Scripture

8:1-17 And when He had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him. And look, a leper, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You are able to cleanse me." And having stretched out ***His*** hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus says to him, "See ***that*** you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them." And when Jesus had entered into Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him and saying, "Lord, my servant has been laid in the house paralyzed, terribly tormented." And Jesus says to him, "I, having come, will heal him." And the centurion, answering, said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; but only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under myself; and I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does ***it***." And Jesus, having heard, marveled and said to those following, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith. And I say to you that many will come from east and west and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go, and as you have believed, let it come about for you." And his servant was healed in that hour. And Jesus, having come into the house of Peter, saw his mother-in-law lying ***in bed*** and feverish. And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and was serving them. And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and He healed all who were sick, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases."

8:18-34 And Jesus, having seen great crowds around Him, commanded ***them*** to depart to the other side. And one scribe, having come, said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus says to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky ***have*** nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere that He may lay ***His*** head." And another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." And when He had gotten into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And look, a great storm arose in the sea, so that the boat was being covered by the waves; but He Himself was sleeping. And His disciples, having come, awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And He says to them, "Why are you fearful, you of little faith?" Then, having arisen, He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What kind ***of man*** is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" And when He had come to the other side, into the region of the Gergesenes, two demon-possessed ***men*** met Him, coming out of the tombs, extremely violent, so that no one was able to pass by that way. And look, they cried out, saying, "What ***is there*** to us and to You, Jesus, Son of God? Have You come here before ***the*** time to torment us?" And there was a herd of many pigs feeding far off from them. And the demons were begging Him, saying, "If You cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of pigs." And He said to them, "Go." And having come out, they went away into the herd of pigs; and look,

the whole herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and died in the waters. And those feeding ***them*** fled, and having gone away into the city, they reported everything, and the ***things*** about those who were demon-possessed. And look, the whole city went out to meet Jesus; and having seen Him, they begged that He would depart from their region.

Chapter 8 Preview

In the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds saw that Jesus taught with authority. In chapters 8 and 9, Matthew shows us that same authority in action. He gathers a series of miracles that show the King has power over everything that troubles us. Jesus touches a leper and makes him clean. He heals a Roman officer's servant from a distance with a word, and He marvels at the Gentile's faith. He heals Peter's mother-in-law and many others, fulfilling what Isaiah said about the Servant who would carry our sicknesses.

Then Jesus tests two men who say they want to follow Him, and He shows them what it costs. He crosses the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, and when a violent storm threatens to sink the boat, He rebukes the wind and waves, and there is a great calm. On the other side, He meets two men possessed by demons and sets them free, sending the demons into a herd of pigs. Sickness, nature and the spirit world all obey Him. But the people of that town begged Him to leave.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And when He had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him.*

"When He had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed Him." The sermon was over, and now Jesus would show that His words were backed by power. Matthew has just told us Jesus taught with authority (7:29). Now he will show us ten miracles in chapters 8 and 9, grouped in three sets, with teaching in between.

Crowds followed Jesus wherever He went. But as we will see, following Him in a crowd is not the same as following Him as a disciple.

8:2-3 *And look, a leper, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You are able to cleanse me." And having stretched out **His** hand, Jesus touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

"Look, a leper, having come, was worshiping Him." In the Bible, leprosy covered a range of skin diseases, some of them terrible. A leper under the Law was unclean. He had to live outside the town, tear his clothes, cover his mouth, and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" when anyone came near (Leviticus 13:45-46). Lepers were cut off from their families and from worship. Many people believed the disease was God's punishment for sin.

This man knelt before Jesus and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You are able to cleanse me." He did not doubt Jesus' power. He wondered whether Jesus would want to help someone like him.

Then Jesus did something no one else would do. He "touched him." The man may not have felt a human touch in years. Under the Law, touching a leper made a person unclean. But when Jesus

touched the leper, the uncleanness did not pass to Jesus. His cleanness passed to the leper. "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately he was. If you wonder whether Jesus is willing to cleanse you, He has already answered that question.

8:4 *And Jesus says to him, "See **that** you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."*

"See that you tell no one." Why would Jesus say that? Most likely because He did not want to be known only as a miracle worker. Crowds wanting healing could make it hard for Him to preach, and some might try to make Him a political king before His time (John 6:15). Mark tells us this man did not obey, and Jesus could no longer openly enter a town (Mark 1:45).

"Go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded." Leviticus 14 gave detailed instructions for what a leper was to do if he was healed. The priest had to examine him and declare him clean. Then he could go home. Jesus was not breaking the Law of Moses. He was keeping it. And this would be "a testimony to them," proof to the priests that God was at work.

8:5-7 *And when Jesus had entered into Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him and saying, "Lord, my servant has been laid in the house paralyzed, terribly tormented." And Jesus says to him, "I, having come, will heal him."*

"When Jesus had entered into Capernaum, a centurion came to Him." A centurion was a Roman army officer in charge of about a hundred men. He was a Gentile, part of the occupying army. Many Jews hated the Romans, but Luke tells us this man loved the Jewish people and had built them a synagogue (Luke 7:4-5).

"Lord, my servant has been laid in the house paralyzed, terribly tormented." Notice his concern for his servant. Many masters saw servants as property. This man cared about him. Jesus answered right away: "I, having come, will heal him." He was willing to go into a Gentile's house, something a strict Jew would never do.

8:8-9 *And the centurion, answering, said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; but only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under myself; and I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does **it**."*

"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof." This powerful Roman officer felt unworthy to have Jesus in his home. Maybe he knew a Jew would be made unclean by entering a Gentile's house. Maybe he just knew who he was before Jesus. Either way, he was humble.

"But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed." Then he explained. He was "a man under authority." He took orders from those above him, and he gave orders to the men under him. When he gave an order, they obeyed. He understood how authority works. He saw that Jesus had authority over sickness the way he had authority over his soldiers. Jesus did not need to be there in person. He only needed to give the order.

8:10 *And Jesus, having heard, marveled and said to those following, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.*

"Jesus, having heard, marveled." Only twice do the Gospels say Jesus marveled. Here He marveled at a Gentile's faith. In Mark 6:6 He marveled at the unbelief of the people in His hometown.

"Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." Israel had the Law, the prophets, the temple and the promises. Yet a Roman soldier understood who Jesus was better than most of them. Great faith is not about how much we know. It is about how much we trust Jesus' word.

8:11-12 *And I say to you that many will come from east and west and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth."*

"Many will come from east and west and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens." People in that day reclined on couches at a feast. Jesus pictures a great banquet in the kingdom, and it will include people from every direction, Gentiles like this centurion. The prophets had spoken of this kind of feast (Isaiah 25:6-9).

"But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness." The "sons of the kingdom" were the people of Israel who assumed they would be in the kingdom simply because they were Abraham's children. John the Baptist had already warned them about that (3:9). Jesus says that those who refuse Him will be shut out, no matter who their family is.

This does not mean God is finished with Israel. Paul tells us plainly that God has not cast away His people, and that a day is coming when all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:1, 25-29). But each person, Jew or Gentile, enters the kingdom the same way, by faith.

"The weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." Gnashing means grinding the teeth in anguish and anger. Jesus uses this phrase several times for the place of final judgment. He spoke of hell more than anyone in the Bible, and He did it because He loved people enough to warn them.

8:13 *And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go, and as you have believed, let it come about for you." And his servant was healed in that hour.*

"Go, and as you have believed, let it come about for you." Jesus did what the centurion asked, and He did it from a distance. "His servant was healed in that hour." Jesus' word is enough. He does not need to be physically present to work. He works today in our lives the same way, through His Word and His Spirit.

8:14-15 *And Jesus, having come into the house of Peter, saw his mother-in-law lying* ***in bed*** *and feverish. And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and was serving them.*

"Jesus, having come into the house of Peter, saw his mother-in-law lying in bed and feverish." Notice that Peter had a mother-in-law, so Peter was married. Paul later mentions that Peter's wife traveled with him (1 Corinthians 9:5).

"He touched her hand, and the fever left her." There was no long recovery. Fevers usually leave a person weak for days. She was healed completely and right away. "She arose and was serving them." Her first act after being healed was to serve Jesus and His disciples. That is the right response to what Jesus does for us. He heals us, and we serve.

Notice the three people Jesus healed in this chapter: a leper, a Gentile's servant, and a woman. All three were people the religious leaders of that day kept at a distance. Jesus came for all of them.

8:16-17 *And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and He healed all who were sick, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases."*

"When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed." It was the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest, as Mark tells us (Mark 1:21, 32). The Sabbath ended at sundown, and then people could carry the sick. They came in crowds. "He cast out the spirits with a word, and He healed all who were sick." Notice "with a word." No rituals or magic formulas. Just His word.

Matthew sees another fulfillment of Scripture: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases." This is from Isaiah 53:4. Isaiah 53 is the great chapter about the suffering Servant who would die for the sins of His people. Matthew shows us that Jesus' healing ministry was part of that work. Sin brought sickness and death into the world. Jesus came to undo all of it. Bible teachers differ on how this applies today. Some believe physical healing is promised to every believer now, because of the cross. Others believe the cross guarantees our full healing, but much of it waits for the resurrection, when we receive new bodies. Those who hold the second view point out that faithful believers like Paul's friends were not always healed (2 Timothy 4:20). God still heals today, as He chooses. And one day every believer will be healed completely and forever (Revelation 21:4).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:4 (quoted)

8:18-20 *And Jesus, having seen great crowds around Him, commanded **them** to depart to the other side. And one scribe, having come, said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus says to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky **have** nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere that He may lay **His** head."*

"Jesus, having seen great crowds around Him, commanded them to depart to the other side." Jesus was not looking for crowds. He was looking for followers.

"One scribe, having come, said to Him." He promised, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." That sounds wonderful. A scribe was a teacher of the Law, and here was one offering to follow Jesus. But Jesus saw his heart. He told him the cost: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere that He may lay His head." Even animals have a place to sleep. Jesus did not.

"The Son of Man" was the title Jesus used for Himself most often. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel sees one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving an everlasting kingdom. It speaks of His true humanity, and also of His glory as the King who will come. Jesus wanted this man to know that following Him might mean giving up comfort and security.

8:21-22 *And another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."*

"Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." This sounds like a reasonable request. In that day, burying one's father was one of the most important duties a son had. But it is likely this man's father was not yet dead. He may have meant that he would follow Jesus after his father died and he received his inheritance. That could be years away.

"Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Jesus means, let the spiritually dead take care of such things. Jesus is not against caring for our parents. He rebuked the Pharisees for neglecting theirs (15:3-6). But He will not take second place. If anything, even a good thing, comes before Him, it is in the wrong place. Matthew does not tell us what either man decided. Maybe that is so we will ask ourselves what we would do.

8:23-24 *And when He had gotten into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And look, a great storm arose in the sea, so that the boat was being covered by the waves; but He Himself was sleeping.*

"When He had gotten into the boat, His disciples followed Him." Notice the word "followed." Right after Jesus talked about the cost of following Him, the disciples follow Him into a boat, and straight into a storm.

"A great storm arose in the sea, so that the boat was being covered by the waves." The Sea of Galilee lies about seven hundred feet below sea level, surrounded by hills. Cold air rushing down from the hills can whip up sudden, violent storms. Several of these disciples were experienced fishermen, and they were terrified. This was no ordinary storm.

"But He Himself was sleeping." Jesus was tired after a long day of ministry. That is a picture of His true humanity. He got tired. He needed sleep. And He was at perfect peace, resting in His Father's care.

8:25 *And His disciples, having come, awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"*

"Lord, save us! We are perishing!" They woke Him in a panic. At least they knew where to go. When we face a storm, the best thing we can do is cry out to Jesus. Their prayer was short and desperate. Sometimes our prayers are like that too, and God hears them.

8:26 *And He says to them, "Why are you fearful, you of little faith?" Then, having arisen, He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*

"Why are you fearful, you of little faith?" Notice that Jesus spoke to the disciples before He spoke to the storm. He was more concerned about the storm inside them. They had some faith, since

they called on Him. But it was "little faith." They thought they were going to die with Jesus in the boat.

"Then, having arisen, He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." He did not pray to the Father for help. He spoke to the wind and waves as their Master, the way you would speak to a misbehaving dog. And there was not just a calm, but "a great calm." Usually after a storm the waves keep rolling for a while. This time, they stopped instantly.

8:27 *And the men marveled, saying, "What kind **of man** is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"*

"What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" That is the right question, and it is the question Matthew wants every reader to ask. In the Old Testament, only God rules the raging sea and stills its waves (Psalm 89:9; 107:28-29). The men in the boat had just seen God at work, sitting right there with them.

Jesus does not always calm the storms in our lives right away. But He is always in the boat with us, and the winds and the sea still obey Him.

8:28 *And when He had come to the other side, into the region of the Gergesenes, two demon-possessed **men** met Him, coming out of the tombs, extremely violent, so that no one was able to pass by that way.*

"When He had come to the other side, into the region of the Gergesenes." This was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, a mostly Gentile area. Mark and Luke call it the region of the Gadarenes or Gerasenes, depending on the Greek copy. These were names for the same general area, taken from nearby towns.

"Two demon-possessed men met Him, coming out of the tombs." Mark and Luke mention only one man, likely because he was the one who spoke, or the better known of the two. Matthew tells us there were two. That is not a contradiction. If there were two, there was certainly one. Tombs were often caves cut into hillsides, and they were unclean under the Law. These men were "extremely violent," so dangerous that people avoided the road.

8:29 *And look, they cried out, saying, "What **is there** to us and to You, Jesus, Son of God? Have You come here before **the** time to torment us?"*

"What is there to us and to You, Jesus, Son of God?" The demons knew exactly who He was. They called Him the "Son of God," something the disciples had just been wondering about. James tells us the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). Knowing who Jesus is, is not the same as trusting Him.

"Have You come here before the time to torment us?" The demons knew a time of judgment was coming for them. Revelation tells us the devil and his angels will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41). They knew Jesus would be their judge. They just did not expect Him so soon.

8:30-32 *And there was a herd of many pigs feeding far off from them. And the demons were begging Him, saying, "If You cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of pigs." And He said to them, "Go." And having come out, they went away into the herd of pigs; and look, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and died in the waters.*

"There was a herd of many pigs feeding far off from them." Jews did not raise pigs, since they were unclean under the Law. This was Gentile country. Mark tells us there were about two thousand of them (Mark 5:13).

The demons begged to be sent into the pigs. Jesus said one word, go. And "the whole herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and died in the waters." Why would Jesus allow this? Scripture doesn't say. Perhaps it showed everyone how many demons there were and how destructive they are. Satan always comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Perhaps it was a clear sign that the men were truly free. What we do know is that two human lives were worth more to Jesus than a herd of pigs.

8:33-34 *And those feeding **them** fled, and having gone away into the city, they reported everything, and the **things** about those who were demon-possessed. And look, the whole city went out to meet Jesus; and having seen Him, they begged that He would depart from their region.*

"Those feeding them fled." The herdsmen ran to town and reported everything. Then "the whole city went out to meet Jesus." You might expect them to be thankful. Two terrifying men had been set free. Instead, "they begged that He would depart from their region."

Why? They cared more about their pigs, their income, and their comfortable way of life than about the men who were freed or the Lord who freed them. They were afraid of the kind of power that could change things. Sadly, many people today respond to Jesus the same way. They would rather keep their lives as they are than have Him come in and change everything. Jesus does not force Himself on anyone. He got back in the boat and left.

Chapter 8 Summary

After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed His authority in action. He touched and cleansed a leper and sent him to the priest as the Law commanded. He healed a centurion's servant with a word from a distance, marveling at the faith of this Gentile and warning that many from east and west would sit at the kingdom's feast while those who relied on their birth would be cast out. He healed Peter's mother-in-law, cast out demons and healed many sick people, fulfilling Isaiah's words about the Servant who took our infirmities. He showed two would-be followers the cost of following Him. On the Sea of Galilee He calmed a great storm with a word, and the disciples asked what kind of man this was. On the other side He freed two violent demon-possessed men, sending the demons into a herd of pigs that rushed into the sea. But the people of the town begged Jesus to leave.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What did the leper believe about Jesus, and what did he wonder about? (8:2)

2. Why was it so remarkable that Jesus touched the leper? (8:3)

3. How did the centurion's understanding of authority help him trust Jesus? (8:8-9)

4. What did Jesus say about the faith of this Gentile, and about who would be in the kingdom? (8:10-12)

5. What did Peter's mother-in-law do as soon as she was healed? (8:15)

6. What does the title "Son of Man" mean, and where does it come from? (8:20)

7. What did Jesus say to the disciples before He calmed the storm, and why? (8:26)

8. Why did the people of the town beg Jesus to leave? (8:34)

9. What storm are you facing right now? What would it look like to trust that Jesus is in the boat with you?

10. Is there anything, even a good thing, that you have been putting ahead of following Jesus? (8:21-22)

Chapter 9: Authority to Forgive

Scripture

9:1-17 And having gotten into the boat, He crossed over and came to His own city. And look, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, laid on a bed. And Jesus, having seen their faith, said to the paralytic, "Take courage, child; your sins have been forgiven you." And look, some of the scribes said within themselves, "This ***man*** blasphemes." And Jesus, seeing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'The sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—then He says to the paralytic—"having arisen, take up your bed and go to your house." And having arisen, he went away to his house. And the crowds, having seen, marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men. And Jesus, passing on from there, saw a man sitting at the tax booth, named Matthew; and He says to him, "Follow Me." And having arisen, he followed Him. And it came about, as He was reclining in the house, that look, many tax collectors and sinners, having come, were reclining with Jesus and His disciples. And the Pharisees, having seen, said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus, having heard, said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But having gone, learn what it is: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call ***the*** righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Then the disciples of John come to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the sons of the bridal chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. And no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for its filling takes away from the garment, and a worse tear comes about. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise indeed, the wineskins burst, and the wine is poured out, and the wineskins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved together."

9:18-38 While He was speaking these things to them, look, one ruler, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "My daughter has just now died; but having come, lay Your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus, having arisen, followed him, and His disciples also. And look, a woman suffering a flow of blood twelve years, having come up behind ***Him***, touched the fringe of His garment. For she was saying within herself, "If only I touch His garment, I will be saved." And Jesus, having turned around and having seen her, said, "Take courage, daughter; your faith has saved you." And the woman was saved from that hour. And Jesus, having come into the house of the ruler and having seen the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, says to them, "Go away, for the girl has not died, but is sleeping." And they were ridiculing Him. But when the crowd had been put outside, having entered, He took hold of her hand, and the girl arose. And this report went out into all that land. And as Jesus was passing on from there, two blind ***men*** followed Him, crying out and saying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" And when He had come into the house, the blind ***men*** came to Him; and Jesus says to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They say to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it come about for you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them,

saying, "See, let no one know." But they, having gone out, made Him widely known in all that land. And as they were going out, look, they brought to Him a mute man, demon-possessed. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute ***man*** spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never has it been seen like this in Israel!" But the Pharisees were saying, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out the demons." And Jesus was going around all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. And having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd. 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."

Chapter 9 Preview

Chapter 8 showed Jesus' authority over sickness, nature and demons. Chapter 9 shows His authority over something deeper: sin itself. When friends lowered a paralyzed man before Him, Jesus first told him his sins were forgiven. The scribes thought that was blasphemy, so Jesus proved His authority to forgive by healing the man on the spot. Then Jesus called Matthew, a hated tax collector, to follow Him, and ate with tax collectors and sinners. When the Pharisees complained, Jesus said He came to call sinners, not the righteous. He also explained why His disciples did not fast, using pictures of a wedding, an old garment and new wine.

The second half of the chapter is full of desperate people and the power of Jesus. A ruler's daughter had died, and a woman had been bleeding for twelve years. Jesus healed the woman and raised the girl from the dead. He gave sight to two blind men who called Him Son of David, and He freed a mute man from a demon. The crowds were amazed, but the Pharisees said His power came from the ruler of the demons. The chapter ends with Jesus looking at the crowds with compassion, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd, and telling His disciples to pray for workers for the harvest.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1 *And having gotten into the boat, He crossed over and came to His own city.*

"Having gotten into the boat, He crossed over and came to His own city." The people on the other side had asked Him to leave (8:34), so He did. "His own city" was Capernaum, where He had made His home (4:13).

Notice that Jesus did not stay where He was not wanted. He went back to where people were waiting for Him. There is a lesson there. Jesus offers Himself, but He does not force Himself on anyone.

9:2 *And look, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, laid on a bed. And Jesus, having seen their faith, said to the paralytic, "Take courage, child; your sins have been forgiven you."*

"They were bringing to Him a paralytic, laid on a bed." Mark and Luke tell us the house was so crowded that four friends dug through the roof and lowered the man down to Jesus (Mark 2:3-4). Matthew skips those details and goes straight to the point.

"Jesus, having seen their faith." Notice the word their. Jesus saw the faith of the friends who carried him. Our faith can bring others to Jesus. Then Jesus surprised everyone. He did not say be healed. He said, "Take courage, child; your sins have been forgiven you." Everyone could see the man's greatest problem was his legs. Jesus saw that his greatest problem was his sin. That is still true of every person. We may come to Jesus for many reasons, but our deepest need is forgiveness.

9:3 *And look, some of the scribes said within themselves, "This* ***man*** *blasphemes."*

"Some of the scribes said within themselves." They thought, "This man blasphemes." To blaspheme means to speak against God, to insult His name or claim what belongs only to Him. The scribes knew their Bibles. Only God can forgive sins against God (Isaiah 43:25). If you sin against me, I can forgive you for what you did to me. But I cannot forgive your sins against God.

The scribes were right about one thing. Only God can forgive sins. They were wrong about Jesus. He was not a man claiming to be God. He was God, who had become a man.

9:4-5 *And Jesus, seeing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'The sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?*

"Jesus, seeing their thoughts." The scribes had not said a word out loud, but Jesus knew what they were thinking. That alone should have told them who He was. Only God knows the heart (1 Kings 8:39).

"Which is easier, to say, 'The sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?" It is easier to say your sins are forgiven, because no one can see whether it happened. Anyone can say that. But if you tell a paralyzed man to get up and walk, everyone will know right away whether you have that power. Jesus was about to do the harder thing to prove He could do the unseen thing.

9:6-7 *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—then He says to the paralytic—"having arisen, take up your bed and go to your house." And having arisen, he went away to his house.*

"So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins." Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man again. In Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man is given authority and an everlasting kingdom. Jesus was claiming that authority. Then He turned to the paralyzed man: "having arisen, take up your bed and go to your house."

"Having arisen, he went away to his house." The man stood up, picked up the mat he had been carried on, and walked home. The healing that everyone could see proved the forgiveness that no one could see. Jesus has authority to forgive sins. If He forgave this man, He can forgive you.

9:8 *And the crowds, having seen, marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*

"The crowds, having seen, marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men." The crowd was amazed and gave praise to God. They saw that God had given this authority to a man, though they did not yet understand who this Man really was.

Notice the difference between the crowd and the scribes. Both saw the same miracle. The scribes were angry, and the crowd praised God. The same work of God can soften one heart and harden another.

9:9 *And Jesus, passing on from there, saw a man sitting at the tax booth, named Matthew; and He says to him, "Follow Me." And having arisen, he followed Him.*

"Jesus, passing on from there, saw a man sitting at the tax booth, named Matthew." This is the writer of this Gospel, telling his own story in just one verse. Mark and Luke call him Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He was a tax collector, sitting at a booth in Capernaum, probably collecting taxes and tolls on goods traveling the main road or crossing the lake.

Tax collectors were among the most hated people in Israel. They worked for Rome or for Herod, and many of them cheated their own people. The rabbis put them in the same group as robbers. They were not welcome in the synagogue.

Jesus said two words: "Follow Me." "And having arisen, he followed Him." A fisherman could go back to fishing if things did not work out. A tax collector who walked away from his booth could not just go back. Matthew left everything. Notice how humbly Matthew tells this. He does not tell us what he gave up. Luke does that (Luke 5:28). Matthew just tells us Jesus called him, and he followed.

9:10-11 *And it came about, as He was reclining in the house, that look, many tax collectors and sinners, having come, were reclining with Jesus and His disciples. And the Pharisees, having seen, said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?"*

"As He was reclining in the house, that look, many tax collectors and sinners, having come, were reclining with Jesus and His disciples." Luke tells us Matthew threw a big feast for Jesus (Luke 5:29). Matthew did what new believers often do. He invited all his old friends to meet Jesus. And his friends were "tax collectors and sinners," people the religious crowd avoided.

"Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?" To eat with someone in that culture meant accepting them, sharing friendship. The Pharisees believed a holy man would keep away from people like that. Notice that they did not ask Jesus. They asked His disciples, trying to stir up doubt.

9:12 *And Jesus, having heard, said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

Jesus heard and answered for Himself: "Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." A doctor does not avoid sick people. That is why he is there.

Jesus came for sinners. He did not join in their sin, but He went where they were and loved them. The Pharisees thought they were healthy. In reality, they were sick too. They just didn't know it. Do we as believers spend any time with people who need Jesus? Or have we built a safe little world where we only spend time with other Christians?

9:13 *But having gone, learn what it is: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call* ***the*** *righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

"But having gone, learn what it is: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6. Go and learn was a phrase rabbis used with their students. Jesus was telling these Bible experts to go back and study their Bible. God gave Israel the sacrifices. But He never wanted religious ritual without a heart of mercy (1 Samuel 15:22).

"For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." The words "to repentance" are in the Greek copies the SLB follows, and they matter. Jesus did not come to leave sinners as they were. He came to call them to turn around. And the only people He cannot help are those who think they don't need Him.

Old Testament links: Hosea 6:6 (quoted)

9:14 *Then the disciples of John come to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"*

"Then the disciples of John come to Him." These were followers of John the Baptist, who was now in prison (4:12). "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" John's disciples lived simple, strict lives like their teacher. They fasted regularly, and so did the Pharisees. They were puzzled that Jesus' disciples were feasting at Matthew's house.

This was likely an honest question, not an attack. John's disciples were not enemies of Jesus. They wanted to understand.

9:15 *And Jesus said to them, "Can the sons of the bridal chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.*

"Can the sons of the bridal chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" The "sons of the bridal chamber" were the groom's friends, the wedding guests. A Jewish wedding feast could last a week, and no one fasted during it. It was a time of joy. Jesus is the Bridegroom. The King had come. It was time to celebrate.

"But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast." This is one of the first hints that Jesus would be killed. "Taken away" suggests a violent end. After

His death and return to heaven, His followers would fast again. And they did (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting is still fitting for believers today, as we long for the Bridegroom to come back for us.

9:16-17 *And no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for its filling takes away from the garment, and a worse tear comes about. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise indeed, the wineskins burst, and the wine is poured out, and the wineskins will be destroyed; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved together."*

Jesus gives two quick pictures. "No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment." New cloth shrinks when it is washed. Sewn onto an old garment, it pulls and makes the tear worse.

"Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins." Wine was stored in bags made from animal skins. New wine was still fermenting and expanding. A new wineskin could stretch with it, but an old one was dry and stiff. New wine would burst it, and both would be lost.

What is Jesus saying? He did not come to patch up the old religion of the Pharisees with their extra rules and rituals. He was bringing something new: the new covenant, the life of the kingdom, and a living relationship with God. It cannot be squeezed into the old forms of man-made religion. It needs a new heart to hold it.

9:18-19 *While He was speaking these things to them, look, one ruler, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "My daughter has just now died; but having come, lay Your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus, having arisen, followed him, and His disciples also.*

"One ruler, having come, was worshiping Him," Mark and Luke tell us his name was Jairus and that he was a ruler of the synagogue, the man who oversaw the synagogue and its services (Mark 5:22). He was an important man in the town, and he fell at Jesus' feet.

"My daughter has just now died; but having come, lay Your hand on her, and she will live." Mark and Luke tell us that when Jairus first came, his daughter was dying, and news came on the way that she had died (Mark 5:23, 35). Matthew, as he often does, tells the story in a shorter form and gives the end result. Either way, Jairus believed Jesus could do the impossible. "Jesus, having arisen, followed him." Jesus went right away.

9:20-21 *And look, a woman suffering a flow of blood twelve years, having come up behind **Him**, touched the fringe of His garment. For she was saying within herself, "If only I touch His garment, I will be saved."*

On the way, "a woman suffering a flow of blood twelve years, having come up behind Him, touched the fringe of His garment." Twelve years. As long as Jairus' daughter had been alive (Luke 8:42). Under the Law, a woman with this kind of bleeding was unclean, and anyone she touched became unclean (Leviticus 15:25-27). For twelve years she had been cut off from worship and from normal life. Mark tells us she had spent everything she had on doctors and only got worse (Mark 5:26).

The fringe was the tassel Jewish men wore on the corners of their outer garment, to remind them of God's commands (Numbers 15:38-39). "If only I touch His garment, I will be saved." The word

saved here can mean healed or rescued. She came quietly, from behind, probably ashamed and afraid of being noticed. But she believed.

9:22 *And Jesus, having turned around and having seen her, said, "Take courage, daughter; your faith has saved you." And the woman was saved from that hour.*

"Jesus, having turned around and having seen her," said, "Take courage, daughter; your faith has saved you." Jesus would not let her slip away unnoticed. He wanted her to know she was not just healed. She was accepted. He called her "daughter." She may not have heard a kind word in years.

Notice that it was not the garment that healed her. It was Jesus, and her faith in Him. Her faith was not perfect. It may have been mixed with some superstition. But it reached out to the right Person. "The woman was saved from that hour."

9:23-24 *And Jesus, having come into the house of the ruler and having seen the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, says to them, "Go away, for the girl has not died, but is sleeping." And they were ridiculing Him.*

"Having come into the house of the ruler and having seen the flute players and the crowd making a commotion." In that culture, when someone died, families hired professional mourners and flute players, even poor families. The house was full of loud wailing.

"Go away, for the girl has not died, but is sleeping." Jesus did not mean she was only in a coma. She was dead, and everyone knew it. "They were ridiculing Him." They laughed at Him. But to Jesus, death is like sleep, because He can wake people from it as easily as we wake someone from a nap. The New Testament often calls the death of believers sleep for this reason (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). For those who belong to Jesus, death is not the end.

9:25-26 *But when the crowd had been put outside, having entered, He took hold of her hand, and the girl arose. And this report went out into all that land.*

"When the crowd had been put outside, having entered, He took hold of her hand, and the girl arose." Jesus put the mockers out. Mark tells us He took only the girl's parents and Peter, James and John into the room (Mark 5:37, 40). Then He took her hand. Under the Law, touching a dead body made a person unclean. But just like with the leper and the woman, Jesus' life flowed into her. "The girl arose."

"This report went out into all that land." How could it not? A dead girl was alive again. It is one of three times the Gospels record Jesus raising someone from the dead before His own resurrection. The other two are the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-15) and Lazarus (John 11).

9:27 *And as Jesus was passing on from there, two blind **men** followed Him, crying out and saying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"*

"Two blind men followed Him, crying out." They said, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" This is the first time anyone in Matthew calls Jesus by this title. "Son of David" was a title for the Messiah, the promised King from David's line (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Isaiah said that when God came

to save His people, the eyes of the blind would be opened (Isaiah 35:5). These blind men saw who Jesus was more clearly than many who had perfect eyesight.

9:28 *And when He had come into the house, the blind **men** came to Him; and Jesus says to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They say to Him, "Yes, Lord."*

"When He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him." Jesus did not stop for them on the road. He waited until they followed Him into the house. Perhaps He wanted to see whether they would keep coming.

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Jesus asked them a simple question about faith. Not whether He was willing, but whether He was able. They answered, "Yes, Lord." Two simple words of faith. Sometimes that is all we need to say.

9:29-31 *Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it come about for you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See, let no one know." But they, having gone out, made Him widely known in all that land.*

"Then He touched their eyes," saying, "According to your faith let it come about for you." It was not the strength of their faith that healed them. It was the One they trusted. "And their eyes were opened."

"Jesus sternly warned them," saying, "See, let no one know." Jesus did not want crowds coming just to see miracles, and He did not want people calling Him Son of David in a way that would stir up a political revolt before His time. "But they, having gone out, made Him widely known in all that land." Their joy was understandable, but they disobeyed. It is possible to love Jesus and still go our own way instead of doing what He asks.

9:32-33 *And as they were going out, look, they brought to Him a mute man, demon-possessed. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute **man** spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never has it been seen like this in Israel!"*

"They brought to Him a mute man, demon-possessed." A mute person cannot speak. In this case, the cause was a demon. Not every case of being unable to speak is caused by a demon, but this one was.

"When the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke." Then "the crowds marveled," saying, "Never has it been seen like this in Israel!" The ordinary people could see that something new was happening. In two chapters, Matthew has shown us Jesus healing the leper, the paralyzed, the blind and the mute, raising the dead, and casting out demons. These were the very signs the prophets said would come with God's kingdom (Isaiah 35:5-6).

9:34 *But the Pharisees were saying, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out the demons."*

The Pharisees said, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out the demons." This is the darkest response in the chapter. The Pharisees could not deny the miracles. So they said His power came from Satan.

This charge will come back in chapter 12, where Jesus answers it fully (12:24-32). It shows us how hard a heart can become. When people are determined not to believe, no amount of evidence will change their minds. They will find a way to explain it away. The answer to unbelief is not always more proof. It is a softened heart, which only God can give.

9:35 *And Jesus was going around all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.*

"Jesus was going around all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people." This verse is almost the same as 4:23. Matthew uses these two summaries like bookends. Between them, he has shown us the King's words in chapters 5 to 7 and the King's works in chapters 8 and 9.

Notice the three parts of Jesus' ministry again: teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus cared about the whole person, mind, soul and body.

9:36 *And having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd.*

"Having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them." The Greek word for compassion is a strong one. It comes from the word for a person's insides. Jesus felt it deep in His gut. He was not annoyed by the crowds. He was moved by them.

"They were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd." Sheep without a shepherd are helpless. They wander, get lost, and are attacked. Israel's religious leaders were supposed to be their shepherds, but they had failed them (Ezekiel 34:1-6). Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). When you look at the crowds in your town, at work, or online, do you see people to avoid, or sheep without a shepherd?

Old Testament links: Numbers 27:17 (alluded to); Ezekiel 34:5 (alluded to)

9:37-38 *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."*

"The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the workers are few." Jesus changes the picture from sheep to a field of grain ready for harvest. The people were ready. Hearts were open. What was missing was workers.

"Therefore implore the Lord of the harvest that He may send out workers into His harvest." Notice what Jesus tells them to do first. Not to organize a program, but to pray. The harvest belongs to God, and He is the One who sends workers. Here is the interesting part. In the very next chapter, Jesus sends out the same men He told to pray. Often, when we pray for God to send workers, we find that He is sending us.

Chapter 9 Summary

Back in Capernaum, Jesus told a paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven. When the scribes thought this was blasphemy, Jesus proved His authority as the Son of Man to forgive sins by healing the man, who got up and walked home. Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to follow Him and ate with tax collectors and sinners, telling the Pharisees that the sick need a doctor and that He came to call sinners to repentance. He explained to John's disciples that His followers would not fast while the Bridegroom was with them, and that the new life He brings cannot be put into the old forms of man-made religion. A ruler came to Jesus because his daughter had died. On the way, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years touched His garment and was healed by her faith, and then Jesus raised the girl from the dead. He healed two blind men who called Him Son of David and freed a mute man from a demon. The crowds marveled, but the Pharisees said His power came from the ruler of the demons. Seeing the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, Jesus was moved with compassion and told His disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus forgave the paralyzed man's sins before He healed his body? (9:2)

2. How did Jesus prove that He had authority to forgive sins? (9:4-7)

3. What did Matthew give up to follow Jesus, and what was the first thing he did afterward? (9:9-10)

4. What did Jesus mean when He said the healthy do not need a doctor? (9:12-13)

5. What do the pictures of the patch and the wineskins teach about what Jesus came to bring? (9:16-17)

6. What do the woman with the bleeding and the ruler's daughter have in common? (9:18-25)

7. Why is it important that the blind men called Jesus "Son of David"? (9:27)

8. How did the Pharisees explain Jesus' power over demons, and what does that show about their hearts? (9:34)

9. Who are the "tax collectors and sinners" in your life that Jesus might want you to spend time with?

10. Jesus told His disciples to pray for workers for the harvest. How might God be asking you to be part of the answer to that prayer? (9:37-38)

Chapter 10: The Twelve Sent Out

Scripture

10:1-15 And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. And the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the ***son*** of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the ***son*** of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, who was surnamed Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, the one who also handed Him over. These twelve Jesus sent out, having instructed them, saying, "Do not go off into ***the*** way of ***the*** Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of ***the*** Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of ***the*** house of Israel. And as you go, proclaim, saying, 'The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.' Heal those who are ailing, cleanse lepers, raise ***the*** dead, cast out demons. Freely you received; freely give. Do not acquire gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts, nor a bag for ***the*** way, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for the worker is worthy of his food. And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and remain there until you go out. And when entering into the house, greet it. And if indeed the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever does not receive you nor hear your words, when going out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for ***the*** land of Sodom and Gomorrah in ***the*** day of judgment than for that city.

10:16-31 Look, I send you out as sheep in ***the*** midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves. But beware of men; for they will hand you over to councils, and in their synagogues they will flog you; and you will even be brought before governors and kings on account of Me, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But whenever they hand you over, do not be anxious how or what you will speak; for it will be given to you in that hour what you will speak; for you are not the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. And brother will hand over brother to death, and father child; and children will rise up against parents and put them to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name; but the one who has endured to ***the*** end, he will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee into the other; for truly I say to you, you will by no means have completed the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above his master. ***It is*** sufficient for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household? Therefore do not fear them; for nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows.

10:32-42 Therefore everyone who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens. But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny him before

My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and the enemies of the man ***will be*** the members of his household. The one who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on account of Me will find it. The one who receives you receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. The one who receives a prophet in ***the*** name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and the one who receives a righteous ***man*** in ***the*** name of a righteous ***man*** will receive a righteous ***man's*** reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold ***water*** to drink in ***the*** name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Chapter 10 Preview

At the end of chapter 9, Jesus told His disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. In chapter 10, He sends them. He calls twelve men, gives them His authority to heal and cast out demons, and sends them on a mission to the towns of Israel with the same message He had been preaching: the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near. This is the second of the five great sermons in Matthew. Jesus tells them where to go, what to take, how to treat those who welcome them, and what to do when a town rejects them.

Then Jesus looks further down the road. He warns that His followers will be like sheep among wolves. They will be arrested, flogged, hated, and even betrayed by their own families. But He tells them three times not to be afraid. The Father who watches over sparrows knows the number of hairs on their heads. Jesus calls for open confession of Him, warns that He brings division even in families, and says that anyone who will not take up his cross and follow Him is not worthy of Him. He ends with a promise: even a cup of cold water given to one of His disciples will not go unrewarded.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness.*

"Having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits." Why twelve? Israel had twelve tribes. By choosing twelve, Jesus was showing that He was forming the true leadership of God's people. Later He promised that the twelve would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in His kingdom (19:28).

Notice that Jesus "gave them authority." The power was not their own. It came from Him. He gave them authority to cast out demons and "to heal every disease and every sickness," the same words Matthew used for Jesus' own ministry (9:35). They were to do what He did, in His name.

10:2-4 *And the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the* ***son*** *of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the* ***son*** *of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, who was surnamed Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, the one who also handed Him over.*

"The names of the twelve apostles are these." This is the only time Matthew uses the word apostle. An apostle is one who is sent, a messenger who carries the authority of the one who sent him. A disciple is a learner. These men were both. They followed Jesus to learn, and now He was sending them out.

The list comes in pairs, maybe because Jesus sent them out two by two (Mark 6:7). Peter is named first. He is always first in every list of the apostles, because he was often their leader and spokesman. Judas is always last.

Look at who Jesus chose. There were four fishermen. There was "Matthew the tax collector," who worked for Rome. And there was "Simon the Cananite." This name does not mean he was from Canaan. It comes from a Hebrew word meaning zealous, and Luke calls him Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15). The Zealots were Jews who wanted to drive out Rome, by force if needed. A tax collector and a Zealot would have been enemies. But in Jesus, they served side by side. The church is still meant to be like that.

And there was "Judas Iscariot, the one who also handed Him over." Jesus chose Judas knowing what he would do (John 6:64, 70). Judas walked with Jesus for three years, saw the miracles, and even did them himself, yet he never truly belonged to Him. It is a sobering reminder that being close to Jesus is not the same as belonging to Him.

10:5-6 *These twelve Jesus sent out, having instructed them, saying, "Do not go off into* ***the*** *way of* ***the*** *Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of* ***the*** *Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of* ***the*** *house of Israel.*

"Do not go off into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of the Samaritans." The Samaritans lived in the region between Galilee and Judea. They were partly Jewish by descent, mixed with peoples the Assyrians had settled there centuries before. They had their own temple and their own version of the books of Moses, and Jews and Samaritans despised each other (John 4:9).

"But rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Why only Israel? Because God had made His promises to Israel, and the King came first to His own people. Paul says the gospel is for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16). This was a limit on this particular mission, not forever. After His resurrection, Jesus sent His disciples to "all the nations" (28:19), including Samaria (Acts 1:8). And God's promises to Israel still stand today (Romans 11:28-29).

10:7-8 *And as you go, proclaim, saying, 'The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.' Heal those who are ailing, cleanse lepers, raise* ***the*** *dead, cast out demons. Freely you received; freely give.*

"As you go, proclaim, saying, 'The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.'" Their message was the same as John's and Jesus' (3:2; 4:17). The kingdom was near because the King was there.

"Heal those who are ailing, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." The signs of the kingdom went with the message. These were the same works Jesus had just done in chapters 8 and 9. They proved that the message came from God.

"Freely you received; freely give." They had received this power without paying for it, so they were not to charge for it. Later, a man named Simon tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money, and Peter rebuked him sharply (Acts 8:18-20). God's gifts are not for sale. And there is a lesson for every believer here. Everything we have from God, we received freely. We should give freely too.

10:9-10 *Do not acquire gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts, nor a bag for **the** way, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for the worker is worthy of his food.*

"Do not acquire gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts." People in that day often carried their money in a fold of their belt. Jesus told them not to take money, a traveler's bag, an extra tunic, sandals, or staffs, beyond what they already had. Mark and Luke word some of this a bit differently, but the point is the same in all three: travel light, and trust God (Mark 6:8-9; Luke 9:3).

"For the worker is worthy of his food." God would provide through the people they served. Paul quotes this principle when he teaches that those who preach the gospel should be supported by those they serve (1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:14). These were instructions for this short mission. Later Jesus told them things would be different, and they should take a bag and money (Luke 22:35-36). But the heart of it still applies: those who serve God should depend on Him.

10:11-13 *And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and remain there until you go out. And when entering into the house, greet it. And if indeed the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

"Into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and remain there until you go out." They were to find a household that welcomed them and stay there, not move from house to house looking for better food or a nicer room.

"When entering into the house, greet it." The usual greeting was peace, shalom, a blessing of well-being. "If indeed the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." If the family received them, God's blessing would rest on that home. If not, the blessing would come back to the messengers. Our job is to offer the peace of Christ. Whether people receive it is up to them.

10:14-15 *And whoever does not receive you nor hear your words, when going out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for **the** land of Sodom and Gomorrah in **the** day of judgment than for that city.*

"Whoever does not receive you nor hear your words, when going out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." Jews coming home from Gentile lands would shake the dust off their feet so they would not bring unclean dirt into Israel. For the apostles to do this in a Jewish town was a

strong warning. It meant that by rejecting the King's messengers, the town had rejected the King. Paul and Barnabas did this when they were thrown out of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:51).

"It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." Sodom and Gomorrah were the wicked cities God destroyed with fire from heaven (Genesis 19). Jesus says a town that rejects Him will be judged more harshly than they were. Why? Because they had more light. They heard the message from the King's own messengers and saw the signs. The more truth we hear, the more we are responsible for. That is true for us too.

10:16 *Look, I send you out as sheep in **the** midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves.*

"Look, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves." Sheep are defenseless. Wolves are hungry. Jesus is honest. He does not promise His followers an easy road.

"Therefore be shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves." A serpent was known for being careful and wise, aware of danger. A dove was known for being gentle and harmless. Jesus wants His people to have both. Be wise, not naive. Do not walk into danger foolishly. But never use trickery or do harm. Wisdom without innocence becomes sly. Innocence without wisdom becomes gullible. We need both.

10:17-18 *But beware of men; for they will hand you over to councils, and in their synagogues they will flog you; and you will even be brought before governors and kings on account of Me, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*

"Beware of men; for they will hand you over to councils, and in their synagogues they will flog you." Here Jesus begins to look beyond this first short mission. Nothing in the Gospels tells us the twelve were arrested on this trip. But after Jesus' resurrection it happened again and again. The apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin and beaten (Acts 5:40). Paul received thirty-nine lashes from the Jews five times (2 Corinthians 11:24).

"You will even be brought before governors and kings on account of Me, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles." Paul stood before the governors Felix and Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 24-26). What looked like defeat was really an open door to tell rulers about Jesus.

10:19-20 *But whenever they hand you over, do not be anxious how or what you will speak; for it will be given to you in that hour what you will speak; for you are not the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

"Whenever they hand you over, do not be anxious how or what you will speak." Imagine being dragged before a court. Most of us would worry about what to say. Jesus says, don't. "It will be given to you in that hour what you will speak."

"For you are not the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, Peter, "having been filled with the Holy Spirit," spoke boldly, and the leaders were amazed (Acts 4:8, 13). This is not a promise that preachers can skip

preparing their sermons. It is a promise for believers on trial for their faith. God will give them the words when they need them.

10:21 *And brother will hand over brother to death, and father child; and children will rise up against parents and put them to death.*

"Brother will hand over brother to death, and father child; and children will rise up against parents and put them to death." This is one of the hardest verses in the chapter. Faith in Christ can divide families. Some will betray their own family members to the authorities. This happened in the early church, and it still happens today in places where becoming a Christian can cost a person his life.

If you have been rejected by your family because of Jesus, He knows that pain. His own brothers did not believe in Him at first (John 7:5).

Old Testament links: Micah 7:6 (alluded to)

10:22 *And you will be hated by all on account of My name; but the one who has endured to **the** end, he will be saved.*

"You will be hated by all on account of My name." Not hated for being rude or foolish, but because of the name of Jesus. Jesus told His disciples later that if the world hated Him, it would hate them too (John 15:18).

"But the one who has endured to the end, he will be saved." What does that mean? Bible teachers read it in a few ways. Some see it as a description of true believers. Those who really belong to Christ will endure, and their endurance shows their faith is real. Others see a warning that a person can fall away. Still others note that Jesus uses the same words in 24:13 for those who live through the Tribulation and are delivered when He returns. All agree that we are not saved by our endurance. We are saved by grace through faith. But real faith keeps going.

10:23 *But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee into the other; for truly I say to you, you will by no means have completed the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.*

"Whenever they persecute you in this city, flee into the other." Jesus does not ask His followers to stay and be killed when they can escape. Running from persecution is not cowardice. It can spread the message to new places, as it did in Acts 8:1-4.

"You will by no means have completed the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes." This is one of the harder verses in Matthew. The twelve did not finish going through the cities of Israel before Jesus died and rose. So what did He mean? Some say He meant His coming in glory at the Transfiguration (17:1-8), or His resurrection. Some say He meant His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Many dispensational teachers read it in light of this whole section. From verse 16 on, Jesus is speaking of the long road His witnesses will walk until He comes again. The witness to Israel will not be finished until the Son of Man returns at the end of the Tribulation. God has not forgotten the cities of Israel. The message of the King will still be going to them when He comes back in glory (24:14, 30).

10:24-25 *A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above his master. **It is** sufficient for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household?*

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above his master." A student should not expect to be treated better than his teacher. "It is sufficient for the disciple that he become like his teacher." The goal of a disciple is to become like Jesus. That includes sharing in how the world treats Him.

"If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household?" Beelzebul was a name for Satan, the ruler of demons. The name may come from Baal-zebub, a false god of the Philistines (2 Kings 1:2). The Pharisees had already said Jesus cast out demons by the ruler of the demons (9:34). If they said that about Jesus, His followers should not expect better. If you are mocked for following Jesus, you are in good company.

10:26-27 *Therefore do not fear them; for nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops.*

"Therefore do not fear them." This is the first of three times in this passage that Jesus says do not fear (10:26, 28, 31). "Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." The truth will come out. The enemies of the gospel may lie about believers now, but one day God will reveal everything. Truth will win.

"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, proclaim on the housetops." Houses in Israel had flat roofs, and announcements were often made from them. Jesus was teaching His disciples privately, but they were to tell it to everyone. The gospel is not a secret to keep. It is good news to proclaim.

10:28 *And do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.*

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul." The worst a persecutor can do is kill the body. He cannot touch the soul. For a believer, death means being with the Lord (Philippians 1:21-23).

"But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna." This is God. To fear God means to stand in awe of Him, knowing He is holy and the Judge of all. It is not the fear of a slave before a cruel master. It is the right respect of a creature before his Creator. And here is the secret. When we fear God rightly, we do not need to fear anyone else. The person who bows before God can stand before any man.

10:29-31 *Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

"Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion?" Sparrows were the cheapest food in the market, sold to the poor. An assarion was a small Roman copper coin, worth only a fraction of a day's wage.

Luke tells us five sparrows sold for two of them (Luke 12:6). The fifth one was thrown in for free. Yet "not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

"Even the hairs of your head are all numbered." God knows you that well. He knows every detail of your life. Nothing happens to you that He does not know about or allow.

"Therefore do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows." If God watches over a cheap sparrow, how much more will He watch over His children? This does not mean nothing bad will happen. Sparrows still fall. But they do not fall without the Father. And neither will you.

10:32-33 *Therefore everyone who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father who **is** in **the** heavens. But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny him before My Father who **is** in **the** heavens.*

"Everyone who will confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father who is in the heavens." To confess means to say the same thing, to openly agree with and stand with someone. If we openly stand with Jesus before people, He will stand with us before the Father.

"But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny him before My Father." This is serious. Notice that Jesus places Himself as the One who decides people's standing before God. Does this mean that a believer who fails once is lost? Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jesus restored him (John 21:15-19). Jesus is speaking of a settled denial, a life that refuses to own Him. Peter wept bitterly over his failure (26:75). A real believer who stumbles comes back.

10:34 *Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." This sounds strange from the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus does bring peace with God to those who believe (Romans 5:1). And one day He will bring peace to the whole earth when He reigns.

But right now His coming divides people. The sword is not a sword for fighting, and Jesus later told Peter to put his sword away (26:52). It is a picture of division. When someone follows Jesus, it often cuts between that person and those who do not.

10:35-36 *For I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and the enemies of the man **will be** the members of his household.*

"I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Jesus is quoting Micah 7:6, where the prophet described how bad things had become in Israel.

"The enemies of the man will be the members of his household." Many believers know this pain. A Jewish person who comes to Christ may be cut off by his family. A Muslim who believes may be in danger of his life. Even in our own country, a person who comes to Jesus may be mocked by his parents or spouse. Jesus does not want us to be the cause of the division. We should be the most loving family members anyone has. But we must not deny Him to keep the peace.

Old Testament links: Micah 7:6 (quoted)

10:37 *The one who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me.*

"The one who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me." Family is one of God's greatest gifts. The Bible commands us to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12) and to love and care for our families (1 Timothy 5:8). But family cannot take God's place.

No mere man has the right to say this. Only God deserves first place above the people we love most. Jesus claims that place. The best thing we can do for our families is to love Jesus more than we love them. When He is first, we love them better, not less.

10:38 *And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*

"Whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." This is the first time Jesus speaks of a cross in Matthew. His hearers knew exactly what it meant. When the Romans crucified someone, the condemned man carried his own cross beam to the place of execution. A man carrying a cross was a man who was going to die.

To take up our cross means to die to ourselves, to our own way, our own plans and our own pride, and to follow Jesus whatever it costs. It does not mean putting up with an annoying neighbor or a bad knee. It means a life fully surrendered to Him.

10:39 *The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on account of Me will find it.*

"The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on account of Me will find it." Here is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life. A paradox is a statement that sounds like a contradiction but is true. If you live for yourself, trying to hold on to your life, you will lose it in the end. If you give your life away for Jesus, you will find real life, now and forever.

Notice the words "on account of Me." This is not about throwing your life away for any cause. It is about giving it to Jesus. Many who have given up everything for Him have found that He gives back far more than they lost.

10:40 *The one who receives you receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.*

"The one who receives you receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." An ambassador speaks for his king. To welcome the ambassador is to welcome the king. To insult the ambassador is to insult the king.

Jesus' messengers carry His message and His authority. When people welcomed the apostles, they were welcoming Jesus. And when they welcomed Jesus, they were welcoming the Father who sent Him. That is a great honor and a great responsibility for everyone who carries the gospel.

10:41 *The one who receives a prophet in **the** name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and the one who receives a righteous **man** in **the** name of a righteous **man** will receive a righteous **man's** reward.*

"The one who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward." To receive someone "in the name of" a prophet means to welcome him because he is a prophet, because he speaks for God. The person who does that shares in the prophet's reward.

Not everyone is called to preach. But everyone can support those who do. The widow who fed Elijah shared in his ministry (1 Kings 17:8-16). If you pray for missionaries, give to their work, or open your home to God's servants, you will share in their reward. God keeps careful records.

10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold **water** to drink in **the** name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

"Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." "These little ones" are Jesus' disciples, humble and often looked down on. A cup of cold water is about the smallest gift there is. In a hot, dry land, it was also very welcome.

Jesus ends this sermon on a gentle note. After all the warnings about wolves, floggings and swords, He reminds His followers that no act of kindness done for them in His name will be forgotten. God sees the smallest things done for Him. You may think what you do for Jesus is too small to matter. It is not. Not even a cup of water is overlooked.

Chapter 10 Summary

Jesus called His twelve disciples, gave them authority to cast out unclean spirits and heal every disease, and sent them out as apostles. Matthew lists their names, from Peter first to Judas Iscariot last. Jesus sent them only to the lost sheep of Israel for this mission, to proclaim that the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near and to heal, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons, giving freely what they had freely received. They were to travel light, stay with worthy households, and shake the dust off their feet where they were rejected. Then Jesus warned that they would be sheep among wolves, handed over to councils, flogged, brought before governors and kings, hated by all and even betrayed by family. He promised the Spirit would give them words to speak and said the witness to Israel would go on until the Son of Man comes. Three times

He told them not to fear, because the Father watches over every sparrow and numbers every hair. He called for open confession of Him, warned that He brings a sword of division even in families, and said that those who love family more than Him, or will not take up their cross, are not worthy of Him. He promised that whoever receives His messengers receives Him, and that even a cup of cold water given to a disciple will be rewarded.

The people God has most put on my heart to tell about Jesus are my grandkids. I want them to know Him early. Matthew 10 tells us not to fear. Love for them is stronger than any fear of saying it wrong.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What authority did Jesus give the twelve, and where did that authority come from? (10:1)

2. What do the names Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Cananite tell you about the kind of people Jesus chose? (10:3-4)

3. Why did Jesus send the twelve only to Israel on this mission, and how did that change later? (10:5-6; 28:19)

4. What does it mean to be "shrewd as the serpents and innocent as the doves"? (10:16)

5. What did Jesus promise His followers when they are brought before rulers? (10:19-20)

6. What three times does Jesus say "do not fear," and what reasons does He give? (10:26-31)

7. What did taking up a cross mean to the people who first heard Jesus say it? (10:38)

8. What does Jesus promise to those who receive His messengers, even with a cup of cold water? (10:40-42)

9. Has following Jesus ever caused tension in your family or friendships? How can you stay loving without denying Him? (10:34-37)

10. Is there someone God has put on your heart to tell about Jesus? What fear keeps you from speaking, and how does this chapter answer it?

Chapter 11: John's Question and Jesus' Invitation

Scripture

11:1-19 And it came about, when Jesus had finished commanding His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and to proclaim in their cities. And John, having heard in the prison the works of the Christ, having sent two of his disciples, said to Him, "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Having gone, report to John the things that you hear and see: ***the*** blind receive sight, and ***the*** lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and ***the*** deaf hear, ***the*** dead are raised, and ***the*** poor have the gospel preached ***to them***. And blessed is he who is not caused to stumble in Me." And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to view? A reed shaken by ***the*** wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft garments? Look, those who wear soft ***things*** are in the houses of kings. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he concerning whom it has been written: 'Look, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not been raised ***one*** greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens suffers violence, and violent ***men*** seize it. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive ***it***, he himself is Elijah, who is about to come. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear. But to what will I compare this generation? It is like little children sitting in markets and calling to their companions, and saying, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge to you, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a man ***who is*** a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' And wisdom was justified by her children."

11:20-30 Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His mighty works had taken place, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in ***the*** day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Sodom, they would have remained until today. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable for ***the*** land of Sodom in ***the*** day of judgment than for you." At that time Jesus, answering, said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, because You hid these things from wise and understanding ***ones*** and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing before You. All things were handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and ***he*** to whom the Son chooses to reveal ***Him***. 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. For My yoke ***is*** easy, and My burden is light."

Chapter 11 Preview

Chapter 11 marks a turning point in Matthew. Up to now, we have seen the King's words and works. From here on, we see more and more how people respond to Him, and much of that response is doubt and rejection. It begins with a surprising question from John the Baptist, now sitting in Herod's prison: "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?" Jesus answers by pointing to His works, the very signs Isaiah promised. Then He tells the crowds who John really was: more than a prophet, the messenger sent ahead of the Lord, the Elijah who was to come.

But the people of that generation were like spoiled children who would not be pleased by anything. They called John a madman and Jesus a glutton. So Jesus warned the towns where He had done most of His miracles, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, that they would face a worse judgment than Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. The chapter ends with one of the most tender invitations in the Bible. Jesus thanks the Father for revealing these things to little children, and then He calls everyone who is tired and burdened to come to Him and find rest.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And it came about, when Jesus had finished commanding His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and to proclaim in their cities.*

"When Jesus had finished commanding His twelve disciples." This is the second time Matthew uses the words "when Jesus had finished" to close one of the great sermons (7:28). The teaching on mission in chapter 10 is over.

"He departed from there to teach and to proclaim in their cities." Jesus did not send the twelve out and then sit back. He went out too. A good leader does not ask others to do what he will not do himself. While His disciples went to some towns, He went to others.

11:2-3 *And John, having heard in the prison the works of the Christ, having sent two of his disciples, said to Him, "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?"*

"John, having heard in the prison the works of the Christ." John had been arrested by Herod Antipas (4:12; 14:3-4). The historian Josephus says John was held in a fortress called Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. He had been there for some time. From his cell, John heard reports of what Jesus was doing.

He sent two of his disciples to ask, "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?" "The One who is coming" was a way of speaking of the Messiah. Why would John ask this? He had baptized Jesus. He had seen the Spirit come down and heard the Father's voice (3:16-17). John had preached that the Coming One would bring judgment, with the ax at the root and the chaff burned up (3:10-12). Now he sat in a dungeon while wicked Herod ruled. Jesus was healing and preaching, but He was not judging. John may have wondered whether he had gotten something wrong.

John's question was honest. He did not walk away from Jesus with his doubts. He took them to Jesus. That is the right thing to do with our doubts too.

11:4-5 *And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Having gone, report to John the things that you hear and see:* ***the*** *blind receive sight, and* ***the*** *lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and* ***the*** *deaf hear,* ***the*** *dead are raised, and* ***the*** *poor have the gospel preached* ***to them****.*

Jesus did not answer with a simple yes. He said, "Having gone, report to John the things that you hear and see." Then He listed them: "the blind receive sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

These words come from Isaiah's promises about the coming of God's kingdom (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). John knew those passages. Jesus was telling him to look at what was happening. The very signs the prophets promised were taking place. Yes, He was the One. And notice the last item on the list. The good news to the poor is the high point. The miracles pointed to the message.

Jesus did not mention the part of Isaiah 61:2 about "a day of vengeance of our God." That would come later. Jesus came first to save, and He will come again to judge. John saw both comings as one. We know now that they are separated by many centuries.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 35:5-6 (alluded to); Isaiah 29:18 (alluded to)

11:6 *And blessed is he who is not caused to stumble in Me."*

"Blessed is he who is not caused to stumble in Me." To stumble here means to be tripped up, to fall away because Jesus does not do what we expected.

This is a gentle word for John, and for us. Jesus does not always act the way we think He should. Sometimes He heals. Sometimes He lets His servant stay in prison. John would soon be killed there (14:10). Jesus was not rebuking John. He was inviting him to trust, even without understanding everything. Blessed are those who keep trusting Jesus when He does not do what they expected.

11:7-8 *And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to view? A reed shaken by* ***the*** *wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft garments? Look, those who wear soft* ***things*** *are in the houses of kings.*

As John's disciples left, Jesus turned to the crowd and defended John. He did not want anyone to think less of John because of his question.

"What did you go out into the wilderness to view? A reed shaken by the wind?" Reeds grew along the Jordan River and bent with every breeze. John was not like that. He did not change his message to please the crowds or the king. "A man dressed in soft garments? Look, those who wear soft things are in the houses of kings." John wore camel's hair (3:4). He was not a courtier who lived in a palace. In fact, he was in a king's house now, in its dungeon, because he would not flatter that king. A moment of doubt did not change who John was.

11:9-10 *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he concerning whom it has been written: 'Look, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.'*

"A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet." John was the first prophet Israel had seen in about four hundred years. But he was more than that.

"Look, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." This is from Malachi 3:1, one of the last prophecies of the Old Testament. Every other prophet spoke about the Messiah from a distance. John was the messenger sent right before Him, to prepare His way. He was the only prophet who could point to Jesus and say, "Look, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). Notice the wording. In Malachi, God says He will send His messenger "before Me." Here, it is "before Your face." The Father speaks to the Son. Jesus is the Lord whose way John prepared.

Old Testament links: Malachi 3:1 (quoted)

11:11 *Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not been raised **one** greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he.*

"Among those born of women there has not been raised one greater than John the Baptist." That is high praise. Greater than Abraham, Moses, David, or Elijah. Why? Because of his place in God's plan. He was the herald who introduced the King.

"Yet the least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he." How can that be? Jesus is not saying the least believer is a better person than John. He is speaking of privilege. John stood at the door of the new age but did not live to see the cross, the resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. The humblest believer today knows more about God's plan of salvation than John could see. We stand on the other side of the cross. That is a privilege we should never take for granted.

11:12 *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens suffers violence, and violent **men** seize it.*

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens suffers violence, and violent men seize it." This is one of the hardest verses in Matthew to understand, and Bible teachers have read it in different ways.

Some read it negatively. Since John began preaching, the kingdom has been under attack. Violent men, like Herod who imprisoned John and the leaders who opposed Jesus, try to seize it and crush it. Others read it positively. The kingdom has been pushing forward with force since John began, and eager, determined people are pressing into it with all their strength. Luke's similar saying says that everyone is forcing his way into it (Luke 16:16). Both ideas are true in Scripture. The kingdom does face violent opposition, and entering it does take a wholehearted response. Those who take the first reading point out that John was sitting in prison for the kingdom's sake when Jesus said it.

11:13-14 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive **it**, he himself is Elijah, who is about to come.*

"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." The whole Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah. John was the last of that line. With him, the time of promise was ending and the time of fulfillment was beginning.

"If you are willing to receive it, he himself is Elijah, who is about to come." Malachi promised that God would send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). Many Jews expected Elijah to come back in person. John denied being Elijah in that sense (John 1:21). But he came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Notice the words "if you are willing to receive it." If Israel had received the King, John would have fulfilled that prophecy completely. Many dispensational teachers believe that because Israel rejected the King, Elijah's ministry will have a further fulfillment before Jesus returns, perhaps through one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Jesus Himself said later that "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things," and also that "Elijah has already come" (17:11-12).

Old Testament links: Malachi 4:5 (alluded to)

11:15 *The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

"The one who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus said this when He wanted people to stop and think carefully. Everyone has ears, but not everyone listens. The question is whether we are willing to receive what God is saying, even when it is not what we expected.

11:16-17 *But to what will I compare this generation? It is like little children sitting in markets and calling to their companions, and saying, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge to you, and you did not mourn.'*

"To what will I compare this generation? It is like little children sitting in markets and calling to their companions." Picture children in the town square playing pretend. Some want to play wedding. They play the flute, but the others won't dance. So they switch to playing funeral. They sing a sad song, but the others won't mourn. Nothing satisfies them.

That is what "this generation" was like. They would not respond to God whatever way He came to them. They complained no matter what.

11:18-19 *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a man **who is** a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' And wisdom was justified by her children."*

"John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'" John lived a strict life in the wilderness and called people to repent. They said he was crazy, possessed by a demon.

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a man who is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Jesus went to dinners and celebrated with sinners. They said He was a party animal. John was too strict, and Jesus was too free. The real

problem was not John or Jesus. It was their hearts. They did not want to repent, so they found reasons to reject the messengers.

"Wisdom was justified by her children." A tree is known by its fruit. God's wisdom in sending both John and Jesus is proven right by the lives changed through them. Tax collectors and sinners were repenting and following Jesus. The results speak for themselves. And notice the insult they threw at Jesus, "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." They meant it as a slur. It is actually wonderful news. He is the Friend of sinners, and that includes you and me.

11:20 *Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His mighty works had taken place, because they did not repent:*

"Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His mighty works had taken place, because they did not repent." To reproach means to rebuke, to lay a charge against someone. Jesus had done most of His miracles in a few towns around the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Notice the charge: "they did not repent." They did not reject Jesus openly. Many were glad to see the miracles. They just did not change. They watched Jesus heal and went on living the same way. That is a quiet but deadly kind of unbelief.

11:21-22 *"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in **the** day of judgment than for you.*

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!" Woe is a cry of grief and a warning of judgment. Chorazin was a small town about two miles north of Capernaum. The Bible never tells us about a single miracle there, but Jesus says many were done. Bethsaida was a fishing village on the north shore, the hometown of Peter, Andrew and Philip (John 1:44).

"If the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities on the coast to the north, known for their wealth, pride and idol worship. The prophets had pronounced judgment on them (Ezekiel 26-28). Sackcloth was rough cloth made from goat's hair, worn with ashes on the head as a sign of deep sorrow and repentance.

"It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." These Jewish towns had seen far more than Tyre and Sidon ever did. Greater light brings greater responsibility. There will be degrees of judgment, depending on how much truth a person has received and rejected (Luke 12:47-48).

11:23-24 *And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Sodom, they would have remained until today. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable for **the** land of Sodom in **the** day of judgment than for you."*

"And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades." Capernaum was Jesus' own town (4:13; 9:1). It had been lifted up to heaven by the privilege of

having the Son of God live there. Hades is the Greek word for the place of the dead, often used for the realm of judgment. Jesus' words echo what Isaiah said about the proud king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:13-15).

"If the mighty works that took place in you had taken place in Sodom, they would have remained until today." Sodom was the most famous example of wickedness and judgment in the Old Testament (Genesis 19). Jesus says even Sodom would have repented if it had seen what Capernaum saw. "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

These are some of the strongest words Jesus ever spoke, and they were spoken to religious, respectable towns. It is a warning for those of us who have grown up around church and heard the gospel many times. It is possible to be so used to Jesus that we never actually turn to Him. Today, the ruins of Capernaum and Chorazin can still be seen. Those towns are gone.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 14:13-15 (alluded to); Genesis 19:24 (alluded to)

11:25-26 *At that time Jesus, answering, said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, because You hid these things from wise and understanding **ones** and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing before You.*

"At that time Jesus, answering, said." His words were, "I praise You, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth." Right after these hard words, Jesus turns to the Father in prayer. "Because You hid these things from wise and understanding ones and revealed them to little children."

"These things" are the truths about who Jesus is and what His kingdom means. The wise and understanding were the proud, educated religious leaders who thought they knew it all. "Little children" were the humble, simple people who knew they needed help, like the disciples, the tax collectors and the sinners. God does not hide the truth from people because they are educated. He hides it from people who are proud. The way into God's kingdom is to become like a child (18:3).

"Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing before You." Jesus rested in His Father's plan. Even when cities rejected Him, He trusted that the Father knew what He was doing. When we see people we love reject the gospel, we can pray the way Jesus did and trust God's wisdom.

11:27 *All things were handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and **he** to whom the Son chooses to reveal **Him**.*

"All things were handed over to Me by My Father." This is a staggering claim. The Father has given the Son all authority. Jesus will say it again after His resurrection (28:18).

"No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him." The Father and the Son know each other completely, in a way no one else can. This verse sounds very much like the Gospel of John (John 10:15; 14:9). Only God can fully know God. And the only way anyone else can truly know the Father is if the Son reveals Him.

Bible teachers have long discussed how verses like 11:25-27 fit with the open invitation in the very next verse. Some stress God's sovereign choice to reveal Himself to whom He wills. Others stress that the Son chooses to reveal the Father to all who come to Him in humble faith. Both truths stand side by side here, and Jesus does not seem troubled by holding them together. What is clear is the very next thing He says: come.

11:28 *Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*

"Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." After speaking of His unique authority, Jesus opens His arms. Notice who He invites: all. Not only the wise, the religious, or the good. All who labor and are burdened.

The people of that day labored under heavy loads. Many were poor and worked hard just to survive. And the Pharisees had piled their many religious rules on the people's backs, rules no one could keep (23:4). Many of us know what it is like to be worn out, by work, by guilt, by trying to be good enough for God.

"I will give you rest." Jesus does not say He will show you the way to rest. He says He will give it. He Himself is the rest. Rest from trying to earn God's favor. Rest from the weight of sin and guilt. Rest for your soul. If you are tired today, this invitation is for you.

11:29 *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.*

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me." A yoke was a wooden frame laid across the necks of two oxen, so they could pull a plow together. The rabbis spoke of taking the yoke of the Law. Jesus invites us to take His yoke instead. Coming to Jesus is not just coming for rest. It is coming to be His disciple, to walk with Him and learn from Him.

"For I am gentle and humble in heart." This is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus describes His own heart. He does not say He is stern and demanding. He says He is gentle and humble. He is not a harsh master. He is patient with our weakness. "And you will find rest for your souls." These words echo Jeremiah 6:16, where God called Israel to walk in the good way and find rest for their souls.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 6:16 (alluded to)

11:30 *For My yoke **is** easy, and My burden is light."*

"For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Does this mean following Jesus is always easy? No. Chapter 10 talked about wolves, floggings and crosses. But His yoke fits well. The word easy was used for something kind, comfortable, well-fitted. A good carpenter made a yoke that fit the ox so it would not rub the neck raw. Jesus grew up as a carpenter.

His burden is light because He carries it with us. When you are yoked to Jesus, He takes the heavy end. The rules of religion are crushing. A relationship with Jesus is freeing. His commands are not

burdensome (1 John 5:3), because He gives us the strength to keep them and the grace when we fail.

Chapter 11 Summary

After sending out the twelve, Jesus went on teaching and preaching in the cities of Galilee. John the Baptist, in prison, sent his disciples to ask whether Jesus was the One who was coming. Jesus told them to report what they saw and heard: the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead raised, and the gospel preached to the poor, and He blessed those who do not stumble over Him. Then Jesus told the crowds that John was more than a prophet, the messenger Malachi promised, the greatest of those born of women, and the Elijah who was to come for those willing to receive it. Yet the least in the kingdom is greater than he. Jesus compared His generation to children who would not dance or mourn, rejecting John as demon-possessed and Jesus as a glutton and friend of sinners. He pronounced woes on Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, which had seen His mighty works but did not repent, and said their judgment would be worse than that of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Then He praised the Father for revealing these things to little children, declared that all things had been handed to Him and that only the Son reveals the Father, and invited all who are weary and burdened to come to Him, take His yoke, and find rest for their souls.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What question did John send to Jesus, and why do you think he asked it? (11:2-3)

2. How did Jesus answer John, and which Old Testament promises was He pointing to? (11:4-5)

3. What did Jesus mean by "blessed is he who is not caused to stumble in Me"? (11:6)

4. Why was John "more than a prophet," and how can the least in the kingdom be greater than he? (11:9-11)

5. How were the people of that generation like children in the marketplace? (11:16-19)

6. Why did Jesus say judgment would be worse for Capernaum than for Sodom? (11:20-24)

7. To whom does God reveal the truth about Jesus, and from whom is it hidden? (11:25-27)

8. What does Jesus invite the weary to do, and what does He promise them? (11:28-30)

9. John took his doubts straight to Jesus. What doubts or questions do you need to bring to Him?

10. What burden are you carrying today that Jesus is inviting you to bring to Him? What would it look like to take His yoke instead?

Chapter 12: Lord of the Sabbath

Scripture

12:1-8 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields; and His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And the Pharisees, having seen, said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him, how he entered into the house of God and ate the loaves of the presentation, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? But I say to you that ***One*** greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this is, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

12:9-21 And having departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And look, there was a man having a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, "What man will there be among you who will have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and raise ***it*** up? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then He says to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched ***it*** out, and it was restored healthy like the other. And the Pharisees, having gone out, took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him. But Jesus, having known, withdrew from there. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them all, and He warned them that they should not make Him known, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul has been well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings forth justice to victory. And in His name ***the*** Gentiles will hope."

12:22-37 Then one who was demon-possessed, blind and mute, was brought to Him; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute ***man*** both spoke and saw. And all the crowds were amazed and were saying, "This is not the Son of David, is it?" But the Pharisees, having heard, said, "This ***man*** does not cast out the demons except by Beelzebul, ruler of the demons." And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast ***them*** out? Because of this they will be your judges. But if I cast out the demons by ***the*** Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how is anyone able to enter into the house of the strong ***man*** and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong ***man***? And then he will plunder his house. The one who is not with Me is against Me, and the one who does not gather with Me scatters. Because of this I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven to men. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the

Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the coming ***one***. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by the fruit. Offspring of vipers, how are you able to speak good things, being evil? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of the good treasure of the heart puts forth the good things, and the evil man out of the evil treasure puts forth evil things. But I say to you that every careless word that men speak, they will give an account of it in ***the*** day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

12:38-50 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from You." But He, answering, said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Ninevite men will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and look, ***something*** greater than Jonah ***is*** here. ***The*** queen of ***the*** south will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look, ***something*** greater than Solomon ***is*** here. Now when the unclean spirit goes out from the man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find ***it***. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came out.' And having come, it finds ***it*** unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered, they dwell there; and the last ***state*** of that man becomes worse than the first. So it will be also with this evil generation." And while He was still speaking to the crowds, look, His mother and His brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak to You." But He, answering, said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" And having stretched out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Look, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 12 is where the opposition to Jesus comes out into the open. It starts with two arguments about the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest God gave Israel. The Pharisees accuse His disciples of breaking it by picking grain, and then they watch to see if Jesus will heal on it. Jesus answers that He is "Lord even of the Sabbath," and from that day the Pharisees begin to plot how they might destroy Him. Matthew then shows us the kind of King Jesus is by quoting Isaiah: a gentle Servant who will not break a bruised reed.

The second half of the chapter turns darker. When Jesus heals a blind and mute man, the crowds wonder if He is the Son of David, but the Pharisees say He casts out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus answers them with a sober warning about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, a word about careless words, and the sign of Jonah. The chapter ends with Jesus pointing to His disciples and saying that whoever does the will of His Father is His true family.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-2 *At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields; and His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And the Pharisees, having seen, said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."*

"At that time" ties this scene to the end of chapter 11, where Jesus offered rest to the weary. Now we see what kind of rest the Pharisees were offering. The Pharisees were a strict party of Jewish teachers who were careful to keep the Law of Moses and also the many rules their elders had built around it. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, Saturday, set apart for rest (Exodus 20:8-11).

The disciples were not stealing. The Law allowed a hungry traveler to pick grain by hand from a neighbor's field (Deuteronomy 23:25). The problem, in the eyes of the Pharisees, was the day. Their rules counted picking and rubbing grain as harvesting and threshing, which was work. So they said, "Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." Notice that the Law itself did not say that. Their tradition did.

12:3-4 *But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him, how he entered into the house of God and ate the loaves of the presentation, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?*

Jesus answers with Scripture, as He always does. "Have you not read" was a sharp question to men who prided themselves on reading. He points them to David in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. David was running from Saul, he and his men were hungry, and the priest gave them "the loaves of the presentation." These were the twelve loaves set out before the Lord in the holy place each week, and only the priests were to eat them (Leviticus 24:5-9).

God did not strike David down. Why? Because God gave His laws for the good of His people, not to let them starve. If David, the anointed king who was not yet on the throne, could do this, how much more the Son of David Himself, who was standing in front of them?

Old Testament links: 1 Samuel 21:3-6 (alluded to); Leviticus 24:9 (alluded to)

12:5-6 *Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? But I say to you that **One** greater than the temple is here.*

Jesus gives a second example, this time from the Law itself. Every Sabbath the priests in the temple did more work than on other days. They killed and offered the extra Sabbath sacrifices (Numbers 28:9-10). In one sense they "profane the Sabbath," yet God called them "guiltless," because the service of the temple came first.

Then Jesus says something amazing: "One greater than the temple is here." The temple was the holiest place in Israel, the house where God put His name. Jesus says He is greater than that. Only God could say this. If the priests were free to work in God's house on the Sabbath, the disciples were free to serve the One who is greater than God's house.

Old Testament links: Numbers 28:9-10 (alluded to)

12:7-8 *But if you had known what this is, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 for the second time in Matthew (9:13): "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." God never wanted rituals without love. The Pharisees knew the rules, but they did not know the heart of the God who gave them, so they "condemned the guiltless."

"For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." The Son of Man was Jesus' favorite name for Himself. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14, where one like a son of man receives an everlasting kingdom from God. The Sabbath was God's day. Jesus says it is His. He is not breaking God's law. He is the Lord who gave it. For us today, this means the real rest God offers is found in a Person, not a day (11:28; Hebrews 4:9-10).

Old Testament links: Hosea 6:6 (quoted)

12:9-10 *And having departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And look, there was a man having a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him.*

Jesus goes into "their synagogue." A synagogue was a local Jewish meeting place where people gathered on the Sabbath to pray and hear the Scriptures read and taught. There was a man there with a withered hand, a hand that was shriveled and useless.

The Pharisees were not asking a real question. Matthew tells us why they asked: "so that they might accuse Him." They cared more about catching Jesus than about the man's suffering. Their own teachers allowed help on the Sabbath only if a life was in danger. A withered hand could wait until tomorrow, they would say. It is a sad thing when religious people look at a hurting person and see only a test case.

12:11-12 *And He said to them, "What man will there be among you who will have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and raise **it** up? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Jesus answers with their own practice. If a man's one sheep fell into a pit on the Sabbath, he would pull it out. They would all do that, and nobody would call it sin.

"How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep?" That is the whole point. God made man in His own image. If you would show mercy to an animal on the Sabbath, how could it be wrong to show mercy to a man? So Jesus draws His conclusion: "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The Sabbath was never a day to stop doing good. It was a day to rest from our own work and to enjoy God's goodness.

12:13-14 *Then He says to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched **it** out, and it was restored healthy like the other. And the Pharisees, having gone out, took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him.*

Jesus tells the man, "Stretch out your hand." That was the one thing the man could not do. But when Jesus gives a command, He gives the power to obey it. The man stretched it out, and it was made healthy like the other one. Notice that Jesus did no work at all by their rules. He only spoke.

How did the Pharisees respond to a miracle of mercy? They "took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him." This is a turning point in Matthew. From here on, the leaders are not just arguing with Jesus. They want Him dead. Think about the irony. They thought healing on the Sabbath was a sin, but plotting murder on the Sabbath was fine.

12:15-16 *But Jesus, having known, withdrew from there. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them all, and He warned them that they should not make Him known,*

Jesus knew what they were planning and "withdrew from there." He was not afraid. His hour had not yet come, and He would go to the cross on the Father's timetable, not theirs.

Great crowds still followed Him, "and He healed them all." Then He warned them not to make Him known. Why would Jesus want to keep quiet? Many people in Israel were looking for a political Messiah who would lead an army against Rome. Jesus did not want a crowd stirring up a revolt in His name. He had come to be a different kind of King first, a King who would suffer before He reigns.

Matthew tells us in the next verses that this quiet way was exactly what Isaiah had said about God's Servant: "He will not make His voice heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:2).

Old Testament links: Isaiah 42:2 (fulfilled)

12:17-21 *so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul has been well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings forth justice to victory. And in His name **the** Gentiles will hope."*

Matthew explains Jesus' quiet way of working by quoting Isaiah 42:1-4. God calls Him "My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved." These words echo what the Father said at Jesus' baptism (3:17). The Spirit is upon Him, and He will "proclaim justice to the Gentiles." A Gentile is anyone who is not Jewish. Even here, early in His ministry, Matthew wants us to see that this Jewish King will bring hope to the whole world.

"He will not quarrel nor cry out." Jesus did not run a loud campaign. "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench." A bruised reed is almost broken. A smoldering wick is almost out. That describes many of us. Jesus does not throw away weak and worn-out people. He handles them gently. If your faith feels like a flickering wick today, take heart. He will not snuff you out. He will keep on until He "brings forth justice to victory," and that will happen when He returns to reign.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 42:1-4 (quoted)

12:22-23 *Then one who was demon-possessed, blind and mute, was brought to Him; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute **man** both spoke and saw. And all the crowds were amazed and were saying, "This is not the Son of David, is it?"*

Now a man is brought who was demon-possessed, blind, and mute. He could not see Jesus and could not cry out to Him. Others had to bring him. Jesus healed him so that he "both spoke and saw."

The crowds were amazed and asked, "This is not the Son of David, is it?" The way the question is worded expects a "no," but it shows they were starting to wonder. The Son of David was a title for the Messiah, the promised King from David's family (2 Samuel 7:12-16). That is the very thing Matthew has been showing since his first verse (1:1). The people were close to the truth.

12:24 *But the Pharisees, having heard, said, "This **man** does not cast out the demons except by Beelzebul, ruler of the demons."*

The Pharisees could not deny the miracle. Everyone saw it. So they attacked the source of it. They said Jesus cast out demons "by Beelzebul, ruler of the demons." Beelzebul was a name for Satan. It likely comes from Baal-zebub, a false god of the Philistines (2 Kings 1:2), and was used as a name of contempt.

This is how hard the human heart can become. The Pharisees saw the plain work of God and called it the work of the devil. They were not confused. They had made up their minds about Jesus, and no evidence was going to change them.

12:25-26 *And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?*

Jesus knew their thoughts. He did not need anyone to tell Him what they said. He answers with plain common sense. A kingdom fighting itself is "made desolate." A city or a family divided against itself will fall.

"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself." Why would Satan tear down his own work? A man set free from a demon is a loss for the devil, not a win. The Pharisees' charge made no sense, and Jesus showed it.

12:27 *And if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast **them** out? Because of this they will be your judges.*

Jesus asks a second question. Some Jewish teachers of the time tried to drive out demons. Jesus calls them "your sons," meaning their own followers. If the Pharisees said Jesus used Satan's power, what would they say about their own people? "Because of this they will be your judges." Their own followers would show how unfair their charge was. They were judging Jesus by a rule they would never use on themselves.

12:28 *But if I cast out the demons by **the** Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

"But if I cast out the demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Here is the real answer. Jesus did these works by the power of the Holy Spirit. And if that is so, the kingdom of God had arrived among them in the Person of the King.

This was a solemn moment for Israel. The King was standing in their midst, showing His power over the enemy. To reject Him was not just to make a mistake about a teacher. It was to turn away from the kingdom itself.

12:29 *Or how is anyone able to enter into the house of the strong **man** and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong **man**? And then he will plunder his house.*

Jesus gives a short parable. You cannot rob a strong man's house unless you first tie up the strong man. Satan is the strong man. His house is this world, and his goods are the people he holds captive. Every time Jesus cast out a demon, He was walking into Satan's house and carrying off what Satan thought was his.

Jesus is the stronger One (Luke 11:22). At the cross He won the decisive victory over the devil (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). Satan is still active today, but he is a defeated enemy. No one is so bound that Jesus cannot set them free.

12:30 *The one who is not with Me is against Me, and the one who does not gather with Me scatters.*

"The one who is not with Me is against Me." There is no neutral ground with Jesus. The Pharisees thought they could stand off to one side and judge Him. Jesus says that if you are not on His side, you are working against Him.

The second picture is a harvest or a flock. Jesus is gathering people into God's kingdom. Anyone who does not gather with Him "scatters." Each of us has to ask: am I helping to gather people to Jesus, or am I driving them away?

12:31 *Because of this I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven to men.*

Now comes one of the most serious warnings Jesus ever gave. "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven to men." Notice how wide that is. Blasphemy means speaking against God, insulting Him

or His name. Murder, adultery, cursing God: every one of them can be forgiven. Paul called himself a former blasphemer, and God saved him (1 Timothy 1:13).

"But the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven to men." What is this sin? Look at the context. The Pharisees saw the Holy Spirit's plain work through Jesus, knew it was a work of God, and still called it the work of Satan. It was not a slip of the tongue. It was a settled, knowing rejection of the Spirit's witness to Jesus. The Spirit is the One who points us to Christ and draws us to Him (John 16:8-14). If a person shuts that door for good, there is no other way to be forgiven.

12:32 *And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the coming* ***one****.*

Jesus makes a distinction. A word "against the Son of Man" can be forgiven. People who misunderstood Jesus during His earthly life, even His own brothers who did not believe in Him at first (John 7:5), could later come to faith. Peter denied Him and was forgiven. But speaking against the Holy Spirit in this way "will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the coming one."

Many believers have lain awake at night afraid they have committed this sin. If that is you, let me speak plainly as a pastor. The very fact that you are worried about it shows you have not done it. The Pharisees were not worried. They were hardened. A person who has truly and finally rejected the Spirit does not care. If you want to be right with God, the Spirit is still at work in you. Come to Jesus, and He will not turn you away (John 6:37). His promise is "every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven" to those who come to Him.

12:33 *Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by the fruit.*

Jesus turns from their charge to their character. A tree shows what it is by its fruit. The Pharisees could not call Jesus' good works evil and still call themselves good. "Make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten." Either Jesus is good, and so is His work, or He is evil. They could not have it both ways. The same test works on us. What we are on the inside will show up sooner or later in what we do.

12:34-35 *Offspring of vipers, how are you able to speak good things, being evil? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of the good treasure of the heart puts forth the good things, and the evil man out of the evil treasure puts forth evil things.*

"Offspring of vipers." John the Baptist used the same words for these leaders (3:7). A viper is a poisonous snake. Jesus says their words were poison because their hearts were poison. "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

This is a principle we can test every day. Our words are like a bucket lowered into a well. Whatever is down there is what comes up. "The good man out of the good treasure of the heart puts forth the good things." If you want to change your words, you have to let God change your heart.

12:36-37 *But I say to you that every careless word that men speak, they will give an account of it in* ***the*** *day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*

"Every careless word that men speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment." A careless word is an idle word, the kind we say without thinking. Jesus says God hears all of them.

"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." To be justified means to be declared righteous, to be found not guilty before God. Does this mean we are saved by talking the right way? No. Our words are evidence of what is in our hearts. A heart made new by faith in Christ will show it in what we say. A heart that hates Christ, like the Pharisees' hearts, shows that too. This is a good verse to remember the next time we are tempted to gossip or cut someone down.

12:38 *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from You."*

Some of the scribes and Pharisees now ask for "a sign." The scribes were experts in the Law of Moses who copied it, taught it, and explained it. Think about what they had already seen: the blind seeing, the lame walking, a withered hand made whole, a demon cast out just minutes before. Yet they wanted something more, a sign of their own choosing. They were not looking for evidence. They were looking for a way to say no.

12:39 *But He, answering, said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.*

Jesus calls them "an evil and adulterous generation." Adultery was a picture the prophets often used for Israel's unfaithfulness to God (Jeremiah 3:8-9). They claimed to love God, but their hearts belonged to something else.

They would get no sign on demand. They would get only "the sign of Jonah the prophet." God is not a performer who does tricks for skeptics. He had already given them more than enough. Still, one great sign was coming, and Jesus tells them what it is.

12:40 *For just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.*

Jonah spent "three days and three nights" in the belly of the great fish and then came out alive (Jonah 1:17; 2:10). In the same way, "the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." This is Jesus predicting His death, burial, and resurrection. The resurrection is the sign. It is the proof God gave to the whole world that Jesus is who He said He is (Romans 1:4).

How does three days and three nights fit a death on Friday and a resurrection on Sunday? The Jewish people counted any part of a day as a day. A phrase like "three days and three nights" was a way of saying three days, counting part of the first and part of the last (compare Esther 4:16 with 5:1). Some Bible teachers believe Jesus died on Wednesday or Thursday to fit a full seventy-two hours. Either way, the point is the same. He would die and rise on the third day (16:21).

Old Testament links: Jonah 1:17 (pictured)

12:41 *Ninevite men will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and look,* ***something*** *greater than Jonah* ***is*** *here.*

The men of Nineveh were pagan Gentiles, enemies of Israel. Yet when Jonah preached to them, they repented (Jonah 3:5-10). One day at the judgment they will stand up beside this generation "and will condemn it." Their repentance will show how guilty Israel's leaders were.

Why? Because "something greater than Jonah is here." Jonah was a reluctant prophet who did no miracles and preached a short message of doom. Jesus is the Son of God who healed their sick and preached the good news of the kingdom. Nineveh had less and repented. Israel's leaders had far more and refused.

Old Testament links: Jonah 3:5 (alluded to)

12:42 ***The*** *queen of* ***the*** *south will rise up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and look,* ***something*** *greater than Solomon* ***is*** *here.*

Jesus gives another example. "The queen of the south" was the queen of Sheba, who traveled a long way to hear Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 10:1-10). She was also a Gentile, and she went to great trouble to hear the truth. The Pharisees did not have to travel at all. Wisdom greater than Solomon's was standing right in their synagogue.

This is a warning for us too. Many of us have Bibles in every room and churches on every corner. The more light God gives, the more we are responsible for what we do with it.

Old Testament links: 1 Kings 10:1 (alluded to); 2 Chronicles 9:1 (alluded to)

12:43-45 *Now when the unclean spirit goes out from the man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find* ***it****. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came out.' And having come, it finds* ***it*** *unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and having entered, they dwell there; and the last* ***state*** *of that man becomes worse than the first. So it will be also with this evil generation."*

Jesus tells a strange story about an evil spirit. It leaves a man, wanders around, and finds no rest. Then it returns and finds its old house "swept, and put in order," but empty. So it brings seven other spirits worse than itself, and the man ends up worse than before.

Jesus says, "So it will be also with this evil generation." John the Baptist had called Israel to repent, and many had cleaned up their outward lives. But cleaning the house is not enough. It must be

filled. They had swept out some sin, but they would not let the King in. An empty, religious life without Christ is not safe. Reform without new life leaves the door open. The only answer is to have Jesus Himself, by His Spirit, living in us.

12:46-47 *And while He was still speaking to the crowds, look, His mother and His brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak to You."*

While Jesus is still speaking, His mother and His brothers come and stand outside, wanting to speak with Him. Mark tells us they had heard reports and thought He had lost His senses (Mark 3:21, 31). They may have come to take Him home.

Who are His brothers? Matthew later names them: James, Joses, Simon, and Jude (13:55). Reading the text plainly, I believe these were the sons of Mary and Joseph, born after Jesus (1:25). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary stayed a virgin all her life and reads these as cousins, and the Eastern churches often say they were sons of Joseph from an earlier marriage. The Greek word for "brothers" here is the normal word for brothers, and the plain reading fits best. At this point in the story, His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). Later, after the resurrection, they did (Acts 1:14).

12:48-50 *But He, answering, said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" And having stretched out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Look, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who **is** in **the** heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

Someone tells Jesus His family is waiting. Jesus asks, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" Then He stretches out His hand toward His disciples and says, "Look, My mother and My brothers!"

Jesus was not being cold to Mary. From the cross He made sure she was cared for (John 19:26-27). He was teaching that there is a family closer even than blood. "Whoever does the will of My Father who is in the heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother." What is the Father's will? First of all, to believe in the One He sent (John 6:29). Everyone who trusts Jesus and follows Him belongs to His family. If you have lost family, or your family has turned against you because of your faith, hear this. In Christ you have brothers and sisters, and you have a place at His table.

Chapter 12 Summary

The Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the Sabbath by picking grain. Jesus answers from David's example and from the priests' work in the temple, declares that One greater than the temple is here, and says He is Lord even of the Sabbath. He heals a man's withered hand in the synagogue, teaching that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees begin to plot His death. Matthew shows from Isaiah that Jesus is God's gentle, chosen Servant who will bring hope to the Gentiles. When Jesus heals a blind and mute man, the Pharisees say He works by Beelzebul. Jesus shows that a divided kingdom cannot stand, that He has bound the strong man, and that blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. He warns that our words show our hearts,

refuses to give a sign except the sign of Jonah, His coming death and resurrection, and warns against an empty, reformed life without Him. He closes by naming those who do His Father's will as His true family.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What rule did the Pharisees accuse the disciples of breaking, and was it in the Law itself or in their tradition? (12:1-2)

2. What two examples from Scripture did Jesus use to answer them? (12:3-5)

3. What did Jesus claim about Himself when He said He is greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath? (12:6-8)

4. How did the Pharisees respond when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand? (12:14)

5. What do the bruised reed and the smoldering wick tell us about how Jesus treats weak people? (12:20)

6. Who is the strong man, and what does it mean that Jesus binds him? (12:29)

7. What was the blasphemy against the Spirit, and why can a worried believer be sure he has not committed it? (12:31-32)

8. What is the sign of Jonah? (12:39-40)

9. What do your words this past week say about what is in your heart? (12:34-37)

10. Jesus said those who do His Father's will are His family. Who in your church family could use your encouragement this week? (12:50)

Chapter 13: Parables of the Kingdom

Scripture

13:1-9 And on that day Jesus, having gone out from the house, was sitting beside the sea. And great crowds were gathered together to Him, so that He, having stepped into the boat, sat down; and all the crowd was standing on the shore. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Look, the sower went out to sow. And while he was sowing, some fell along the road, and the birds came and devoured them. And others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because of not having depth of soil. And the sun having risen, they were scorched; and because of not having root, they withered. And others fell on the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. And others fell on the good soil and were giving fruit, some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty. The ***one*** having ears to hear, let him hear."

13:10-23 And the disciples, having come, said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And answering, He said to them, "Because to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And upon them is being fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, 'In hearing you will hear, and by no means understand; and seeing you will see, and by no means perceive. For the heart of this people has grown dull, and with the ears they heard with difficulty, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with the heart, and turn back, and I should heal them.' But blessed ***are*** your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous ***men*** longed to see what you see, and did not see, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear. You, therefore, hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil ***one*** comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the ***one*** sown along the road. And the ***one*** sown on the rocky places, this is the ***one*** hearing the word and immediately receiving it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but is temporary; and when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he is caused to stumble. And the ***one*** sown among the thorns, this is the ***one*** hearing the word, and the care of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the ***one*** sown on the good soil, this is the ***one*** hearing the word and understanding, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty."

13:24-35 Another parable He set before them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while the men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds in the midst of the wheat, and went away. And when the blade sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds also appeared. And the slaves of the master of the house, having come, said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? From where then does it have the weeds?' And he said to them, 'A man, an enemy, did this.' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us then, having gone away, to gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while gathering up

the weeds you uproot the wheat together with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the weeds and bind them into bundles in order to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'" Another parable He set before them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard, which a man, having taken, sowed in his field, which indeed is smaller than all the seeds, but when it has grown, it is greater than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches." Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman, having taken, hid in approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of flour until all was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and without a parable He was not speaking to them, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from ***the*** foundation of ***the*** world."

13:36-43 Then, having dismissed the crowds, Jesus went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." And answering, He said to them, "The ***one*** sowing the good seed is the Son of Man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the weeds are the sons of the evil ***one***; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is ***the*** consummation of the age; and the reapers are angels. Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the consummation of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather up out of His kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness, and they will throw them into the furnace of the fire; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth. Then the righteous will shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The ***one*** having ears to hear, let him hear.

13:44-58 Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man, having found, hid; and from his joy he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a merchant, seeking fine pearls, who, having found one very precious pearl, having gone away, has sold all that he had and bought it. Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a dragnet cast into the sea and having gathered together ***fish*** of every kind, which, when it was filled, having drawn ***it*** up on the shore and having sat down, they collected the good into vessels, but threw the bad out. So it will be at the consummation of the age: the angels will go out and separate the evil from ***the*** midst of the righteous, and they will throw them into the furnace of the fire; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." Jesus says to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They say to Him, "Yes, Lord." And He said to them, "Because of this, every scribe having been discipled into the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure ***things*** new and old." And it came about, when Jesus had finished these parables, He withdrew from there. And having come into His hometown, He was teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "From where ***did*** this ***man get*** this wisdom and the miracles? Is this not the son of the carpenter? ***Is*** not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joses and Simon and Jude? And His sisters, are they not all with us? From where then ***did*** this ***man get*** all these things?" And they were caused to stumble in Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his house." And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Chapter 13 Preview

Chapter 13 is the third of the five long teaching sections in Matthew. After the leaders' rejection in chapter 12, Jesus changes the way He teaches the crowds. He sits in a boat and speaks to them in parables, stories drawn from everyday life that carry a spiritual lesson. When His disciples ask why, He tells them that the parables reveal "the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens" to those who want to hear, and hide them from those who have already closed their hearts.

There are eight parables in this chapter. The sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, and the leaven are told to the crowd by the sea. The hidden treasure, the pearl, the dragnet, and the master of a house are told to the disciples in the house. Together they describe the kingdom in a form the Old Testament prophets did not fully see: the time between the King's first coming and His return, when the gospel is sown in the world, good and evil grow side by side, and the final sorting waits for the end of the age. The chapter closes with Jesus rejected in His own hometown.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-2 *And on that day Jesus, having gone out from the house, was sitting beside the sea. And great crowds were gathered together to Him, so that He, having stepped into the boat, sat down; and all the crowd was standing on the shore.*

"On that day" is the same day as the events of chapter 12. Jesus leaves the house and sits by the Sea of Galilee. The crowd grew so large that He got into a boat and sat down to teach while the people stood on the shore. A teacher sat to teach in those days. The water also carried His voice well, like a natural sound system.

I find it striking that Jesus teaches on the same day He was accused of working for Satan. He did not stop doing His Father's work because people opposed Him. He simply changed His method.

13:3 *And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Look, the sower went out to sow.*

"He spoke many things to them in parables." A parable is a story from ordinary life, set alongside a spiritual truth to teach it. The Greek word parabole means something thrown alongside. Jesus used farming, fishing, cooking, and business, things everyone in Galilee knew well.

Up to now in Matthew, Jesus has taught plainly, as in the Sermon on the Mount. From here on, He speaks to the crowds mostly in parables (13:34). We will see why in verses 10 to 17.

The first story is about "the sower." In that day a farmer walked through his field throwing seed by hand from a bag. Some of it landed where he wanted it, and some did not.

13:4 *And while he was sowing, some fell along the road, and the birds came and devoured them.*

Some seed fell "along the road." Fields had paths running through and beside them, packed down hard by people walking. Seed that landed there just sat on top of the ground. It never had a chance to go in, and the birds came and ate it up.

13:5-6 *And others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because of not having depth of soil. And the sun having risen, they were scorched; and because of not having root, they withered.*

Other seed fell on "the rocky places." This was not ground full of loose stones. It was a thin layer of soil over a shelf of rock, which was common in Galilee. The seed sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow and warmed fast. But its roots could not go down. When the hot sun came out, the plants were scorched and withered.

13:7 *And others fell on the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.*

Other seed fell among thorns. The ground looked plowed and ready, but the roots of thorn bushes were still in it. The thorns grew up with the grain and choked it out. The grain did not die right away, but it never produced anything.

13:8-9 *And others fell on the good soil and were giving fruit, some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty. The **one** having ears to hear, let him hear."*

Finally, some seed fell "on the good soil." This soil was soft, deep, and clean, and the seed produced a harvest, "some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty." A good harvest in that day might be ten times what was sown. A hundredfold was an amazing crop.

"The one having ears to hear, let him hear." Everyone has ears, but not everyone listens. Jesus is calling the crowd to stop and think. This is not just a farming story. It is about them.

13:10 *And the disciples, having come, said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"*

The disciples came and asked, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" It was a fair question. They had heard Jesus teach plainly before. Why the change? Jesus' answer in the next few verses is one of the most important keys to understanding this chapter.

13:11 *And answering, He said to them, "Because to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it has not been given.*

"To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it has not been given." Matthew usually says "the kingdom of the heavens" where Mark and Luke say "the kingdom of God." Matthew wrote mainly for Jewish readers, who often avoided saying God's name out of reverence. Both phrases mean the same thing (compare 19:23-24).

In the Bible, a "mystery" is not a puzzle to solve. It is a truth God kept hidden in the past and now reveals to His people (Romans 16:25-26). The Old Testament prophets spoke of a glorious kingdom where Messiah would reign on David's throne (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44). What they did not clearly see was that the King would be rejected, go away, and then come again, and that a long age would pass in between. The parables of this chapter describe the kingdom in that age. I call it the mystery form of the kingdom: God's rule spreading through the word in the hearts of people, while the King Himself is in heaven. The kingdom in its full, visible form will come when Jesus returns to the earth to reign (Revelation 20:4-6).

13:12 *For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*

"For whoever has, to him will be given." This sounds unfair until we see what Jesus means. The one who has is the person who has received the truth with a willing heart. God gives that person more light. The one who "does not have" is the person who has turned away from what he heard. Even the little he has will be taken from him.

This is a law of the spiritual life. Use the light God gives you, and He will give you more. Refuse it, and you lose even what you had. The disciples had believed, and they would understand more. The Pharisees had refused, and their hearts would grow darker.

13:13 *Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

"Because of this I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear." Jesus did not start using parables to keep honest seekers from the truth. The crowd had already seen His miracles and heard His teaching, and their leaders had called it the work of Satan. The parables were both mercy and judgment. To the hungry heart, a parable invited them to ask more, as the disciples did. To the hard heart, it was just a story about seeds, and it hid truth they had already refused.

13:14-15 *And upon them is being fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, 'In hearing you will hear, and by no means understand; and seeing you will see, and by no means perceive. For the heart of this people has grown dull, and with the ears they heard with difficulty, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, and understand with the heart, and turn back, and I should heal them.'*

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. When God called Isaiah, He told him that Israel would hear his message and not understand. In the words Jesus quotes, "the heart of this people has grown dull." Jesus says that prophecy "is being fulfilled" again in His own day.

Notice the order in verse 15. First, the people closed their own eyes. Then the hardening came. God does not harden a soft heart that wants Him. He confirms the choice of a heart that has already shut Him out. And look at what they lost: they might have turned back, "and I should heal them." God's desire was always to heal. The tragedy is that they would not come.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 6:9-10 (quoted)

13:16-17 *But blessed **are** your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous **men** longed to see what you see, and did not see, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear.*

"But blessed are your eyes because they see." The disciples were not smarter than the crowd. They were simply willing. They had left everything to follow Jesus, and they asked Him to explain.

"Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see." Abraham, Moses, David, and Isaiah all looked forward to the Messiah. Peter later writes that the prophets searched carefully to learn when and how these things would happen (1 Peter 1:10-12). The disciples were seeing it with their own eyes. We do not see Jesus with our eyes today, but we have the whole New Testament. We have more light than the prophets of old. What are we doing with it?

13:18-19 *You, therefore, hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil **one** comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the **one** sown along the road.*

Now Jesus explains the parable of the sower, and we do not have to guess what it means. The seed is "the word of the kingdom," God's message. The soils are different kinds of hearts that hear it.

The seed along the road is the person who "hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand." His heart is hard, like a packed path. The word never gets in. Then "the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown." Satan is active when the word is preached. He does not want people to think about it. He would rather they forget it on the way to the car.

13:20-21 *And the **one** sown on the rocky places, this is the **one** hearing the word and immediately receiving it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but is temporary; and when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he is caused to stumble.*

The rocky ground is the person who hears "and immediately receiving it with joy." This person seems like the best kind at first. He is excited and quick to respond. But "he has no root in himself, but is temporary." When "tribulation or persecution comes because of the word," he quits.

Every pastor has seen this. Someone comes forward with tears and joy, and a few months later he is gone. Real faith puts down roots. It keeps going when following Jesus gets costly. Emotion is not bad, but it is not the same thing as faith.

13:22 *And the **one** sown among the thorns, this is the **one** hearing the word, and the care of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

The thorny ground is the person who hears the word, but "the care of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." The thorns are worry and money. Worry is the poor man's thorn, and the love of riches is the rich man's. Both crowd out God's word.

Notice that riches are called deceitful. They promise security and happiness and do not deliver. This is the soil most of us in the modern world need to watch. Our lives are so full of busyness and stuff that the word can get choked without our even noticing.

13:23 *And the **one** sown on the good soil, this is the **one** hearing the word and understanding, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty."*

The good soil is the person "hearing the word and understanding, who indeed bears fruit." Here is the mark of a true believer: he hears, he understands, and he bears fruit. Fruit is the life of Christ showing in a person, in character (Galatians 5:22-23), in obedience, and in leading others to Him.

Not everyone bears the same amount. Some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty. God does not ask all of us to have the same results. He asks us to be good soil. The difference between the soils was never the seed or the sower. It was the condition of the ground. So the real question of this parable is, what kind of ground is my heart?

13:24-26 *Another parable He set before them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while the men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds in the midst of the wheat, and went away. And when the blade sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds also appeared.*

The second parable is about weeds. A man sows good seed, but at night his enemy sows weeds in the same field. The weed here was most likely darnel, a plant that looks almost exactly like wheat while it is young. You could not tell them apart until the heads of grain appeared. Then "the weeds also appeared."

Jesus will explain this one in verses 36 to 43. For now, notice that the enemy works at night, while men sleep, and that his work is meant to look like the real thing.

13:27-28 *And the slaves of the master of the house, having come, said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? From where then does it have the weeds?' And he said to them, 'A man, an enemy, did this.' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us then, having gone away, to gather them up?'*

The slaves were confused. Their master had sown good seed. Where did the weeds come from? He answered, "A man, an enemy, did this." The slaves offered to go pull them up right away.

That is a very human response. We see evil mixed in with good, and we want to clean it all out now. The master's answer in the next verses shows that God has a different timetable.

13:29-30 *But he said, 'No, lest while gathering up the weeds you uproot the wheat together with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the weeds and bind them into bundles in order to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"*

"No, lest while gathering up the weeds you uproot the wheat together with them." The roots were tangled together, and pulling the weeds would damage the wheat. So the master said, "Allow both to grow together until the harvest." At harvest the reapers would sort them, burning the weeds and gathering the wheat into the barn.

This is not a teaching about church discipline. Jesus will teach that in chapter 18. Here the field is the world (13:38). God allows good and evil to live side by side in this age. He is patient, and He will sort it out in His time, not ours.

13:31-32 *Another parable He set before them, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard, which a man, having taken, sowed in his field, which indeed is smaller than all the seeds, but when it has grown, it is greater than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."*

The third parable is the mustard seed. It was the smallest seed a farmer in Israel would commonly plant, and it was used as a saying for something tiny (17:20). Yet it grew into a plant ten feet tall or more, big enough for birds to nest in its branches.

The kingdom started very small: one Teacher and a handful of fishermen in Galilee. Today the gospel has gone to every continent. Many Bible teachers see this as a picture of that amazing growth. Others notice that birds in this chapter stand for the evil one (13:4, 19) and see a warning that the outward form of Christianity would grow into something larger than God intended, with all kinds of things nesting in it. Both have something to teach. The kingdom has grown far beyond its small start, and not everything that shelters under the name of Christ belongs to Him.

Old Testament links: Daniel 4:12 (alluded to); Ezekiel 17:23 (alluded to)

13:33 *Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman, having taken, hid in approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of flour until all was leavened."*

The fourth parable is leaven. Leaven was a small lump of old, fermented dough kept back and mixed into new dough to make it rise. A woman hid it in "approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of flour" a very large batch of bread, "until all was leavened."

Many teachers read this as the gospel quietly working its way through the world, or through a person's life, until it changes everything. Others point out that leaven is almost always a picture of sin or false teaching in the Bible (16:6, 12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9) and see this as a warning that corruption would work its way into the professing church. I hold these views with an open hand. What both views agree on is that something small and hidden can work through the whole. Which is at work in us?

13:34-35 *All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and without a parable He was not speaking to them, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from **the** foundation of **the** world."*

"Without a parable He was not speaking to them." This was now His way with the crowds. Matthew sees this as fulfilling Psalm 78:2. That psalm was written by Asaph, who is called a seer, or prophet (2 Chronicles 29:30). Matthew gives his words this way: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world."

That last phrase is the key to this chapter. Jesus was revealing things that had been hidden since creation. These were not new ideas God made up after Israel rejected Jesus. They were part of His plan all along, kept secret until the right time.

Old Testament links: Psalm 78:2 (quoted)

13:36 *Then, having dismissed the crowds, Jesus went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."*

Jesus sends the crowds away and goes into the house. Then His disciples come and say, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." This is the right response to God's word. When you don't understand something, don't walk away. Bring your question to the Lord. He was glad to explain it to them, and He gives wisdom to those who ask (James 1:5).

13:37-39 *And answering, He said to them, "The **one** sowing the good seed is the Son of Man; and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the weeds are the sons of the evil **one**; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; and the harvest is **the** consummation of the age; and the reapers are angels.*

Jesus explains each part. The sower is "the Son of Man." The field is "the world," not the church. The good seed are "the sons of the kingdom," true believers. The weeds are "the sons of the evil one." The enemy is "the devil." The harvest is "the consummation of the age," the end of this present age. And the reapers are angels.

Notice that Satan does not just pull out the wheat. He plants his own people right next to it, people who look like believers but are not. That is still one of his favorite ways of working. Jesus warned about false prophets who look like sheep (7:15).

13:40-42 *Therefore, just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the consummation of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather up out of His kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness, and they will throw them into the furnace of the fire; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.*

"Just as the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so it will be at the consummation of this age." The Son of Man will send His angels to gather out of His kingdom "all the stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness." A stumbling block is anything or anyone that causes others to fall into sin.

They will be thrown "into the furnace of the fire; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. He did not speak of it to scare people for fun. He spoke of it because it is real and He did not want anyone to go there. This sorting happens when He returns at the end of the age to set up His kingdom on earth (25:31-33, 41).

Old Testament links: Zephaniah 1:3 (alluded to)

13:43 *Then the righteous will shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The **one** having ears to hear, let him hear.*

"Then the righteous will shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This echoes Daniel 12:3, where those who have insight shine like the brightness of the expanse. After the weeds are removed, the true children of God will shine with His glory. Today the wheat and the weeds can look alike. One day the difference will be plain for all to see.

"The one having ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus repeats His call from verse 9. This is not just information. It calls for a response.

Old Testament links: Daniel 12:3 (alluded to)

13:44 *Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man, having found, hid; and from his joy he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.*

Now Jesus speaks only to the disciples. The kingdom "is like treasure hidden in the field." In those days there were no banks. People often buried money and jewelry in the ground to keep it safe, especially in times of war. If the owner died, the treasure could lie there for years. A man stumbles across it, hides it again, and "from his joy he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

The usual reading is simple and true. The kingdom of God is worth more than anything else we have. When a person really sees what Jesus is worth, giving up everything to have Him is not a sad duty. It is a joy. Paul said he counted everything as loss compared to knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

13:45-46 *Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a merchant, seeking fine pearls, who, having found one very precious pearl, having gone away, has sold all that he had and bought it.*

The next parable is close to the last one. A merchant is searching for fine pearls. Pearls were among the most valuable things in the ancient world. When he finds one of great price, he sells everything he has to buy it.

In the first parable the man stumbled onto the treasure. In this one the merchant was searching. Some people find Christ when they are not looking for anything. Others search for years. Either way, the kingdom is worth everything.

Some Bible teachers read these two parables the other way around. They see Jesus as the man who gave all He had, His very life, to buy the field, which is the world (13:38), for the sake of the treasure in it, and to buy His church as His pearl of great price. That is also a true picture of what Jesus did. Many find the simpler reading fits the flow best, and both lead us to worship.

13:47-48 *Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a dragnet cast into the sea and having gathered together **fish** of every kind, which, when it was filled, having drawn **it** up on the shore and having sat down, they collected the good into vessels, but threw the bad out.*

The last parable in this group is the dragnet. This was a large net weighted on the bottom with floats on top, dragged between boats or pulled to shore. It gathered fish "of every kind." When it

was full, the fishermen sat down on the shore and sorted them. The good fish went into containers. The bad ones, either unclean under the Law (Leviticus 11:9-12) or worthless, were thrown away.

Several of the disciples were fishermen. They had done this very thing many times.

13:49-50 *So it will be at the consummation of the age: the angels will go out and separate the evil from **the** midst of the righteous, and they will throw them into the furnace of the fire; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth."*

"So it will be at the consummation of the age." The gospel net goes out into the world and gathers in all kinds of people. Not all who are gathered are true. At the end, "the angels will go out and separate the evil from the midst of the righteous."

This parable has the same lesson as the weeds, and Jesus repeats the same solemn words about "the furnace of the fire." When Jesus says something twice, we should listen. The sorting is coming. Our job now is not to sort the fish. It is to cast the net, and to make sure we ourselves belong to Him.

13:51 *Jesus says to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They say to Him, "Yes, Lord."*

"Have you understood all these things?" They said, "Yes, Lord." They did not understand everything perfectly yet, as later chapters will show. But they had grasped the main lesson, and their answer was honest. Jesus is a patient teacher. He keeps teaching those who keep listening.

13:52 *And He said to them, "Because of this, every scribe having been discipled into the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure **things** new and old."*

Jesus ends with one more picture. A scribe who has been "discipled into the kingdom of the heavens" is like the master of a house who brings out of his storeroom "things new and old." A scribe was a trained teacher of the Old Testament. When such a man becomes a disciple of Jesus, he has old treasure, the Law and the Prophets, and new treasure, the truths Jesus has revealed about the kingdom.

That is what Matthew himself did in this Gospel. He brings out the Old Testament promises and shows how Jesus fulfills them. It is what every Bible teacher should do. We do not throw away the Old Testament. We read it in the light of Christ.

13:53-54 *And it came about, when Jesus had finished these parables, He withdrew from there. And having come into His hometown, He was teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "From where **did** this **man get** this wisdom and the miracles?*

After these parables, Jesus goes to "His hometown," which is Nazareth, where He grew up (2:23). He teaches in their synagogue, and the people are "astonished." They ask, "From where did this man get this wisdom and the miracles?"

They could not deny His wisdom or His power. But instead of asking whether He might be the Messiah, they focused on where He came from.

13:55-56 *Is this not the son of the carpenter? **Is** not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joses and Simon and Jude? And His sisters, are they not all with us? From where then **did** this **man get** all these things?"*

"Is this not the son of the carpenter?" The Greek word tekton means a builder or craftsman who worked with wood or stone. Joseph had this trade, and Jesus did too (Mark 6:3). They knew His mother Mary and His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Jude, and His sisters still lived in town.

James later became a leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote the letter of James (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19). Jude wrote the letter of Jude. Both came to faith after the resurrection. To the people of Nazareth, Jesus was just the local builder. They knew His family, so they thought they knew Him.

13:57 *And they were caused to stumble in Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his house."*

"And they were caused to stumble in Him." They were offended at Him. How could a man they had watched grow up be anything special? Jesus answered with a saying: "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his house."

Familiarity can be dangerous. People who grew up around church, who have heard about Jesus their whole lives, can be the hardest to reach. They think they already know Him. Don't let familiarity with Jesus keep you from really knowing Him.

13:58 *And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.*

"And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." It was not that Jesus lost His power in Nazareth. Mark says He laid hands on a few sick people and healed them (Mark 6:5). But Jesus did not do His works to entertain people who refused to believe. Unbelief shuts the door to blessing. What might God want to do in our lives that we are missing because we will not trust Him?

Chapter 13 Summary

Jesus teaches the crowds from a boat in parables. He tells the parable of the sower and explains to His disciples that He speaks in parables because the mysteries of the kingdom have been given to them, while the crowds, as Isaiah foretold, see without seeing and hear without hearing. The four soils show four ways people respond to the word of the kingdom. The parables of the weeds and the dragnet show that good and evil will exist side by side in this age until the angels separate them at the end of the age. The mustard seed and the leaven show something small and hidden growing to fill the whole. The hidden treasure and the pearl of great price show that the kingdom is worth everything. A scribe discipled into the kingdom brings out treasures new and old. Finally, the people of Nazareth take offense at Jesus because they know His family, and He does not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What is a parable, and why did Jesus begin to teach the crowds this way? (13:10-13)

2. What does "mystery" mean in the Bible, and what were the mysteries of the kingdom? (13:11, 35)

3. What do the seed and the four kinds of soil stand for? (13:18-23)

4. What are the two thorns that choke the word, and why are riches called deceitful? (13:22)

5. In the parable of the weeds, what is the field, and why does the master let the weeds grow until harvest? (13:29-30, 38)

6. What will happen at the consummation of the age? (13:40-43, 49-50)

7. What do the hidden treasure and the pearl teach about the worth of the kingdom? (13:44-46)

8. Why did the people of Nazareth take offense at Jesus? (13:54-57)

9. Which soil best describes your heart right now, and what thorns might be choking God's word in your life? (13:22-23)

10. Is there a place in your life where familiarity with Jesus has made you take Him for granted? (13:57-58)

Chapter 14: Five Thousand Fed and a Walk on the Water

Scripture

14:1-12 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and because of this the miraculous powers are at work in him." For Herod, having seized John, bound him and put ***him*** in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother. For John was saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." And wishing to kill him, he feared the crowd, because they were holding him as a prophet. But when the birthday of Herod was being celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst and pleased Herod, whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. And she, having been urged on by her mother, says, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." And the king was grieved, but on account of the oaths and those reclining at table with ***him***, he commanded ***it*** to be given. And having sent, he beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and was given to the girl, and she brought ***it*** to her mother. And his disciples, having come, took up the body and buried it; and having come, they reported ***it*** to Jesus.

14:13-21 And Jesus, having heard, withdrew from there by boat to a desolate place by Himself. And the crowds, having heard, followed Him on foot from the cities. And Jesus, having gone out, saw a great crowd, and was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick. And evening having come, His disciples came to Him, saying, "The place is desolate, and the hour has already passed; dismiss the crowds, so that, having gone into the villages, they may buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They have no need to go away; you give them ***something*** to eat." And they say to Him, "We do not have ***anything*** here except five loaves and two fish." And He said, "Bring them here to Me." And having commanded the crowds to recline on the grass, and having taken the five loaves and the two fish, having looked up to heaven, He blessed; and having broken ***them***, He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples ***gave them*** to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up what was left over of the fragments, twelve baskets full. And those eating were about five thousand men, apart from women and children.

14:22-36 And immediately Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat and to go before Him to the other side, until He had dismissed the crowds. And having dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. And evening having come, He was there alone. But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, being tormented by the waves, for the wind was contrary. And in ***the*** fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And the disciples, having seen Him walking on the sea, were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out from fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage; I am ***He***; do not be afraid." And Peter, answering Him, said, "Lord, if ***it*** is You, command me to come to You on the waters." And He said, "Come." And Peter, having gone down from the boat, walked on the waters to come to Jesus. But seeing the strong wind, he was afraid; and having begun to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus, having stretched out the hand, took hold of him, and says to him, "***You*** of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they had stepped into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat, having come, worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are ***the*** Son of God." And having crossed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And the men of that

place, having recognized Him, sent into all that surrounding region and brought to Him all who were sick, and they were begging Him that they might only touch the fringe of His garment; and as many as touched were made completely well.

Chapter 14 Preview

Chapter 14 begins with a dark flashback. Herod, the ruler of Galilee, hears about Jesus and is afraid that John the Baptist has come back from the dead. Matthew then tells how Herod had John arrested for speaking against his marriage, and how, at a birthday party, Herod had John beheaded to keep a foolish oath. John's disciples bury him and go and tell Jesus.

Jesus withdraws to a desolate place, but the crowds follow Him. Moved with compassion, He heals their sick and then feeds five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves and two fish. That night He walks on the sea to His disciples in a storm. Peter steps out of the boat to come to Him, begins to sink, and is lifted up by the hand of Jesus. The disciples worship Him as the Son of God, and the chapter ends with many healed at Gennesaret just by touching the fringe of His garment.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-2 *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and because of this the miraculous powers are at work in him."*

"Herod the tetrarch" was Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, the king who tried to kill the baby Jesus (2:16). A tetrarch was a ruler over part of a kingdom. When Herod the Great died, Rome divided his land among his sons, and Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea, the land east of the Jordan. He was not really a king, but people called him one (14:9).

When Herod heard about Jesus, his guilty conscience went to work. "This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead." Herod had killed John, and now he was haunted by him. A guilty conscience is a hard thing to silence. Herod had power, palaces, and soldiers, but he did not have peace.

14:3-4 *For Herod, having seized John, bound him and put **him** in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother. For John was saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."*

Matthew now goes back and tells what happened earlier. Herod had arrested John and put him in prison "on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother." Herodias was married to Herod's half-brother. Herod fell for her, and both of them left their marriages so they could marry each other. To make it worse, Herodias was also their niece.

John did not soften his message for a ruler. He told Herod to his face, "It is not lawful for you to have her." The Law forbade a man to marry his brother's wife while the brother was alive (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). John spoke the truth, and it cost him his freedom. God's people today are still called to speak the truth about marriage and sin, even to powerful people, and to do it with love.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 18:16 (alluded to)

14:5 *And wishing to kill him, he feared the crowd, because they were holding him as a prophet.*

Herod wanted John dead, but "he feared the crowd, because they were holding him as a prophet." Herod was not moved by right and wrong. He was moved by fear of what people would think. Mark adds that Herod also feared John, knew he was a righteous man, and liked to listen to him even though it troubled him (Mark 6:20). He was a man pulled in two directions. A divided heart like that will eventually give way to the stronger pull.

The Jewish historian Josephus also writes about John's arrest and death, and says he was held at Machaerus, a fortress east of the Dead Sea.

14:6-7 *But when the birthday of Herod was being celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst and pleased Herod, whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.*

At Herod's birthday party, the daughter of Herodias danced before Herod and his guests. Josephus tells us her name was Salome. A dance like this at a party full of drunken officials was not a decent thing for a princess to do, and it "pleased Herod."

Herod then made a rash promise "with an oath to give her whatever she might ask." Mark says he offered up to half his kingdom (Mark 6:23). He was showing off in front of his guests. Proud men often say foolish things, and a foolish promise made in a moment of pleasure can lead to a lifetime of regret.

14:8 *And she, having been urged on by her mother, says, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist."*

The girl went to her mother. Herodias had been waiting for this. She had hated John for a long time (Mark 6:19). "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." She wanted it now, while Herod was trapped, and she wanted proof.

Herodias shows us where bitterness can lead. She could not stand to be told she was wrong, so she wanted the voice of conscience silenced forever.

14:9 *And the king was grieved, but on account of the oaths and those reclining at table with* ***him****, he commanded* ***it*** *to be given.*

"And the king was grieved." Herod did not want to do it. But "on account of the oaths and those reclining at table with him, he commanded it to be given." He cared more about saving face in front of his guests than about doing right.

Herod could have said no. A wicked oath is better broken than kept. Instead, he let pride and fear of man push him into murder. How often do we do wrong because we are afraid of looking foolish in front of others?

14:10-11 *And having sent, he beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and was given to the girl, and she brought **it** to her mother.*

Herod "beheaded John in the prison." There was no trial. John, the greatest of the prophets (11:11), died in a dungeon because of a dance and a grudge. The head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

This is one of the ugliest scenes in the Gospels. It reminds us that faithfulness to God does not always bring earthly reward. Sometimes it costs everything. But John's story did not end in that prison. Jesus said there was no one greater born of women, and John is with the Lord today. Herod's story is the one that ended badly. Some years later Rome removed him from power and sent him into exile.

14:12 *And his disciples, having come, took up the body and buried it; and having come, they reported **it** to Jesus.*

John's disciples came, "took up the body and buried it," and then went and "reported it to Jesus." That is exactly the right place to take our grief. They could not undo what had happened. But they knew where to go. When your heart is broken, go to Jesus and tell Him. He cares.

14:13 *And Jesus, having heard, withdrew from there by boat to a desolate place by Himself. And the crowds, having heard, followed Him on foot from the cities.*

"And Jesus, having heard, withdrew from there by boat to a desolate place by Himself." John was Jesus' relative and the forerunner who had prepared His way. Jesus grieved. He also knew that Herod was now curious about Him, and His hour had not yet come.

Jesus needed time alone. But the crowds heard where He was going and followed Him on foot around the lake. Many of us know what that feels like: you need a rest, and people still need you.

14:14 *And Jesus, having gone out, saw a great crowd, and was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick.*

Look at how Jesus responds. He did not get angry or send them away. He "saw a great crowd, and was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick." The Greek word for compassion comes from the word for the inner parts of the body. It was a deep, gut-level feeling of pity and love.

In the middle of His own grief, Jesus cared for others. That is the heart of our Savior. He never sees a crowd as a crowd. He sees hurting people, and He meets their need.

14:15 *And evening having come, His disciples came to Him, saying, "The place is desolate, and the hour has already passed; dismiss the crowds, so that, having gone into the villages, they may buy food for themselves."*

When evening came, the disciples came to Jesus with what seemed like a sensible plan. The place was "desolate," the day was over, and there was no food. "Dismiss the crowds, so that, having gone into the villages, they may buy food for themselves."

They were not being cruel. They were being practical. But they were looking at the problem with human eyes. They saw the size of the crowd and the size of their supplies and left Jesus out of the math.

14:16-17 *But Jesus said to them, "They have no need to go away; you give them **something** to eat." And they say to Him, "We do not have **anything** here except five loaves and two fish."*

Jesus said, "They have no need to go away; you give them something to eat." Imagine how that sounded to the disciples. They answered, "We do not have anything here except five loaves and two fish." John tells us these came from a boy's lunch, and the loaves were barley, the bread of the poor (John 6:9).

Jesus often asks us to do what we cannot do, so that we will learn to depend on what He can do. The disciples were right that they did not have enough. They were wrong to think that settled it.

14:18 *And He said, "Bring them here to Me."*

"Bring them here to Me." This is one of the simplest and most important sentences in the chapter. Whatever we have, however small, needs to be put in the hands of Jesus. Five loaves and two fish in the disciples' hands were a snack. In the hands of Jesus they were a feast. What have you been holding back from Him because it seems too small to matter?

14:19 *And having commanded the crowds to recline on the grass, and having taken the five loaves and the two fish, having looked up to heaven, He blessed; and having broken **them**, He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples **gave them** to the crowds.*

Jesus had the crowds "recline on the grass." He took the loaves and fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed. A Jewish blessing at a meal thanked God for the food. Then He broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, and "the disciples gave them to the crowds."

Notice how the miracle worked. Jesus did not hand out the food Himself to thousands of people. He gave it to His disciples, and they gave it to others. That is still how Jesus feeds the world with the Bread of Life. He gives to us, and we pass it on.

14:20 *And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up what was left over of the fragments, twelve baskets full.*

"And they all ate and were satisfied." Not a crumb each. They ate their fill. Then "they took up what was left over of the fragments, twelve baskets full." There were twelve disciples and twelve baskets. Each man who had doubted held a basket of leftovers in his hands.

God does not just meet our needs. He often gives more than enough. And Jesus wasted nothing. The leftovers were gathered up. Our God is generous, but He is not careless with His gifts.

14:21 *And those eating were about five thousand men, apart from women and children.*

"Those eating were about five thousand men, apart from women and children." In that culture, men were often counted separately. With women and children, the crowd may have been fifteen or twenty thousand people.

This is the only miracle of Jesus, other than the resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels (Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). It reminded the people of how God fed Israel with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16). Jesus is the One who provides for His people, the true Bread from heaven (John 6:35).

14:22 *And immediately Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat and to go before Him to the other side, until He had dismissed the crowds.*

"And immediately Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat." The word compelled is strong. Jesus made them leave right away. Why? John tells us the crowd wanted to take Him by force and make Him king (John 6:15). The disciples might have been swept up in that excitement. Jesus sent them away from the danger while He dismissed the crowds.

Sometimes Jesus sends us out into the storm to keep us from something worse. We may not understand His reasons at the time.

14:23 *And having dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. And evening having come, He was there alone.*

"He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray." Jesus had just fed thousands and turned down a crown. Now He spent time alone with His Father. If the Son of God needed to pray, how much more do we?

"Evening having come, He was there alone." It had been a long day: news of John's death, a crowd that would not leave, a great miracle, and a political danger. Jesus answered all of it with prayer.

14:24 *But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, being tormented by the waves, for the wind was contrary.*

Meanwhile, the boat was "in the midst of the sea, being tormented by the waves, for the wind was contrary." The Sea of Galilee lies low, surrounded by hills, and sudden strong winds can come down on it. The disciples were rowing hard and getting nowhere.

Here is something to hold on to. The disciples were in the storm because they obeyed Jesus. Storms do not always mean we are out of God's will. Sometimes they come right in the middle of it.

14:25 *And in **the** fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.*

"In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea." The Romans divided the night into four watches. The fourth watch was from about three to six in the morning. The disciples had been fighting the wind most of the night.

Jesus came to them on the very waves that were frightening them. The thing they feared was under His feet. In the Old Testament, God is the One who treads on the high places of the sea (Job 9:8). Jesus was showing them who He is.

Old Testament links: Job 9:8 (alluded to)

14:26 *And the disciples, having seen Him walking on the sea, were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out from fear.*

When the disciples saw Him, they "were troubled." They cried, "It is a ghost!" It was dark, they were exhausted, and they were not expecting Jesus. So they cried out in fear.

Have you ever done that? Jesus comes to us in the middle of a hard time, and we do not recognize Him. We think the trouble is the end of the story, when He is actually coming to us through it.

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

"But immediately Jesus spoke to them." He said, "Take courage; I am He; do not be afraid." Jesus did not leave them in their fear. He spoke right away. The words I am in Greek are ego eimi. They can mean simply it is I, but they also echo the name God gave Himself when He spoke to Moses from the burning bush, I AM (Exodus 3:14). On the sea in the dark, Jesus tells them who He is, and that is the reason not to be afraid.

14:28 *And Peter, answering Him, said, "Lord, if **it** is You, command me to come to You on the waters."*

Peter answers, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the waters." That is Peter: bold, quick, and wanting to be near Jesus. His "if" was not unbelief. It was a request for a word from Jesus. Peter knew he could not walk on water by himself. He would only step out if Jesus told him to.

14:29 *And He said, "Come." And Peter, having gone down from the boat, walked on the waters to come to Jesus.*

Jesus answered with a single word, telling him to come. One word from Jesus was enough. Peter climbed over the side of the boat and "walked on the waters to come to Jesus." For a few steps, a fisherman did what only God can do.

The other disciples stayed in the boat. I am not criticizing them, but I admire Peter. He trusted the word of Jesus enough to step out. Real faith is not a feeling. It is stepping out on what Jesus has said.

14:30 *But seeing the strong wind, he was afraid; and having begun to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"*

"But seeing the strong wind, he was afraid." Nothing had changed except where Peter was looking. The wind had been blowing the whole time. As long as his eyes were on Jesus, he walked. When he looked at the storm, he sank.

Then Peter prayed one of the shortest prayers in the Bible: "Lord, save me!" It was not a long or fancy prayer, but it was the right one. When you are going under, you don't need fine words. You need to call on the Lord.

14:31 *And immediately Jesus, having stretched out the hand, took hold of him, and says to him, "**You** of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

"Immediately Jesus, having stretched out the hand, took hold of him." Jesus did not let Peter sink while He gave a lecture. He grabbed him first. Then He said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter had little faith, but he had some, and he was the only one out on the water. Jesus' question is gentle. There was no reason to doubt. The One who said "Come" was right there. When we doubt, the problem is never Jesus. It is that we have taken our eyes off Him.

14:32-33 *And when they had stepped into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat, having come, worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are **the** Son of God."*

When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, "the wind ceased." Then "those in the boat, having come, worshiped Him." They said, "Truly You are the Son of God."

This is the first time in Matthew that the disciples as a group call Jesus the Son of God. They worshiped Him, and He accepted it. A good man or a prophet would never accept worship (Acts 10:25-26). Jesus did, because He is God. This is the right end to every storm: not just relief, but worship.

14:34 *And having crossed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.*

They crossed over and came to "the land of Gennesaret." This was a fertile plain on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, south of Capernaum. The lake itself was sometimes called the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

14:35-36 *And the men of that place, having recognized Him, sent into all that surrounding region and brought to Him all who were sick, and they were begging Him that they might only touch the fringe of His garment; and as many as touched were made completely well.*

"The men of that place, having recognized Him," spread the word through the whole region. They brought all their sick to Him. They begged Him "that they might only touch the fringe of His garment." The fringe was the tassel a Jewish man wore on the corners of his robe as God commanded (Numbers 15:38-40). They had probably heard of the woman who was healed this way (9:20-22).

"As many as touched were made completely well." There was no magic in the cloth. The power was in Jesus. These people came with simple faith, and He healed them all. That same Jesus is still able to make people whole, body and soul. The question is whether we will come to Him.

Chapter 14 Summary

Herod the tetrarch hears about Jesus and fears that John the Baptist has risen from the dead. Matthew tells how Herod had imprisoned John for condemning his marriage to Herodias, and then beheaded him at a birthday party because of a rash oath and his fear of his guests. Jesus withdraws to a desolate place, but the crowds follow. Moved with compassion, He heals their sick and feeds five thousand men, plus women and children, with five loaves and two fish, with twelve baskets left over. He sends the disciples ahead by boat and prays alone. In the fourth watch of the night He comes to them walking on the sea. Peter walks on the water toward Him, begins to sink when he sees the wind, and is saved by Jesus' hand. The disciples worship Him as the Son of God, and at Gennesaret all who touch the fringe of His garment are made well.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Why did Herod think Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead? (14:1-2)

2. What did John say to Herod, and what did it cost him? (14:3-5)

3. What pushed Herod to keep his wicked oath, even though he was grieved? (14:9)

4. What did John's disciples do after they buried him? (14:12)

5. What did Jesus feel when He saw the crowd, even though He had gone away to be alone? (14:13-14)

6. How did the disciples want to solve the problem of feeding the crowd, and what did Jesus tell them instead? (14:15-18)

7. Why did Jesus send the disciples away quickly and go up on the mountain? (14:22-23)

8. What caused Peter to begin sinking, and what did he do then? (14:30-31)

9. What small thing do you have that you need to bring to Jesus and let Him use? (14:18)

10. What storm are you facing right now, and what would it look like to keep your eyes on Jesus in it? (14:30)

Chapter 15: Clean Hearts and a Gentile Mother's Faith

Scripture

15:1-20 Then those from Jerusalem, scribes and Pharisees, come to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." And answering, He said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'The ***one*** speaking evil of father or mother, let him die by death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever you might have been profited by me ***is*** a gift," and he shall by no means honor his father or his mother.' And you made void the commandment of God on account of your tradition. Hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, saying, 'This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching ***as*** doctrines ***the*** precepts of men.'" And having called the crowd to ***Him***, He said to them, "Hear and understand. Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Then His disciples, having come, said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees, having heard the word, were caused to stumble?" And answering, He said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be rooted up. Leave them; they are blind guides of ***the*** blind. And if a blind ***man*** leads a blind ***man***, both will fall into a pit." And Peter, answering, said to Him, "Explain to us this parable." And Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that everything entering into the mouth goes into the stomach and is cast out into the latrine? But the things proceeding out of the mouth come out of the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things defiling the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

15:21-28 And having gone out from there, Jesus withdrew into the districts of Tyre and Sidon. And look, a Canaanite woman from those regions, having come out, cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is badly demonized." But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples, having come, were asking Him, saying, "Dismiss her, because she is crying out after us." And answering, He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of ***the*** house of Israel." But she, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" And answering, He said, "It is not good to take the bread of the children and to throw ***it*** to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord; for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs falling from the table of their masters." 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.

15:29-39 And having departed from there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. And great crowds came to Him, having with them ***the*** lame, blind, mute, crippled, and many others; and they cast them down at the feet of Jesus, and He healed them, so that the crowds marveled, seeing ***the*** mute speaking, ***the*** crippled whole, ***the*** lame walking, and ***the*** blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. And Jesus, having called His disciples to ***Him***, said, "I am moved with compassion toward the crowd, because they have already remained with Me three days and do not have anything that they may eat; and I am not

willing to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And His disciples say to Him, "From where ***are*** so many loaves to us in a desolate place, so as to satisfy so great a crowd?" And Jesus says to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And He commanded the crowds to sit down on the ground. And having taken the seven loaves and the fish, having given thanks, He broke ***them*** and gave ***them*** to His disciples, and the disciples ***gave them*** to the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied, and they took up what was left over of the fragments, seven large baskets full. And those eating were four thousand men, apart from women and children. And having dismissed the crowds, He stepped into the boat and came into the region of Magdala.

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapter 15 opens with a delegation of Pharisees and scribes who have come all the way from Jerusalem. They complain that Jesus' disciples do not wash their hands before eating, as the tradition of the elders required. Jesus turns the charge back on them. They have broken God's own commandment to honor father and mother in order to keep their tradition. Then He teaches the crowd that what defiles a person is not what goes into the mouth, but what comes out of the heart.

Next Jesus goes north into Gentile land, near Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman begs Him to heal her daughter. Jesus tests her faith, and she answers with humble, persistent trust that He praises as great. Back by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus heals great crowds of the lame, blind, crippled, and mute, and then feeds four thousand men, plus women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fish.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-2 *Then those from Jerusalem, scribes and Pharisees, come to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."*

"Those from Jerusalem, scribes and Pharisees" had come to check on Jesus. Jerusalem was the center of Jewish religious life, so this was an official delegation. The scribes were experts in the Law, and the Pharisees were the strict party that kept both the Law and the rules of their teachers.

Their question was, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" The tradition of the elders was a large body of rules passed down by word of mouth from earlier rabbis. They believed these rules built a fence around the Law, to keep people from breaking it. Later they were written down in the Mishnah. One rule required a special ceremonial washing of the hands before eating. This had nothing to do with germs. It was about religious purity. The Law of Moses required such washings for priests in certain duties, but it never required them of every person at every meal.

15:3 *And answering, He said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition?*

Jesus answers their question with a question. "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition?" They accused the disciples of breaking man's tradition. Jesus accused them of breaking God's commandment.

This is a danger in every generation, not just the first century. Churches and believers can build up their own rules and customs until they matter more than God's word. Traditions are not bad in themselves. Many are helpful. But when a tradition starts to set aside what God plainly says, it has to go.

15:4 *For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'The **one** speaking evil of father or mother, let him die by death.'*

Jesus quotes two commandments. "Honor your father and mother" is the fifth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12). The second quote is from Exodus 21:17, which shows how seriously God took it: the one speaking evil of father or mother was to be put to death.

To honor parents in the Bible includes respect, and it also includes caring for them when they are old and in need. Paul says a believer who will not provide for his own family has denied the faith (1 Timothy 5:4, 8).

Old Testament links: Exodus 20:12 (quoted); Exodus 21:17 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:16 (quoted); Leviticus 20:9 (quoted)

15:5-6 *But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever you might have been profited by me **is** a gift," and he shall by no means honor his father or his mother.' And you made void the commandment of God on account of your tradition.*

Here is how their tradition broke that command. A man could say to his parents, "Whatever you might have been profited by me is a gift." Mark tells us the word for this was Corban, meaning something dedicated to God (Mark 7:11). Once a man declared his money or property Corban, the teachers said he could not use it to help his parents. Often he could still use it for himself.

So a man could leave his old mother and father in need and feel religious about it. Jesus says, "you made void the commandment of God on account of your tradition." To make void means to cancel. They had found a holy-sounding way to dodge a clear duty. We can still do this. Some people are so busy at church that they neglect their own families. God never asks us to serve Him by breaking His word.

15:7-9 *Hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, saying, 'This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching **as** doctrines **the** precepts of men.'"*

"Hypocrites!" A hypocrite was an actor on a stage, someone wearing a mask. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 and says Isaiah was speaking about them. "This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me."

That is the problem in one sentence. Their words were right and their rituals were careful, but their hearts were far from God. "In vain they worship Me." Worship that comes only from the lips is empty. And when we teach "as doctrines the precepts of men," putting man's rules on the same level as God's word, we are on dangerous ground. God wants our hearts first.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 29:13 (quoted)

15:10-11 *And having called the crowd to **Him**, He said to them, "Hear and understand. Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."*

Jesus calls the crowd and says, "Hear and understand." This was something every person needed to grasp. "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

To defile means to make unclean, unfit to come before God. The Pharisees thought eating with unwashed hands made a person unclean inside. Jesus says real uncleanness does not come from the outside in. It comes from the inside out. This was a radical statement. It cut to the root of their whole system of outward purity.

15:12 *Then His disciples, having come, said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees, having heard the word, were caused to stumble?"*

The disciples were nervous. "Do You know that the Pharisees, having heard the word, were caused to stumble?" In other words, they were telling Jesus He had offended them. These were powerful men from Jerusalem. The disciples may have worried what it would cost them.

Jesus was never rude for the sake of being rude. But He was not willing to soften the truth to keep important people happy. Sometimes the truth offends. That does not make it less true.

15:13-14 *And answering, He said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be rooted up. Leave them; they are blind guides of **the** blind. And if a blind **man** leads a blind **man**, both will fall into a pit."*

Jesus gives two pictures. First, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant will be rooted up." The Pharisees' teaching was not planted by God. It was man-made, and in time it would be pulled up.

Second, "Leave them; they are blind guides of the blind." Do not follow them, and do not worry about offending them. "And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." A false teacher is dangerous, and so is following one. We need to test what we hear by the word of God, the way the believers in Berea did (Acts 17:11).

15:15-16 *And Peter, answering, said to Him, "Explain to us this parable." And Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding?*

Peter, as usual, speaks for the group. "Explain to us this parable." Jesus answers, "Are you also still without understanding?" You can hear His patience being tested a little. These men had been with Him a long time.

Still, I am glad Peter asked. It is better to ask and look slow than to stay quiet and stay confused. Jesus did explain it, and we have the answer because Peter asked.

15:17-18 *Do you not yet understand that everything entering into the mouth goes into the stomach and is cast out into the latrine? But the things proceeding out of the mouth come out of the heart, and those defile the man.*

Jesus makes it very plain. Food goes into the stomach and passes out of the body. It does not touch the heart. "But the things proceeding out of the mouth come out of the heart, and those defile the man."

In the Bible the heart is the center of the whole person: the mind, the will, and the feelings. What we say and do flows out of who we are inside. Mark adds that by saying this Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). The food laws of Moses had pointed to the need for purity. Now the One who gave the Law shows where true purity has to start.

15:19-20 *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things defiling the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."*

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies." Notice that this list starts with thoughts. Every sin begins in the mind before it shows up in the hands or the mouth. Notice too that these follow the second half of the Ten Commandments: murder, adultery, stealing, and false witness.

The trouble with the human race is not dirty hands. It is a sinful heart. Jeremiah said the heart is deceitful more than everything, and it is incurable (Jeremiah 17:9). No amount of washing can fix it. We need a new heart, and that is what God promised to give (Ezekiel 36:26). It comes when we trust Jesus, and the Holy Spirit makes us new (Titus 3:5). "To eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man," but sin does. Only Jesus can cleanse it.

15:21 *And having gone out from there, Jesus withdrew into the districts of Tyre and Sidon.*

Jesus then "withdrew into the districts of Tyre and Sidon." These were Gentile cities on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel, in what is now Lebanon. Mark tells us Jesus went into a house and did not want anyone to know He was there (Mark 7:24). He may have been looking for rest away from the crowds and the leaders. But even in Gentile land He could not stay hidden.

15:22 *And look, a Canaanite woman from those regions, having come out, cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is badly demonized."*

"A Canaanite woman from those regions" came out crying to Him. The Canaanites were the old people of the land, enemies of Israel from the days of Joshua. Matthew uses that old name on purpose. This woman was as far outside of Israel as anyone could be.

Yet listen to what she calls Him: "Lord, Son of David!" She knew who He was, better than the scribes from Jerusalem. "My daughter is badly demonized." She was a mother in agony, and she

cried for mercy. She did not only ask mercy for her daughter. She said, "Have mercy on me, Lord." Her daughter's pain was her own.

15:23 *But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples, having come, were asking Him, saying, "Dismiss her, because she is crying out after us."*

"But He did not answer her a word." This is one of the hardest verses in the Gospels to read. Why was Jesus silent? He was not being cruel. As we will see, He was drawing out her faith.

The disciples were less patient. "Dismiss her, because she is crying out after us." They may have meant that Jesus should give her what she wanted so she would leave, or simply that He should send her away. Either way, they saw her as a bother. Sometimes God is silent when we pray. Silence is not the same as a no. Keep praying.

15:24 *And answering, He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of **the** house of Israel."*

Jesus answered, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This was true. In His earthly ministry Jesus came first to Israel, to fulfill God's promises to Abraham and David (10:5-6; Romans 15:8). The gospel would go to the Gentiles in full after the cross and resurrection (28:19).

God's plan has an order. It went to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). But that order never meant the Gentiles were shut out. It meant they would come in through Israel's Messiah.

15:25 *But she, having come, was worshiping Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"*

She did not give up. "But she, having come, was worshiping Him." She came closer and knelt at His feet. Her prayer was even shorter now: "Lord, help me!" There was no argument, no claim of rights, just need.

This is how we should come to God. We do not come because we deserve anything. We come because we are needy, and He is Lord.

15:26 *And answering, He said, "It is not good to take the bread of the children and to throw **it** to the little dogs."*

Jesus said, "It is not good to take the bread of the children and to throw it to the little dogs." The children are Israel. The bread is the blessing Jesus came to bring them first. The Jewish people sometimes called Gentiles "dogs" as an insult, meaning the wild street dogs that roamed in packs.

But the word Jesus used is not that word. It is kunaria, "little dogs," the small dogs that lived in a house as pets. That softens it a great deal. Jesus was not mocking her. He was speaking in a way that left a door open, and He was testing whether she would walk through it.

15:27 *And she said, "Yes, Lord; for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs falling from the table of their masters."*

And she did. "Yes, Lord; for even the little dogs eat from the crumbs falling from the table of their masters." What an answer! She did not argue with Him. She agreed with Him. Yes, Lord, I am not one of the children. I am not asking for the children's bread. I am only asking for a crumb. And a crumb from Your table is enough.

She had humility. She had persistence. And she had a big view of Jesus. She believed that even a crumb of His power was enough to heal her daughter from a distance.

15:28 *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.*

"O woman, great is your faith!" Only two people in the Gospels are praised by Jesus for great faith, and both are Gentiles: this woman and the Roman centurion (8:10). The scribes from Jerusalem had the Scriptures and the temple, and they found fault. This pagan woman had nothing, and she found mercy.

"Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour. Jesus never meant to turn her away. He meant to show everyone, including her, how great her faith was. When God makes us wait, He is often building something in us we could not get any other way.

15:29 *And having departed from there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there.*

From Tyre and Sidon, Jesus went back to the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us He went through the region of the Decapolis, a group of ten mostly Gentile cities on the east side of the lake (Mark 7:31). He went up on a mountain and sat down. Once again, the crowds came.

15:30 *And great crowds came to Him, having with them **the** lame, blind, mute, crippled, and many others; and they cast them down at the feet of Jesus, and He healed them,*

"Great crowds came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, crippled, and many others;" People carried their sick and "cast them down at the feet of Jesus." The word suggests they laid them down quickly, one after another, because there were so many.

"And He healed them." Jesus did not hold a sign-up sheet or turn anyone away. Every need that was laid at His feet was met. That is a good picture of prayer. We lay our burdens and our loved ones at the feet of Jesus.

15:31 *so that the crowds marveled, seeing **the** mute speaking, **the** crippled whole, **the** lame walking, and **the** blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*

"The crowds marveled, seeing the mute speaking, the crippled whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing." This is just what Isaiah said would happen when God came to save His people (Isaiah 35:5-6).

"And they glorified the God of Israel." This phrase suggests that many in the crowd were Gentiles. They praised the God of Israel because they could see that Israel's God was at work. The miracles of Jesus always pointed past Himself to His Father, and they drew even outsiders to worship.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 35:6 (alluded to)

15:32 *And Jesus, having called His disciples to **Him**, said, "I am moved with compassion toward the crowd, because they have already remained with Me three days and do not have anything that they may eat; and I am not willing to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."*

Jesus called His disciples and said, "I am moved with compassion toward the crowd." This time it was not the first evening. The people "have already remained with Me three days" and had run out of food. Jesus did not want to send them away hungry, "lest they faint on the way." Some had come a long distance.

Jesus cared about their bodies, not only their souls. He knew they were hungry and tired. Our Lord is not too busy with big spiritual matters to care about our daily needs. He taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (6:11).

15:33 *And His disciples say to Him, "From where **are** so many loaves to us in a desolate place, so as to satisfy so great a crowd?"*

The disciples said, "From where are so many loaves to us in a desolate place, so as to satisfy so great a crowd?" It is hard to believe they asked this. Not long before, they had watched Jesus feed five thousand men with five loaves.

But before we are too hard on them, let's be honest. How often has God brought us through one trial, and then we panic when the next one comes? We forget so quickly. That is why it is good to remember and write down what God has done for us.

15:34-36 *And Jesus says to them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And He commanded the crowds to sit down on the ground. And having taken the seven loaves and the fish, having given thanks, He broke **them** and gave **them** to His disciples, and the disciples **gave them** to the crowd.*

Jesus asked the same kind of question He asked before. "How many loaves do you have?" They had "seven, and a few small fish." He told the crowd to sit on the ground, took the loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to give to the crowd.

The pattern is the same as in chapter 14. Jesus takes what we have, gives thanks for it, breaks it, and gives it back through our hands to others. He could have done it some other way. He chose to use His disciples. He still does.

15:37 *And they all ate and were satisfied, and they took up what was left over of the fragments, seven large baskets full.*

"They all ate and were satisfied." Again there were leftovers, this time "seven large baskets full." The word for these baskets is different from the one in chapter 14. These were large baskets, the kind a person could fit inside. Paul was let down over the wall of Damascus in one (Acts 9:25).

15:38-39 *And those eating were four thousand men, apart from women and children. And having dismissed the crowds, He stepped into the boat and came into the region of Magdala.*

"Those eating were four thousand men, apart from women and children." Some people say this is just the same story as the five thousand told twice. But Matthew gives different numbers of people, loaves, and baskets, and Jesus Himself later speaks of both feedings as two different events (16:9-10).

Then Jesus sent the crowds away, got into the boat, and "came into the region of Magdala." This was on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was likely the hometown of Mary Magdalene. The first feeding was mostly for Jewish crowds. This one seems to have been in a region with many Gentiles. Jesus is the Bread of Life for Jew and Gentile alike.

Chapter 15 Summary

Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the tradition of the elders by eating with unwashed hands. Jesus shows that they themselves break God's commandment to honor father and mother by their tradition of declaring property a gift to God, and He applies Isaiah's words about lips that honor God while the heart is far away. He teaches that what defiles a person is not food but the evil that comes out of the heart. In the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman begs Him to free her daughter from a demon. Jesus tests her, and she answers with such humble and persistent faith that He praises her great faith and heals her daughter. By the Sea of Galilee He heals great crowds, who glorify the God of Israel, and He feeds four thousand men, plus women and children, with seven loaves and a few small fish.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What was the tradition of the elders, and what did the Pharisees accuse the disciples of? (15:1-2)

2. How did the Pharisees' tradition break the command to honor father and mother? (15:3-6)

3. What did Isaiah say about people who honor God with their lips? (15:8-9)

4. According to Jesus, what defiles a person, and where does it come from? (15:11, 18-19)

5. Why do you think Jesus was silent at first when the Canaanite woman cried out to Him? (15:22-23)

6. How did the woman answer Jesus' words about the children's bread, and what did Jesus say about her faith? (15:26-28)

7. Why did the disciples' question in 15:33 show they had forgotten something?

8. Is there a tradition or habit in your life that has become more important to you than what God says? (15:3)

9. What does your speech this week say about the condition of your heart? (15:18)

10. What prayer have you stopped praying because God seemed silent, and what can you learn from this mother's persistence? (15:22-28)

Chapter 16: Peter's Confession

Scripture

16:1-12 And the Pharisees and Sadducees, having come, testing ***Him***, asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. And answering, He said to them, "When evening has come, you say, '***It will be*** fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, '***There will be*** a storm today, for the sky is red, being overcast.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but the signs of the times you are not able ***to discern***. An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet." And having left them, He went away. And His disciples, having come to the other side, forgot to take loaves. And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And they were reasoning among themselves, saying, "***It is*** because we did not take loaves." But Jesus, having known ***it***, said to them, "Why do you reason among yourselves, ***you*** of little faith, because you did not take loaves? Do you not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? How do you not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?" Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of the bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

16:13-20 And Jesus, having come into the districts of Caesarea of Philip, was asking His disciples, saying, "Who do men say Me, the Son of Man, to be?" And they said, "Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 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." And answering, Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal ***it*** to you, but My Father who ***is*** in the heavens. 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. And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in the heavens." Then He ordered His disciples that they should tell no one that He is Jesus the Christ.

16:21-28 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and on the third day to be raised. And Peter, having taken Him aside, began to rebuke Him, saying, "***God be*** merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means be to You." But He, having turned, said to 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." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone 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 will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life? Or what will a man give ***as*** an exchange for his life? For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each according to his conduct. Truly I say to you, there are some of those standing here who will by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Chapter 16 Preview

Chapter 16 is the turning point of Matthew's Gospel. It begins with the Pharisees and Sadducees, two groups that usually could not stand each other, joining together to demand a sign from heaven. Jesus refuses and warns His disciples to beware of their leaven, their teaching. Then, far to the north at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the most important question anyone will ever answer: "But you, who do you say Me to be?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

On that confession Jesus promises to build His church, and He gives Peter the keys of the kingdom. From that moment Jesus begins to tell His disciples plainly that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and rise on the third day. Peter, who had just spoken by revelation from the Father, now tries to talk Jesus out of the cross and is sharply rebuked. Jesus then teaches that anyone who follows Him must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow, because a man gains nothing if he wins the whole world and loses his own life.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1 *And the Pharisees and Sadducees, having come, testing **Him**, asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.*

"The Pharisees and Sadducees" came together to test Jesus. The Pharisees were the strict party who held to the Law and the traditions of the elders. The Sadducees were a smaller, wealthy group made up mostly of priestly families who ran the temple. They accepted only the five books of Moses as their authority, and they did not believe in angels or the resurrection (Acts 23:8). These two groups disagreed on almost everything. What brought them together was opposing Jesus.

They "asked Him to show them a sign from heaven." They wanted something spectacular in the sky, maybe fire or a voice, something that could not be faked. They were not asking in faith. They were testing Him, hoping He would fail.

16:2-3 *And answering, He said to them, "When evening has come, you say, '**It will be** fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, '**There will be** a storm today, for the sky is red, being overcast.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but the signs of the times you are not able **to discern**.*

Jesus answers with something every farmer and fisherman knew. A red sky in the evening means fair weather tomorrow. A red and overcast sky in the morning means a storm is coming. People today still say something much like this. They could read the weather by looking at the sky.

"Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but the signs of the times you are not able to discern." The signs of the times were all around them. Prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes. The blind were seeing and the lame were walking, just as Isaiah said (Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 11:4-5). They could forecast the weather but could not recognize the Messiah standing in front of them.

Some of the oldest Greek copies of Matthew do not have the words about the red sky in verses 2 and 3, and some modern Bibles put them in brackets. The words fit what Jesus says in Luke 12:54-56, and nothing in our faith rests on them alone.

16:4 *An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet." And having left them, He went away.*

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign." Jesus says almost the same thing He said in 12:39. They would get no sign "except the sign of Jonah the prophet." As we saw in chapter 12, that sign is Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection on the third day. That was all they would get, and it would be more than enough.

"And having left them, He went away." That is a sad sentence. When people keep refusing the light God gives them, there comes a time when He leaves them to their choice. Jesus did not stay to argue. He walked away.

Old Testament links: Jonah 1:17 (alluded to)

16:5-6 *And His disciples, having come to the other side, forgot to take loaves. And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

The disciples crossed the lake and realized they had forgotten to bring bread. Jesus used the moment to teach them. "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Leaven is yeast, a small piece of fermented dough that spreads through a whole batch of bread. In the Bible it is often a picture of something that spreads quietly and corrupts, like sin or false teaching (1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9). A little bit of it goes a long way.

16:7 *And they were reasoning among themselves, saying, "**It is** because we did not take loaves."*

The disciples missed the point completely. "It is because we did not take loaves." They thought Jesus was scolding them for forgetting lunch. Their minds were on their stomachs. Jesus was talking about their souls. We do the same thing. God is trying to teach us something important, and we are worried about something small.

16:8-10 *But Jesus, having known **it**, said to them, "Why do you reason among yourselves, **you** of little faith, because you did not take loaves? Do you not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?*

Jesus knew what they were saying. "Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, because you did not take loaves?" He reminded them of the two great feedings. With five loaves He fed five thousand, and they picked up baskets of leftovers. With seven loaves He fed four thousand, and they picked up large baskets of leftovers.

His point was plain. Why worry about bread when you are traveling with the One who makes bread out of almost nothing? Their problem was not a short memory alone. It was little faith.

When we worry about our needs, Jesus asks us the same thing: "Do you not yet understand, nor remember?" Look back at what He has already done for you.

16:11-12 *How do you not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?" Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of the bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

"How do you not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?" Then it finally clicked. "They understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of the bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

The Pharisees added man-made rules to God's word and cared most about outward religion. The Sadducees took away from God's word, denied the supernatural, and cared most about power and politics. One added and the other subtracted, and both led people away from Christ. Those same two dangers are still with us. Watch out for anyone who adds to the gospel and anyone who waters it down.

16:13 *And Jesus, having come into the districts of Caesarea of Philip, was asking His disciples, saying, "Who do men say Me, the Son of Man, to be?"*

Jesus took His disciples far north to "the districts of Caesarea of Philip." Caesarea Philippi was about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Philip the tetrarch, a son of Herod the Great, rebuilt it and named it after Caesar and himself. It was a Gentile city full of idols. There was a shrine to the Greek god Pan at a great rock cliff where a spring came out of a cave.

In that place, surrounded by false gods, Jesus asked, "Who do men say Me, the Son of Man, to be?" He was not asking because He did not know. He was preparing them for the next question.

16:14 *And they said, "Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

The disciples gave the popular answers. Some said "John the Baptist," as Herod did (14:2). Others said Elijah, because Malachi had promised that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). Others said "Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Every answer was kind. Each one put Jesus among the great men of God. But every answer was wrong, because each one made Him only a man. People still do this today. Many will call Jesus a good teacher, a prophet, or a wise man. That sounds respectful, but it falls far short of who He is.

16:15 *He says to them, "But you, who do you say Me to be?"*

"But you, who do you say Me to be?" The word "you" is plural and placed first for emphasis. It does not matter as much what the crowds say. What do you say?

This is the most important question you will ever answer. Not what your parents believed, or what your church teaches, or what your friends think. Who do you say Jesus is? Your answer to that question decides your eternity.

16:16 *And Simon Peter, answering, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Messiah. Both mean the Anointed One, the promised King God would send to save His people and sit on David's throne.

Peter also called Him "the Son of the living God." This means far more than a man close to God. It means Jesus shares the very nature of God. In the middle of a city of dead idols carved from stone, Peter confessed the Son of the living God. This is the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus is God the Son.

16:17 *And answering, Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal **it** to you, but My Father who **is** in the heavens.*

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah." Bar-Jonah is the Aramaic way of saying son of Jonah. Jesus calls Peter by his old family name, as if to say, this did not come from your natural self.

"Flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father who is in the heavens." Peter did not figure this out on his own. He was not smarter than the others. God the Father opened his eyes. That is true of every believer. No one comes to know Jesus as Lord unless God makes Him known (John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 12:3). If you believe in Jesus, you have been blessed by God.

16:18 *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.*

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church." This is one of the most discussed verses in the Bible. The name Peter is Petros in Greek, which means a stone. The word for rock is petra, which means a large rock, like bedrock or a cliff. Jesus was making a play on words, and they were standing near a massive rock wall.

What is the rock? Here is how I understand it, and I say it with respect for those who see it differently. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the rock is Peter himself, that he was the first pope, and that his authority passed down to the bishops of Rome after him. I don't believe the text teaches that. Most Protestant teachers understand the rock to be the truth Peter had just confessed: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Others say the rock is Peter, but Peter as the one who first confessed Christ and would first preach Him, which he did at Pentecost (Acts 2). Either way, the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. Paul says no one can lay any other foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). Peter himself called Jesus the living stone, the chief cornerstone, and called all believers living stones built on Him (1 Peter 2:4-8). Nothing in this verse speaks of anyone passing Peter's place on to others.

"I will build My church." This is the first time the word church appears in the New Testament. The Greek word is ekklesia, which means an assembly of people called out. Notice it was still

future: "I will build." The church began on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2). And it is His church. It does not belong to a pastor, a denomination, or a building. It belongs to Jesus.

"And the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Hades is the place of the dead. Gates were where a city's leaders met and where its defenses stood. Death itself and all the powers of darkness cannot stop the church Jesus is building. Christians have been persecuted for two thousand years, and the church is still here. It always will be.

16:19 *And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in the heavens."*

"And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." Keys open doors. Peter would be the one to open the door of the kingdom by preaching the gospel. And that is just what he did. He preached first to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). He went with John to the Samaritans when they received the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). He brought the gospel to the first Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-48). Peter used the keys, and the door has stood open ever since.

"Whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in the heavens." Binding and loosing were terms the Jewish teachers used for forbidding and permitting. Notice the tense: "will have been bound." Heaven does not follow Peter's decisions. Peter and the apostles would declare on earth what God had already decided in heaven. In 18:18 Jesus gives the same authority to the church as a whole. This is the authority of God's word faithfully taught, not the power of one man to make new rules.

16:20 *Then He ordered His disciples that they should tell no one that He is Jesus the Christ.*

"Then He ordered His disciples that they should tell no one that He is Jesus the Christ." Why keep it quiet now? The crowds had the wrong idea of what the Messiah would do. They wanted a king to lead a revolt against Rome. If word got out that Jesus was the Christ, they might try to force Him to be that kind of king (John 6:15). The disciples themselves still did not understand that the Messiah must suffer, as the next verse shows. The time to proclaim it to the world would come after the cross and the empty tomb.

16:21 *From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and on the third day to be raised.*

"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples." This marks a new stage in Matthew. From here on Jesus speaks openly about the cross. "It is necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem." The word necessary tells us this was not an accident or a tragedy that happened to Him. It was God's plan.

He would "suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes." These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews in Jerusalem. He would "be killed, and on

the third day to be raised." Every time Jesus spoke of His death, He also spoke of His resurrection. The cross was never the end of the story.

16:22 *And Peter, having taken Him aside, began to rebuke Him, saying, "**God be** merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means be to You."*

"Peter, having taken Him aside, began to rebuke Him." Think about that. Peter pulled the Lord aside to correct Him. "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means be to You."

Peter loved Jesus and could not stand the thought of Him suffering. Like most Jews of his day, he believed the Messiah would win, not die. A dying Messiah made no sense to him. Peter meant well. But good intentions can still stand in the way of God's plan.

16:23 *But He, having turned, said to 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."*

"Get behind Me, Satan!" These are some of the strongest words Jesus ever spoke to a friend. Jesus was not saying Peter was possessed. He was saying the idea Peter just spoke came from Satan. It was the same temptation the devil offered in the wilderness: a crown without a cross (4:8-10).

"You are a stumbling block to Me." Just minutes earlier Peter was called a rock. Now he is a stone in the road that could trip someone. "You are not minding the things of God, but the things of men." Peter was thinking the way people naturally think: avoid pain, seek comfort, win now. God's way went through the cross. Any of us can go from speaking God's truth to speaking the enemy's lies in the same conversation. That should keep us humble.

16:24 *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me.*

Now Jesus turns to all His disciples. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me."

To deny yourself means to say no to yourself, to stop making yourself the center of your life. To take up your cross was a picture everyone in that day understood. When the Romans crucified a man, they made him carry his cross to the place of execution. A man carrying a cross was a man on his way to die. Jesus is saying that following Him means dying to our own way. This is not how we are saved. We are saved by grace through faith. It is what a saved life looks like. Each of us has to ask, what am I holding on to that Jesus is asking me to lay down?

16:25 *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life on account of Me will find it.*

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life on account of Me will find it." This sounds backward, but it is true. The person who holds on tight to his own life, his comfort, plans, and pride, will lose it in the end. The person who gives his life to Jesus finds real life, now and forever.

Many believers have found this to be true. The times we clutch our plans the hardest are often the times we are most anxious and empty. The times we let go and trust the Lord are the times we find peace.

16:26 *For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life? Or what will a man give **as** an exchange for his life?*

"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but suffers the loss of his life?" Jesus asks two business questions. Suppose you could own everything on earth. If you lose your soul, what good is it? You cannot take any of it with you.

"Or what will a man give as an exchange for his life?" Once your soul is lost, there is nothing you can pay to buy it back. Your soul is worth more than the whole world. That is why Jesus gave His own life to redeem it.

16:27 *For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each according to his conduct.*

"For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels." Jesus has just told them He will suffer and die. Now He tells them He will come again in glory. The same One who was rejected will return as Judge.

"And then He will repay each according to his conduct." For the unbeliever, this means judgment for sin. For the believer, it means reward for faithful service (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12). Our salvation is a gift, but how we live still matters to God. Nothing done for Jesus is wasted.

Old Testament links: Psalm 62:12 (alluded to); Proverbs 24:12 (alluded to)

16:28 *Truly I say to you, there are some of those standing here who will by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

"There are some of those standing here who will by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." What did Jesus mean? He did not return in glory while the disciples were alive. Many Bible teachers find the answer in the very next verses. Six days later, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured in glory on the mountain (17:1-8). Peter himself later wrote that on the holy mountain they were eyewitnesses of His majesty, and he linked it to the power and coming of the Lord Jesus (2 Peter 1:16-18). The Transfiguration was a preview, a sneak look at the King in His glory. Some teachers apply this verse to the resurrection, to Pentecost, or to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but many find the Transfiguration fits the context best.

Chapter 16 Summary

The Pharisees and Sadducees demand a sign from heaven. Jesus says they can read the sky but not the signs of the times, and they will get only the sign of Jonah. He warns His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and they finally understand He means their teaching. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks who people say He is and then who the disciples say He is. Peter

confesses that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, a truth revealed by the Father. Jesus promises to build His church on this rock, says the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, and gives Peter the keys of the kingdom. From then on Jesus teaches plainly that He must suffer, be killed, and rise on the third day. Peter rebukes Him and is rebuked in turn. Jesus calls all His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him, for nothing is worth losing one's soul. He will come in His Father's glory and repay each one, and some standing there will see Him in His kingdom's glory before they die.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Who were the Sadducees, and why is it surprising that they joined the Pharisees against Jesus? (16:1)

2. What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? (16:6, 12)

3. Who did the crowds say Jesus was, and why did those answers fall short? (16:13-14)

4. What did Peter confess about Jesus, and where did that understanding come from? (16:16-17)

5. What is the rock on which Jesus builds His church, and who is the church's true foundation? (16:18)

6. How did Peter use the keys of the kingdom in the book of Acts? (16:19)

7. Why did Jesus call Peter Satan and a stumbling block? (16:22-23)

8. What does it mean to deny yourself and take up your cross? (16:24)

9. If someone asked you today who you say Jesus is, what would you answer? (16:15)

10. What are you holding on to that might be keeping you from following Jesus fully? (16:25-26)

Chapter 17: The Transfiguration

Scripture

17:1-13 And after six days Jesus takes Peter and James and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as the light. And look, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. And Peter, answering, said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, let us make here three tents, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 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." And having heard, the disciples fell on their face and were greatly afraid. And Jesus, having come, touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from ***the*** dead." And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer by them." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them concerning John the Baptist.

17:14-27 And when they had come to the crowd, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic and suffers badly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Your disciples, and they were not able to heal him." And answering, Jesus said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon went out from him, and the boy was healed from that hour. Then the disciples, having come to Jesus privately, said, "Why were we not able to cast it out?" And Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." And while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into ***the*** hands of men, and they will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised." And they were greatly grieved. And when they had come to Capernaum, those collecting the didrachmas came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the didrachmas?" He says, "Yes." And when he had entered into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive customs or tribute? From their sons or from the strangers?" Peter says to Him, "From the strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. But so that we may not cause them to stumble, having gone to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and having opened its mouth, you will find a stater. Having taken that, give ***it*** to them for Me and you."

Chapter 17 Preview

Six days after Peter's confession, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. There He is transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun, His clothes become as white as light, and Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Him. When Peter offers to build three tents, a bright cloud covers them, and the Father's voice says, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased; listen to Him." On the way down, Jesus explains that Elijah does come first, and that in one sense he has already come in John the Baptist.

At the foot of the mountain the scene changes from glory to need. A father brings his suffering son, and the disciples have not been able to help. Jesus casts out the demon and teaches them about faith as small as a mustard seed, and about prayer and fasting. He speaks again of His coming death and resurrection. The chapter ends in Capernaum with a question about the temple tax, which Jesus pays with a coin from a fish's mouth.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1 *And after six days Jesus takes Peter and James and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain by themselves.*

"After six days." Luke says "about eight days" (Luke 9:28), likely counting the first and last days as well. This was about a week after Jesus told His disciples He would suffer and die, and that some of them would see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (16:28). Now He keeps that promise.

Jesus took "Peter and James and John his brother." These three were His inner circle. They were with Him when He raised a dead girl (Mark 5:37), and they would be closest to Him in Gethsemane (26:37). Jesus loved all twelve, but He let these three see more. The "high mountain" is not named. Tradition says Mount Tabor in Galilee. Many think Mount Hermon is more likely, since it is high and near Caesarea Philippi, where they had just been. Scripture doesn't tell us, and it does not matter much. What happened there is what matters.

17:2 *And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as the light.*

"And He was transfigured before them." The Greek word is metamorphoo, from which we get metamorphosis. It means a change of form from the inside out. Jesus did not just have a light shining on Him. The glory came from within. For a few moments the veil of His humanity was pulled back, and the disciples saw what He truly is.

"His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as the light." When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face shone because he had been with God (Exodus 34:29-35). Moses reflected glory. Jesus radiated it. John, who was there, later wrote, "we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). The Jesus who walked dusty roads in Galilee is the Lord of glory.

Old Testament links: Exodus 34:29 (alluded to)

17:3 *And look, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.*

"And look, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him." Moses stood for the Law, and Elijah for the Prophets. Together they stand for the whole Old Testament, which points to Jesus. Luke tells us what they talked about: His "departure," His death that was about to happen in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

Both men had unusual endings to their lives on earth. God buried Moses Himself (Deuteronomy 34:5-6), and Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Here they are, alive and recognizable. This tells us something about life after death. God's people are alive with Him, they know who they are, and they can be recognized.

17:4 *And Peter, answering, said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, let us make here three tents, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."*

Peter, who always had something to say, spoke up. "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Then he offered to make "three tents, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Mark says Peter did not know what to say because they were terrified (Mark 9:6).

Peter's heart was right in wanting to stay in God's presence. But his idea had two problems. First, he put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah, one tent each. Second, he wanted to stay on the mountain, but Jesus was headed for the cross. Peter wanted the glory without the suffering, just as he did in chapter 16.

17:5 *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."*

"While he was still speaking," God interrupted him. "A bright cloud overshadowed them." This was the cloud of God's glory, like the cloud that filled the tabernacle and led Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 40:34-38).

Then came the voice of the Father: "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased; listen to Him." These are the same words spoken at Jesus' baptism (3:17), with three added at the end: "listen to Him." Moses himself had said that God would raise up a Prophet like him, and "to him you shall listen" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses and Elijah were great men, but they were servants. Jesus is the Son. God does not put Him on the same level as anyone. He puts Him above all, and He tells us to listen to Him. Are we listening?

Old Testament links: Isaiah 42:1 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 18:15 (alluded to)

17:6-7 *And having heard, the disciples fell on their face and were greatly afraid. And Jesus, having come, touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."*

When the disciples heard the voice of God, "the disciples fell on their face and were greatly afraid." This is how sinful people react when they come near the holy God. Isaiah cried, "Woe to me!" (Isaiah 6:5). John fell like a dead man when he saw the risen Christ (Revelation 1:17).

Then Jesus came and "touched them and said," "Get up, and do not be afraid." What a tender moment. The One whose glory had just blazed like the sun reached out and touched His frightened friends. The holiness of Jesus is a fearful thing. But for those who belong to Him, His touch takes the fear away.

17:8 *And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone.*

"And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus alone." Moses was gone. Elijah was gone. The cloud was gone. Only Jesus was left. That is the whole point of the Transfiguration. The Law and the Prophets did their work in pointing to Him. Now He alone is the One we follow. When everything else fades away, Jesus is still there.

17:9 *And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from* ***the*** *dead."*

On the way down, Jesus commanded them, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." Why keep it secret? The crowds were looking for a political king. A story of glory on a mountain would only stir them up. Even the disciples did not yet understand that He had to die. After the resurrection, they would understand, and they could tell it. Peter did exactly that in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

17:10-11 *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things.*

The disciples had a question. "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Malachi 4:5-6 promised that God would send Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord. They had just seen Elijah, but he had gone. How could Jesus be the Messiah if Elijah had not yet come to prepare the way?

"Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things." Jesus agrees with the scribes on this point. Malachi's promise is true, and it still has a future part. Many Bible teachers believe Elijah, or one who comes in his power, will come before the Lord returns to restore all things in His kingdom. Some see this in the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-6, who do miracles like Elijah's, though the text does not name them.

Some Bible teachers believe John the Baptist was the whole fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6, but I believe, as many pre-tribulation teachers do, that John fulfilled it only in part.

Old Testament links: Malachi 4:5-6 (alluded to)

17:12-13 *But I say to you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer by them." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them concerning John the Baptist.*

"But I say to you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him." Then the disciples understood that He meant John the Baptist. The angel had said John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Jesus had already said that if they were willing to

receive it, John was the Elijah who was to come (11:14). John himself said he was not Elijah in person (John 1:21).

So how does it all fit together? John came in the spirit and power of Elijah at Christ's first coming. If Israel had received the King, John would have fulfilled Malachi's promise. But the leaders rejected John, and Herod killed him. "So also the Son of Man is about to suffer by them." The rejection of the forerunner was a preview of the rejection of the King. Malachi's prophecy will be completely fulfilled before the King's return.

Old Testament links: Malachi 4:5-6 (alluded to)

17:14-16 *And when they had come to the crowd, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic and suffers badly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Your disciples, and they were not able to heal him."*

They came down from the mountain of glory into a valley of need. A man knelt before Jesus and begged, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic and suffers badly." He often fell into fire and into water. Mark tells us a demon was behind it, a spirit that made him mute and threw him into convulsions (Mark 9:17-18). Matthew also shows this in verse 18. Not every sickness comes from a demon, and the Bible tells them apart (4:24). But in this case a demon was at work.

The worst part for this father was in verse 16. "I brought him to Your disciples, and they were not able to heal him." He went to the followers of Jesus, and they could not help. That still happens. People come to the church with real needs and leave disappointed. It should make us pray harder.

17:17 *And answering, Jesus said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."*

Jesus said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you?" Jesus was speaking to all of them: the crowd, the scribes who were arguing (Mark 9:14), and His own disciples. He had given them power over demons (10:1, 8), and they had not trusted Him to use it.

Perverted means twisted or bent out of shape. Jesus felt the weight of living among people who would not trust God. Yet even in His frustration, He did not turn away. "Bring him here to Me." When others fail, Jesus does not.

17:18 *And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon went out from him, and the boy was healed from that hour.*

"And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon went out from him, and the boy was healed from that hour." There was no struggle, no long ritual, no shouting. Jesus spoke, and the demon had to go. All the powers of darkness must obey Him. That same Jesus is Lord over every power that troubles us today.

17:19-20 *Then the disciples, having come to Jesus privately, said, "Why were we not able to cast it out?" And Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

Later, in private, the disciples asked, "Why were we not able to cast it out?" Jesus answered honestly: "Because of your unbelief."

Then He said that if they had "faith like a grain of mustard," they could tell a mountain to move and it would. The mustard seed was the smallest seed they commonly planted (13:31-32). Jesus was not saying they needed great faith. He was saying they needed real faith, even a tiny amount, placed in a great God. The power is not in our faith. It is in the One our faith trusts.

To move a mountain was a common saying for doing something impossible. Jesus is not promising that we can do whatever we want. Faith trusts God to do what He wills. When we trust Him, "nothing will be impossible for you."

17:21 *But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."*

"But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Some cases are harder than others. The disciples may have been relying on past success, as if the power were theirs to use whenever they liked. Jesus says that this kind needs a deeper dependence on God, shown in prayer and in fasting. To fast is to go without food for a time in order to seek God. It is a way of saying that we need Him more than we need our next meal.

Most of the oldest Greek copies of Matthew do not have this verse, and many modern Bibles put it in brackets or a footnote, or leave it out of the text. The SLB includes it because it follows the Received Greek Text. Mark 9:29 also speaks of prayer in this same story. No teaching of the Christian faith rests on this verse alone. What it says about prayer and fasting is taught plainly elsewhere (6:16-18; Acts 13:2-3).

17:22-23 *And while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into **the** hands of men, and they will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised." And they were greatly grieved.*

While they were in Galilee, Jesus told them a second time about His death. "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men." The word delivered up is the same word used for betrayal. Judas would hand Him over, but behind it all was the Father's plan (Romans 8:32).

"And they will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised." Again Jesus spoke of His resurrection in the same breath as His death. But "they were greatly grieved." They heard the first part and missed the second. Grief can do that. It can make us deaf to the promises of God. The disciples heard that He would be killed and stopped listening. If they had heard that He would be raised, their grief would have turned to hope.

17:24 *And when they had come to Capernaum, those collecting the didrachmas came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the didrachmas?"*

Back in Capernaum, "those collecting the didrachmas came to Peter." The didrachma was a coin worth two drachmas, about two days' wages. Every Jewish man age twenty and up paid this amount once a year as a tax for the upkeep of the temple. It came from the half-shekel God commanded in Exodus 30:13-16.

They asked Peter, "Does your Teacher not pay the didrachmas?" It may have been an honest question or a trap. Either way, Peter answered quickly.

17:25-26 *He says, "Yes." And when he had entered into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive customs or tribute? From their sons or from the strangers?" Peter says to Him, "From the strangers." Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free.*

Peter told them yes. He did not check with Jesus first. When he came into the house, Jesus spoke before Peter could bring it up. He already knew what had happened.

Jesus asked, "From whom do the kings of the earth receive customs or tribute? From their sons or from the strangers?" Kings tax their subjects, not their own children. Peter said, "From the strangers." "Then the sons are free." Here is the point. The temple tax was paid to God. Jesus is God's Son. Why should the Son pay a tax for His own Father's house? Jesus was quietly claiming, once again, that He is the Son of God and Lord of the temple (12:6).

17:27 *But so that we may not cause them to stumble, having gone to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and having opened its mouth, you will find a stater. Having taken that, give **it** to them for Me and you."*

"But so that we may not cause them to stumble." Jesus had every right not to pay. But He chose to pay so that He would not give offense where there was no need. There is a lesson here for us. Sometimes we should give up our rights for the sake of others (1 Corinthians 9:19). Not every hill is worth dying on.

Then comes one of the most unusual miracles in the Bible. Jesus told Peter, a fisherman, to go to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that came up. In its mouth he would "find a stater." A stater was a coin worth four drachmas, exactly enough to pay the tax for two men. "Give it to them for Me and you."

Notice the details. Jesus knew which fish, where it was, and what was in its mouth. He is Lord over all creation, even the fish in the sea. And notice that He said "for Me and you." He provided for Peter's need along with His own. The Lord still provides for His people, sometimes in very surprising ways.

Chapter 17 Summary

Six days after Peter's confession, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain and is transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Him, and when Peter offers to build three tents, a bright cloud overshadows them and the Father declares that Jesus is His beloved Son and commands, "listen to Him." Coming down, Jesus explains that Elijah comes first and will restore all things, and that Elijah has already come in John the Baptist, who was rejected just as the Son of Man will be. At the foot of the mountain, Jesus casts out a demon His disciples could not, and teaches that faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains and that this kind goes out only by prayer and fasting. He foretells His death and resurrection a second time. In Capernaum, Jesus shows that as God's Son He is free from the temple tax, but pays it anyway with a coin from a fish's mouth so as not to give offense.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Which three disciples went up the mountain with Jesus, and what did they see? (17:1-2)

2. Who appeared with Jesus, and what did they represent? (17:3)

3. What was wrong with Peter's offer to build three tents? (17:4-5)

4. What did the Father say from the cloud, and what three words did He add to what He said at Jesus' baptism? (17:5)

5. What did Jesus say about Elijah, and how was John the Baptist connected to that promise? (17:10-13)

6. Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon? (17:19-21)

7. Why did the disciples grieve when Jesus spoke of His death, and what did they miss? (17:22-23)

8. Why was Jesus free from paying the temple tax, and why did He pay it anyway? (17:25-27)

9. When everything else fades away, is Jesus the One you are listening to? What would that look like this week? (17:5, 8)

10. Is there a right you need to give up so that you don't cause someone else to stumble? (17:27)

Chapter 18: Greatness and Forgiveness

Scripture

18:1-9 In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens?" And Jesus, having called a little child to ***Him***, set it in their midst, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like the little children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore whoever humbles himself like this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of the heavens. And whoever receives one such little child in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a donkey millstone be hung on his neck, and that he be sunk in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of the stumbling blocks! For it is necessary for the stumbling blocks to come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut them off and throw ***them*** from you; it is good for you to enter into life lame or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw ***it*** from you; it is good for you to enter into life one-eyed, rather than having two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire.

18:10-20 See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that their angels in ***the*** heavens continually see the face of My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens. For the Son of Man came to save what is lost. What do you think? If a certain man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not, having left the ninety-nine, having gone on the mountains, seek the ***one*** going astray? And if he happens to find it, truly I say to you that he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray. So it is not ***the*** will before your Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens that one of these little ones should perish. And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear, take with you one or two more, so that by ***the*** mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell ***it*** to the church; and if he refuses to hear even the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on the earth concerning any matter that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father who ***is*** in ***the*** heavens. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in ***the*** midst of them."

18:21-35 Then Peter, having come, said to Him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus says to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Because of this the kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man, a king, who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle ***them***, one debtor of approximately 750,000 pounds (ten thousand talents) was brought to him. But as he did not have ***anything*** to pay, his master commanded him to be sold, and his wife and the children and all that he had, and payment to be made. Therefore the slave, having fallen down, was bowing down to him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And the master of that slave, having been moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave, having gone out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred

denarii; and having seized him, he was choking ***him***, saying, 'Pay me what you owe.' Therefore his fellow slave, having fallen down at his feet, was begging him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' But he was not willing, but having gone, he threw him into prison until he should pay what was owed. And his fellow slaves, having seen what had taken place, were greatly grieved; and having come, they explained to their master all that had taken place. Then his master, having called him to ***him***, says to him, 'Evil slave, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Was it not necessary for you also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I also had mercy on you?' And his master, having been angered, delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was owed to him. So also My heavenly Father will do to you, unless you forgive, each his brother, from your hearts their trespasses."

Chapter 18 Preview

Chapter 18 is the fourth of the five great teaching sections in Matthew, and it is all about how the King's people are to live with one another. It begins with the disciples arguing over who is greatest. Jesus sets a little child in front of them and says that unless they turn and become like little children, they will not even enter the kingdom. He gives a sober warning to anyone who causes one of His little ones to stumble, and He tells of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to look for the one that wandered away.

Then Jesus teaches what to do when a brother sins against you: go to him alone, then with one or two others, and then tell it to the church. He promises His presence where two or three are gathered in His name. Finally, Peter asks how many times he must forgive. Jesus answers with seventy times seven and tells the parable of a slave who was forgiven a debt he could never pay, but would not forgive a fellow slave a small one. The lesson is plain: those who have been forgiven much must forgive from the heart.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1 *In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens?"*

"In that hour the disciples came to Jesus." They asked, "Who then is greater in the kingdom of the heavens?" Mark and Luke tell us they had been arguing about this on the road (Mark 9:33-34; Luke 9:46). Jesus had just told them a second time that He was going to die (17:22-23), and they were arguing over rank.

It is easy to shake our heads at them. But we do the same thing. We want to be noticed, to be in charge, to be thought of as important, even in church. The question of who is greatest has split many congregations. Jesus is about to turn their whole idea of greatness upside down.

18:2-3 *And Jesus, having called a little child to **Him**, set it in their midst, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like the little children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.*

Jesus "called a little child to Him, set it in their midst." Then He said, "Unless you turn and become like the little children, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens."

They asked who would be greatest. Jesus told them they had to change even to get in. To turn means to change direction, to repent. In that culture a child had no status at all. He could not earn anything, demand anything, or boast of anything. He depended on others for everything. That is how we must come to God. Not proud of what we have done, but humble and trusting, receiving salvation as a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus is not asking us to be childish. He is asking us to be childlike in our trust.

18:4 *Therefore whoever humbles himself like this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Therefore whoever humbles himself like this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of the heavens." The way up in God's kingdom is down. The greatest is not the one who pushes to the front, but the one who humbles himself.

Jesus is the perfect example. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death on a cross, and God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:5-9). Humility is not thinking badly of yourself. It is thinking rightly about yourself and thinking of yourself less, because God and others matter more.

18:5 *And whoever receives one such little child in My name receives Me.*

"And whoever receives one such little child in My name receives Me." To receive someone is to welcome them and care for them. Jesus counts kindness to a child, or to a humble believer, as kindness to Himself. Children could not repay anyone. To welcome them for Jesus' sake, with nothing to gain, shows a heart like His.

Those who teach children's Sunday school, care for kids in the nursery, or welcome the least important person at church are doing something great in God's eyes. They are receiving Jesus.

18:6 *But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a donkey millstone be hung on his neck, and that he be sunk in the depth of the sea.*

Now Jesus gives one of His most serious warnings. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble." Notice that the little ones are those "who believe in Me." Jesus means children, and He also means every humble believer, especially the young and weak in faith. To cause them to stumble is to lead them into sin or to drive them away from Christ.

"It is better for him that a donkey millstone be hung on his neck, and that he be sunk in the depth of the sea." A donkey millstone was a huge round stone so heavy it took a donkey to turn it. Being drowned with that around your neck is a terrible death. Jesus says it would be better than what

awaits the person who harms His little ones. God takes very seriously the abuse or misleading of children and young believers. So should His church.

18:7 *Woe to the world because of the stumbling blocks! For it is necessary for the stumbling blocks to come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!*

"Woe to the world because of the stumbling blocks!" Woe is a cry of grief and a warning of judgment. "For it is necessary for the stumbling blocks to come." In a fallen world full of sinners, temptations and offenses are going to happen. That is just the way things are until Christ returns.

"But woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" The fact that sin is common does not excuse the person who causes it. Each of us is responsible for the influence we have on others. Ask yourself: is my life making it easier or harder for others to follow Jesus?

18:8-9 *And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut them off and throw **them** from you; it is good for you to enter into life lame or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw **it** from you; it is good for you to enter into life one-eyed, rather than having two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire.*

Jesus now turns from the stumbling blocks we put in front of others to the ones in our own lives. "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut them off and throw them from you." The same goes for the eye. Jesus said something similar in the Sermon on the Mount (5:29-30).

Is Jesus telling us to hurt our own bodies? No. The text itself shows this is a strong figure of speech. Sin does not come from a hand or an eye. It comes from the heart (15:19). A blind man can still lust. Jesus is telling us to deal with sin ruthlessly. Whatever leads you into sin, cut it out of your life. That may mean ending a relationship, getting rid of a device, changing jobs, or staying away from certain places.

"The Gehenna of fire" is a name for hell. Gehenna was the Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times wicked kings sacrificed children there in fire to false gods (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31). It became a picture of the place of final judgment. Jesus calls it "the eternal fire." It is better to lose anything in this life than to lose your soul.

18:10 *See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that their angels in **the** heavens continually see the face of My Father who **is** in **the** heavens.*

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones." To despise is to look down on, to treat as unimportant. Why should we not do this? "Their angels in the heavens continually see the face of My Father." These little ones are so precious to God that angels stand ready in His presence on their behalf.

Many believe this verse teaches that God assigns angels to watch over His children. Scripture does say angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Whether each believer has one angel of his own, Scripture doesn't tell us clearly. What is clear is that the God of heaven watches over the least of His people, and so must we.

18:11 *For the Son of Man came to save what is lost.*

"For the Son of Man came to save what is lost." This is why we must never despise the little ones. Jesus came for the lost, the weak, and the helpless. If the Son of God came all the way from heaven to save them, how can we look down on them? This verse also leads straight into the parable of the lost sheep.

Most of the oldest Greek copies of Matthew do not have this verse here, and many modern Bibles put it in brackets or a footnote, or leave it out. The SLB includes it because it follows the Received Greek Text. Jesus said these same words in Luke 19:10, where all the Greek copies have them. No teaching of the faith rests on this verse alone. The truth that Jesus came to save the lost is taught plainly all through the New Testament (1 Timothy 1:15).

18:12-13 *What do you think? If a certain man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not, having left the ninety-nine, having gone on the mountains, seek the **one** going astray? And if he happens to find it, truly I say to you that he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray.*

"What do you think?" Jesus asks them to picture a man with a hundred sheep. One goes astray. He leaves the ninety-nine on the mountains and goes looking for the one. When he finds it, "he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray."

Does the shepherd not care about the ninety-nine? Of course he does. But the one that is lost has his attention because it is in danger. That is the heart of God. In Luke this parable is about lost sinners (Luke 15:3-7). Here in Matthew it is about believers who wander. When one of God's children strays, He goes after him. If you have wandered from the Lord, know this: He has not stopped looking for you.

18:14 *So it is not **the** will before your Father who **is** in **the** heavens that one of these little ones should perish.*

"So it is not the will before your Father who is in the heavens that one of these little ones should perish." God does not want any of His little ones to be lost. Peter says the Lord is patient, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

This verse shapes how the church should treat those who stray. We should not shrug and let them go. We should go after them, as the shepherd did. That is exactly what Jesus teaches in the next verses.

18:15 *And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

"And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone." This is the first step in what is often called church discipline. It begins privately. Most of the time, most problems would be solved right here if we would only do it.

Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not say to tell your friends, post about it, or complain to the pastor first. He says to go to the person, "between you and him alone." To reprove means to show someone his fault, to bring it into the light. This must be done humbly and gently (Galatians 6:1). The goal is not to win an argument. The goal is in the last line: "If he hears you, you have gained your brother." The goal is always restoration.

18:16 *But if he does not hear, take with you one or two more, so that by **the** mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

"But if he does not hear, take with you one or two more." If the private talk does not work, the circle widens a little. Jesus quotes the principle from Deuteronomy 19:15: "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

These witnesses serve two purposes. They can help the brother see his sin more clearly, and they can make sure the facts are right. Sometimes they will find that the one who came to complain is the one at fault. The process protects everyone.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 19:15 (quoted)

18:17 *And if he refuses to hear them, tell **it** to the church; and if he refuses to hear even the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector.*

"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church." This is the third step. The whole local assembly is told so that they can lovingly urge the brother to repent.

"And if he refuses to hear even the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector." To a Jew, a Gentile was an outsider to God's covenant people, and a tax collector was a Jew who worked for Rome and was treated as a traitor. Neither would be welcomed at the table of fellowship. So the church is to stop treating the unrepentant person as a brother in good standing. Paul applied this in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

But think about how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors. He loved them, ate with them, and called them to repent. Matthew himself was a tax collector. So even this last step is meant to bring the person back. And when he repents, the church must welcome him gladly (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Church discipline is hard, and many churches avoid it. But done in humility and love, it protects the flock, honors Christ, and often wins the brother back.

18:18 *Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in heaven.*

"Whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on the earth will have been loosed in heaven." Jesus gave these words to Peter in 16:19. Here He gives them to the church as a whole. In context, binding and loosing are about this very matter: declaring a sinner guilty when he refuses to repent, or declaring him forgiven and restored when he does.

Again notice the tense. The church does not make heaven's decisions. When a church acts faithfully by God's word, it is carrying out on earth what heaven has already decided. That gives weight to what the church does. It also means the church must act carefully and only in line with Scripture.

18:19 *Again I say to you that if two of you agree on the earth concerning any matter that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father who **is** in **the** heavens.*

"If two of you agree on the earth concerning any matter that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father who is in the heavens." This verse is often quoted as a general promise about prayer, and God certainly hears His people when they pray together. But look at the context. Jesus has been talking about church discipline, and about the "two or three witnesses." The two who agree are most likely those dealing with a brother's sin, praying for God's wisdom in the matter.

This is not a blank check. Getting someone to agree with you does not force God to give whatever you want. Prayer always says, "let Your will come about" (6:10). But when believers come together under His word, seeking His will, the Father acts.

18:20 *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in **the** midst of them."*

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them." When the church gathers to deal with these hard matters, even if it is only two or three people, Jesus Himself is there. They do not act alone. They act with His presence and His authority.

The verse also gives comfort to any small group of believers who meet in His name. You do not need a crowd to have Jesus with you. Many small churches and home Bible studies have found strength in this promise. To gather "in My name" means to gather under His authority, for His purposes, trusting in who He is.

18:21 *Then Peter, having come, said to Him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"*

Peter thought he was being generous. "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Some rabbis taught that you should forgive a person three times for the same offense, and after that you did not have to. Peter doubled it and added one more. Seven was the number of completeness. He probably expected Jesus to praise him.

18:22 *Jesus says to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*

"I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." That is 490 times. Some Greek scholars think the phrase means seventy-seven times, as in Genesis 4:24, where Lamech boasted of taking revenge seventy-seven times. Either way, the point is the same. Jesus is not asking us to keep a count and stop at 491. By the time you have forgiven someone that many times, you have stopped counting. Forgiveness has become a way of life.

Forgiving does not mean pretending the wrong did not happen or that there are no consequences. It does not always mean trusting the person right away. It means letting go of the debt and leaving justice in God's hands (Romans 12:19).

Old Testament links: Genesis 4:24 (alluded to)

18:23-24 *Because of this the kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man, a king, who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle* ***them****, one debtor of approximately 750,000 pounds (ten thousand talents) was brought to him.*

To show why we must forgive, Jesus tells a parable. A king wanted to "settle accounts with his slaves." These slaves were likely high officials who managed the king's money, like governors who collected taxes for him.

One owed "approximately 750,000 pounds (ten thousand talents)." A talent was a large weight of silver or gold, about seventy-five pounds, and it was worth about six thousand denarii. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. So one talent was about twenty years of wages, and ten thousand talents was more than anyone could earn in many lifetimes. Ten thousand was the largest number the Greeks had a single word for, and the talent was the largest unit of money. Jesus is describing a debt that could never be paid.

18:25 *But as he did not have* ***anything*** *to pay, his master commanded him to be sold, and his wife and the children and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

"But as he did not have anything to pay, his master commanded him to be sold, and his wife and the children and all that he had." This was the law of the day for a man who could not pay his debts. Selling the family would not come close to covering it. It was simply justice for a man who owed what he could not repay.

This is a picture of us before God. Our sin is a debt we can never pay. We cannot work it off, give it off, or make up for it with good deeds. If God dealt with us by strict justice, we would be lost.

18:26-27 *Therefore the slave, having fallen down, was bowing down to him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And the master of that slave, having been moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt.*

The slave fell down and begged, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." That was an impossible promise. He could never repay ten thousand talents. He only asked for more time.

But the master did far more than he asked. He was "moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt." He did not give him more time. He wiped out the whole debt. That is grace. God does not give us a payment plan for our sin. When we come to Him through faith in Jesus, He forgives the entire debt, because Jesus paid it on the cross (Colossians 2:13-14).

18:28 *But that slave, having gone out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and having seized him, he was choking **him**, saying, 'Pay me what you owe.'*

Then the forgiven slave went out and "found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii." A hundred denarii was about a hundred days' wages, about four months of pay. It was not nothing. But compared to ten thousand talents, it was tiny, about one six-hundred-thousandth of what he had been forgiven.

He seized him and "was choking him," saying, "Pay me what you owe." He had just walked out of the king's presence a free man, and he was already choking someone over pocket change. How quickly he forgot.

18:29-30 *Therefore his fellow slave, having fallen down at his feet, was begging him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' But he was not willing, but having gone, he threw him into prison until he should pay what was owed.*

The fellow slave did just what the first slave had done. He fell down and begged with almost the same words: "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." This debt could actually be repaid in time.

"But he was not willing." He threw the man into prison until he paid. He would not show even a little of the mercy he had received. This is what makes an unforgiving spirit so ugly in a Christian. We who have been forgiven everything refuse to forgive others for much less.

18:31 *And his fellow slaves, having seen what had taken place, were greatly grieved; and having come, they explained to their master all that had taken place.*

"His fellow slaves, having seen what had taken place, were greatly grieved." Other people notice when we refuse to forgive. It grieves them. They told their master everything. An unforgiving spirit in God's family does not stay hidden. It hurts the whole household.

18:32-33 *Then his master, having called him to **him**, says to him, 'Evil slave, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Was it not necessary for you also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I also had mercy on you?'*

The master called him in. "Evil slave, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Was it not necessary for you also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I also had mercy on you?"

Here is the heart of the parable. We forgive because we have been forgiven. Paul says the same thing: forgive each other, just as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32). If we really understood how much we have been forgiven, we could not hold a grudge against anyone. The size of our forgiveness toward others shows how much we understand God's forgiveness toward us.

18:34 *And his master, having been angered, delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was owed to him.*

"And his master, having been angered, delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was owed to him." The torturers were the jailers who were allowed to treat prisoners harshly. Since the debt could never be paid, this meant he would never get out.

This is a frightening verse, and it is meant to be.

18:35 *So also My heavenly Father will do to you, unless you forgive, each his brother, from your hearts their trespasses."*

"So also My heavenly Father will do to you, unless you forgive, each his brother, from your hearts their trespasses." Jesus says it plainly. A trespass is a wrong done against someone. Forgiveness must come "from your hearts," not just from the lips.

Does this mean we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others? No. The slave was forgiven first, freely, before he did anything. We are saved by grace through faith alone. But Jesus is teaching that a heart that truly receives mercy becomes merciful. A person who stubbornly refuses to forgive, year after year, should ask whether he has ever truly understood and received God's forgiveness. Bible teachers differ on how this verse applies to a true believer. Some say it describes a person who was never truly changed. Others say it describes God's discipline of a believer who refuses to forgive, who loses the joy and peace of fellowship with Him until he lets go. Either way, the warning is real. If there is someone you have not forgiven, don't wait. Let it go today, for your sake and for theirs.

Chapter 18 Summary

The disciples ask who is greatest in the kingdom. Jesus sets a little child before them and teaches that they must turn and become like little children even to enter, and that whoever humbles himself is greatest. He warns sternly against causing His little ones to stumble and calls His followers to deal ruthlessly with sin in their own lives. Because the Son of Man came to save the lost, and the Father does not want one of His little ones to perish, a shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one. Jesus then gives the steps for dealing with a brother who sins: go to him alone, then with one or two witnesses, then to the church, and if he still refuses, treat him as an outsider. The church binds and looses on earth what heaven has already decided, and Jesus is present where two or three gather in His name. When Peter asks how often he must forgive, Jesus says seventy times seven, and tells the parable of a slave forgiven an unpayable debt who would not forgive a small one. The Father expects those He has forgiven to forgive from the heart.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. What were the disciples arguing about, and how did Jesus answer them? (18:1-4)

2. What does it mean to become like a little child? (18:3-4)

3. What did Jesus say about anyone who causes one of His little ones to stumble? (18:6)

4. What does Jesus mean by cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye? (18:8-9)

5. What does the parable of the lost sheep teach about the Father's heart? (18:12-14)

6. What are the steps Jesus gives for dealing with a brother who sins against you, and what is the goal? (18:15-17)

7. How does the context of church discipline help us understand 18:19-20?

8. How large was the first slave's debt compared to the second, and what does that teach about our debt to God? (18:24, 28)

9. Is there a brother or sister you need to go to privately, in humility, this week? (18:15)

10. Who do you need to forgive from your heart, and what is holding you back? (18:35)

Chapter 19: Marriage, Children, and Riches

Scripture

19:1-12 And it came about, when Jesus had finished these words, He withdrew from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. And the Pharisees came to Him, testing Him and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" And answering, He said to them, "Have you not read that He who made ***them*** from ***the*** beginning made them male and female, and said, 'On account of this a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God joined together, let man not separate." They say to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to divorce her?" He says to them, "Moses, in view of your hardness of heart, permitted you to divorce your wives; but from ***the*** beginning it has not been so. And I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and the ***one*** having married a divorced ***woman*** commits adultery." His disciples say to Him, "If the case of the man with the wife is so, it is not better to marry." And He said to them, "Not all receive this word, but ***those*** to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from a mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens. The ***one*** being able to receive ***it***, let him receive ***it***."

19:13-30 Then little children were brought to Him, so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Permit the little children, and do not forbid them to come to Me; for of such is the kingdom of the heavens." And having laid His hands on them, He departed from there. And look, one having come to Him said, "Good Teacher, what good ***thing*** shall I do so that I may have eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one ***is*** good except One, God. But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments." He says to Him, "Which ***ones***?" And Jesus said, "'You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man says to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you desire to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to ***the*** poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But the young man, having heard the word, went away grieving; for he was ***one*** having much property. And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you that a rich ***man*** will enter with difficulty into the kingdom of the heavens. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through ***the*** eye of a needle than for a rich ***man*** to enter into the kingdom of God." And His disciples, having heard, were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then is able to be saved?" And Jesus, having looked at ***them***, said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter, answering, said to Him, "Look, we have left all things and followed You; what then will there be for us?" And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on ***the*** throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or

brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for the sake of My name will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many first will be last, and last first."

Chapter 19 Preview

Chapter 19 begins Jesus' last journey toward Jerusalem. He leaves Galilee for the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, and great crowds follow Him. The Pharisees test Him with a hot question of the day: is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all? Jesus takes them back to the beginning, to God's design in creation, where a man and his wife become one flesh. He explains that Moses permitted divorce because of hard hearts, and He gives His own teaching on divorce and remarriage. His disciples are so surprised that they wonder whether it is better not to marry.

Then little children are brought to Jesus, and when the disciples try to send them away, He welcomes them and blesses them. Next a rich young man asks what good thing he must do to have eternal life. Jesus shows him what his heart truly loves, and he goes away grieving. Jesus tells His disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom, and that salvation is impossible with men but possible with God. He ends by promising that those who have left everything for Him will receive far more and will inherit eternal life.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-2 *And it came about, when Jesus had finished these words, He withdrew from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.*

"When Jesus had finished these words" marks the end of the fourth great teaching section in Matthew (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 26:1). Jesus "withdrew from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan." This area east of the Jordan River was called Perea, and it was ruled by Herod Antipas. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time.

"Great crowds followed Him, and He healed them there." Wherever Jesus went, He met people's needs. Even with the cross ahead of Him, He kept caring for others.

19:3 *And the Pharisees came to Him, testing Him and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?"*

"And the Pharisees came to Him, testing Him." Their question was a trap: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" To understand it, we need some background. The Jewish teachers argued over Deuteronomy 24:1, which speaks of a man who finds in his wife "the nakedness of a thing," something shameful. One school, following the rabbi Shammai, said this meant serious sexual sin. Another school, following the rabbi Hillel, said a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason at all, even for spoiling his dinner.

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to take sides. Either way, He would make someone angry. There may have been another danger too. They were in Herod's territory, and John the Baptist had been killed for speaking against Herod's divorce and remarriage (14:3-4).

19:4 *And answering, He said to them, "Have you not read that He who made **them** from **the** beginning made them male and female,*

Jesus did not start with the debate. He went back further than Moses, all the way to creation. "Have you not read that He who made them from the beginning made them male and female?" That is Genesis 1:27.

When we have a question about marriage, the right place to start is God's original design. God made two kinds of people, male and female, and He made them for each other. Marriage was not invented by a culture or a government. God created it.

Old Testament links: Genesis 1:27 (quoted)

19:5 *and said, 'On account of this a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?*

Jesus then quotes Genesis 2:24: "On account of this a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Notice that Jesus says God Himself said this.

There are three parts here. A man leaves his parents, meaning marriage creates a new family that comes first. He is joined to his wife. The word means to be glued or cemented together. And the two become one flesh, a union of body and life. Marriage is the closest human bond there is.

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:24 (quoted)

19:6 *So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God joined together, let man not separate."*

"So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God joined together, let man not separate." This is Jesus' answer to the debate. Marriage is not just a contract between two people. God joins a husband and wife together. And what God has joined, no man has the right to tear apart.

This is a high view of marriage, and it is God's view. In a world where marriages break up every day, this verse calls us back to see marriage as something holy. God's plan from the beginning was one man and one woman for life.

Old Testament links: Genesis 2:24 (alluded to)

19:7 *They say to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to divorce her?"*

The Pharisees pushed back. "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to divorce her?" They pointed to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In their minds, Moses commanded divorce.

But read that passage carefully. Moses did not command anyone to divorce. He gave rules for a situation that was already happening. If a man divorced his wife, he had to give her a written certificate. This protected the woman. It showed she was free and could not be accused of adultery if she married again. It also kept men from taking back a wife they had sent away after she married another.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 24:1 (alluded to)

19:8 *He says to them, "Moses, in view of your hardness of heart, permitted you to divorce your wives; but from **the** beginning it has not been so.*

Jesus corrected them. "Moses, in view of your hardness of heart, permitted you to divorce your wives." Notice the change of words. They said Moses commanded it. Jesus said Moses permitted it. There is a big difference.

Why did Moses allow it at all? Because of "your hardness of heart." Sin had entered the world, and people were cruel and stubborn. Moses' law limited the damage that sin caused. "But from the beginning it has not been so." Divorce was never part of God's original plan. It is a result of sin. God hates the tearing apart of what He has joined (Malachi 2:16).

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 24:1 (alluded to)

19:9 *And I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and the **one** having married a divorced **woman** commits adultery."*

"And I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and the one having married a divorced woman commits adultery."

This is one of the most debated verses in the New Testament, so I will go slowly. The word for sexual immorality is porneia, a broad word that covers all kinds of sexual sin. Jesus says that a man who divorces his wife for any reason other than this, and marries another, commits adultery. In God's eyes the first marriage was not truly ended, so the second union is adultery.

Good Bible teachers read the exception in different ways. Many Protestants believe that when a spouse has been sexually unfaithful, the innocent partner may divorce and is free to remarry without sin. Many also believe Paul adds a second case in 1 Corinthians 7:15, when an unbelieving spouse leaves the believer. Others believe Jesus allows separation or divorce for sexual sin but no remarriage while the former spouse is living, and they point to Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18, which have no exception. Still others believe porneia here refers to unfaithfulness during the betrothal period before the wedding (as with Joseph and Mary in 1:18-19) or to marriages the Law forbade, such as close relatives. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that a true marriage cannot be dissolved, though it may declare that a marriage was never valid. I am not going to settle this debate here. What every view agrees on is that God's plan is lifelong faithfulness, that divorce is never something to take lightly, and that Jesus set a far higher standard than the easy divorce of His day.

Let me add a word as a pastor. Many people reading this have been through divorce. Some were sinned against. Some sinned. Some both. If that is you, hear me. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. Jesus did not come to crush the broken. The woman at the well had five husbands, and Jesus offered her living water (John 4:16-18). Whatever your past, there is forgiveness and a new start in Christ. Bring it to Him, seek godly counsel from your pastor, and walk forward in obedience from here.

19:10 *His disciples say to Him, "If the case of the man with the wife is so, it is not better to marry."*

His disciples said, "If the case of the man with the wife is so, it is not better to marry." The disciples had grown up in a world of easy divorce. Jesus' standard shocked them. If a man could not get out of a marriage when he wanted to, maybe it would be safer not to get married at all.

Their reaction tells us how high Jesus set the bar. Marriage is a lifelong commitment, and it should not be entered into lightly.

19:11 *And He said to them, "Not all receive this word, but **those** to whom it has been given.*

"Not all receive this word, but those to whom it has been given." What word does Jesus mean? Most likely He means the disciples' statement that it is better not to marry. Staying single for life is not for everyone. It is for those to whom God has given it as a gift. Paul says the same thing: each person has his own gift from God, one this way and one that way (1 Corinthians 7:7).

19:12 *For there are eunuchs who were born so from a mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens. The **one** being able to receive **it**, let him receive **it**."*

Jesus speaks of three kinds of eunuchs. A eunuch was a man who could not have children. Some were "born so from a mother's womb." Some "were made eunuchs by men." In the ancient world, kings had some servants castrated, especially those who served in the royal household. And some "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens."

That third group does not mean men who harm their bodies. The text points to a choice of the will for the kingdom's sake. It means people who choose to stay single so they can serve God with undivided hearts. Paul was one of them (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). Jesus Himself never married. Singleness is not second best. For those God calls to it, it is a gift. "The one being able to receive it, let him receive it." The church should honor both marriage and singleness as ways to serve the Lord.

19:13 *Then little children were brought to Him, so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; but the disciples rebuked them.*

"Then little children were brought to Him, so that He might lay His hands on them and pray." Parents in Israel often brought their children to a respected teacher to be blessed. These parents wanted Jesus to bless their kids.

"But the disciples rebuked them." Why? Maybe they thought Jesus was too busy and too important for children. He was on His way to Jerusalem, and they had serious matters on their minds. They had already forgotten what Jesus taught in 18:1-5 about receiving little children.

19:14 *But Jesus said, "Permit the little children, and do not forbid them to come to Me; for of such is the kingdom of the heavens."*

Jesus said, "Permit the little children, and do not forbid them to come to Me; for of such is the kingdom of the heavens." Mark tells us Jesus was indignant with the disciples (Mark 10:14). He did not want anyone standing between children and Himself.

"For of such is the kingdom of the heavens." The kingdom belongs to those who come like children: humble, trusting, and dependent. Children matter to Jesus. They are not the church of tomorrow. They are part of His concern today. Parents, grandparents, and teachers, bring them to Jesus. Teach them His word, pray with them, and never treat them as a bother.

19:15 *And having laid His hands on them, He departed from there.*

"And having laid His hands on them, He departed from there." Jesus did what the parents asked. He blessed them. We do not know who these children grew up to be. But each one had been held by the Son of God. What a gift that was.

19:16 *And look, one having come to Him said, "Good Teacher, what good **thing** shall I do so that I may have eternal life?"*

"And look, one having come to Him" asked, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do so that I may have eternal life?" Matthew tells us he was young (19:20) and rich (19:22). Luke calls him a ruler (Luke 18:18), maybe a leader in the local synagogue. He had youth, wealth, and position, everything the world says makes a man successful. Yet he knew something was missing.

Look at his question. He wanted to know what "good thing" he could do to earn eternal life. He thought of salvation as something to achieve. That is how most people think. They believe heaven is for those who do enough good. Jesus is about to show him, and us, that no one can do enough.

19:17 *And He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one **is** good except One, God. But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

Jesus answered, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except One, God." Jesus was not denying that He is good or that He is God. He was making the young man think. If only God is good, and you call Me good, do you understand who I am?

He was also challenging the young man's idea of goodness. If only God is truly good, then the young man was not good either. Then Jesus said, "If you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments." Is Jesus teaching that we are saved by keeping the Law? No. He was using the Law the way God meant it to be used, as a mirror to show us our sin (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24). The young man thought he could keep it. Jesus would show him he could not.

19:18-19 *He says to Him, "Which **ones**?" And Jesus said, "'You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

"Which ones?" he asked. Jesus listed the commandments about how we treat other people: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother. Then He added Leviticus 19:18: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Notice which commandments Jesus did not list. He left out the commands about loving God first, having no other gods, and not coveting. Jesus was going to test the young man on those very points in a moment.

The five commandments Jesus listed come from the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:12-16, which Moses repeated in Deuteronomy 5:16-20.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:18 (quoted); Exodus 20:12 (quoted); Exodus 20:13-16 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:16 (quoted); Deuteronomy 5:17-20 (quoted)

19:20 *The young man says to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"*

"All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" He probably believed it. Outwardly he had lived a clean, respectable life. But had he truly loved his neighbor as himself? He was about to find out.

Yet even while claiming to have kept everything, he asked, "What do I still lack?" Deep down he knew. All his rule keeping had not given him peace with God. Many people today live decent lives and still feel that empty place inside. Being good enough never fills it.

19:21 *Jesus said to him, "If you desire to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to **the** poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

"If you desire to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Perfect here means complete, lacking nothing. Jesus went straight to the one thing that ruled this young man's heart: his money.

Is Jesus saying that every Christian must sell everything to be saved? No. Zacchaeus gave half his goods to the poor (Luke 19:8), and Jesus did not ask for the rest. Jesus did not tell every rich person in the Gospels to do this. But He told this man, because money was his god. The command exposed that he was breaking the first commandment: you shall have no other gods before Me. He did not love God above everything, and he did not love his neighbor, the poor, as himself.

And notice the last words: "come, follow Me." The real issue was not money. It was whether he would trust and follow Jesus. Salvation is not earned by giving things away. It comes by turning from whatever we trust in and following Christ. Each of us has to ask: what would be hardest for me to give up for Jesus? That may be the very thing standing between me and Him.

19:22 *But the young man, having heard the word, went away grieving; for he was **one** having much property.*

"But the young man, having heard the word, went away grieving; for he was one having much property." This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Mark says he came running to Jesus (Mark 10:17). He walked away grieving. He was offered treasure in heaven and chose treasure on earth.

This young man came to Jesus asking about eternal life and went away sadder than he came. He wanted eternal life, but not more than he wanted his money. Jesus let him go. He did not chase him down with an easier offer. The gospel has no discount price.

19:23 *And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you that a rich **man** will enter with difficulty into the kingdom of the heavens.*

"Truly I say to you that a rich man will enter with difficulty into the kingdom of the heavens." Why is it hard for the rich? Because riches make people feel they do not need God. When you have enough money to solve most of your problems, it is easy to trust your bank account instead of the Lord (1 Timothy 6:17). Jesus already warned that the deceitfulness of riches chokes the word (13:22).

Most of us reading this are rich by the standards of most of the world in history. This warning is for us.

19:24 *And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through **the** eye of a needle than for a rich **man** to enter into 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 into the kingdom of God." The camel was the largest animal in Israel. The eye of a needle was the smallest opening anyone knew. Jesus is saying it is impossible.

You may have heard that there was a small gate in Jerusalem called the Needle's Eye, and a camel could squeeze through it on its knees if its load was taken off. That is a nice sermon illustration, but there is no evidence from the ancient world that such a gate existed. The story seems to come from much later. Jesus meant a real needle. He was not saying it is hard for a rich man to be saved. He was saying it is impossible, humanly speaking. The disciples understood Him that way, as the next verse shows.

19:25 *And His disciples, having heard, were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then is able to be saved?"*

"His disciples, having heard, were exceedingly astonished." They asked, "Who then is able to be saved?" Why were they so shocked? Many Jews of that day believed riches were a sign of God's blessing. If the rich, whom God had clearly blessed, could not be saved, then who could?

That is exactly the right question. And the answer is no one, if salvation depends on us.

19:26 *And Jesus, having looked at **them**, said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Jesus looked at them and said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Here is the key to the whole passage. No one can save himself, rich or poor. We cannot earn eternal life by being good, keeping commandments, or giving things away. "With men this is impossible."

"But with God all things are possible." Salvation is God's work. He can change the heart of a rich man, or any man. He can loosen the grip of money and make us want Him more than anything. That is what grace does. The young man asked what he could do. Jesus' answer is that we cannot do it, but God can. Salvation is a gift, received by faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

19:27 *Then Peter, answering, said to Him, "Look, we have left all things and followed You; what then will there be for us?"*

Peter spoke up. "Look, we have left all things and followed You; what then will there be for us?" The disciples had done what the young man would not do. They left their boats, their nets, their tax booth, and their families. Peter wanted to know if it was worth it.

It is an honest question, and Jesus does not scold him for it. He answers with a promise.

19:28 *And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on **the** throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

"Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

"The regeneration" means the new birth of the world. This is the time when Jesus returns to earth and sets up His kingdom, and the earth itself is renewed (Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-21). Jesus will sit on "the throne of His glory," the throne of David that was promised to Him (Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 25:31).

The apostles will sit on twelve thrones, "judging the twelve tribes of Israel." To judge here means to rule and govern, like the judges of the Old Testament. This promise only makes sense if God still has a future for the nation of Israel. I believe He does. The twelve tribes will be restored under their Messiah in the thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6; Romans 11:25-29). God has not cast away His people.

19:29 *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for the sake of My name will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.*

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for the sake of My name will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life." This promise is not just for the twelve. It is for "everyone."

What does a hundredfold mean? Mark says it begins "now in this time" (Mark 10:30). When you lose family for Jesus' sake, God gives you a much larger family in His church: brothers, sisters, mothers, and children in the faith. When you give up a home, you find many homes open to you among believers. And in the age to come, eternal life. No one ever gives up anything for Jesus and comes out behind.

19:30 *But many first will be last, and last first."*

"But many first will be last, and last first." This saying warns against pride. The rich young man seemed to be first: young, rich, respected, moral. He went away last. The disciples seemed last: fishermen and a tax collector. They will sit on thrones.

The warning is also for the disciples. Peter's question had a bit of self-interest in it. Jesus will explain this saying with a parable in the next chapter (20:1-16). God does not run His kingdom the way the world does. Those who think they deserve first place may find themselves at the back. Those who humbly serve will be honored by Him.

Chapter 19 Summary

Jesus leaves Galilee for Judea beyond the Jordan. The Pharisees test Him about divorce for any cause, and He takes them back to creation: God made them male and female, the two become one flesh, and what God joined together man must not separate. Moses permitted divorce because of hard hearts, but it was not so from the beginning. Jesus teaches that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery. When the disciples say it may be better not to marry, Jesus says lifelong singleness is a gift given to some for the sake of the kingdom. He welcomes and blesses little children, for of such is the kingdom. A rich young man asks what good thing he must do to have eternal life. Jesus points him to the commandments and then tells him to sell his possessions and follow Him, and he goes away grieving. Jesus teaches that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom, and that salvation is impossible with men but possible with God. He promises the twelve that they will sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel in the regeneration, and that all who leave everything for Him will receive a hundredfold and eternal life.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What was the debate behind the Pharisees' question about divorce "for every cause"? (19:3)

2. Where did Jesus go to answer their question, and what does that teach us about marriage? (19:4-6)

3. Did Moses command divorce or permit it, and why? (19:7-8)

4. What exception did Jesus give, and what are some of the ways Bible teachers understand it? (19:9)

5. What does Jesus say about those who stay single for the sake of the kingdom? (19:11-12)

6. Why did the disciples try to keep the children away, and how did Jesus respond? (19:13-14)

7. What did the rich young man think he needed to do to have eternal life, and what did Jesus show him? (19:16-22)

8. Why is it impossible for anyone to be saved by his own effort, and what makes it possible? (19:25-26)

9. What would be the hardest thing for you to give up for Jesus, and is it standing between you and Him? (19:21-22)

10. How have you seen God give back more than you gave up for His sake? (19:29)

Chapter 20: The Last Will Be First

Scripture

20:1-16 "For the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a master of a house, who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. And having agreed with the workers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And having gone out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the marketplace idle, and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever may be right I will give you.' And they went away. Again, having gone out about ***the*** sixth and ninth hour, he did likewise. And about the eleventh hour, having gone out, he found others standing idle, and he says to them, 'Why have you stood here all the day idle?' They say to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He says to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.' And evening having come, the master of the vineyard says to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them the wages, having begun from the last to the first.' And those ***hired*** about the eleventh hour, having come, received each a denarius. And the first, having come, thought that they would receive more; and they themselves also received each a denarius. And having received ***it***, they were grumbling against the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he, answering, said to one of them, 'Friend, I do not wrong you. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what ***is*** yours and go. But I wish to give to this last ***one*** as also to you. Or is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what ***is*** mine? Is your eye evil because I am good?' Thus the last will be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few chosen."

20:17-34 And Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside privately on the road, and He said to them, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and they will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and to flog and to crucify; and on the third day He will rise again." Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, worshiping and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She says to Him, "Say that these two sons of mine may sit, one at Your right and one at ***Your*** left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus, answering, said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup which I am about to drink, and to be baptized ***with*** the baptism with which I am baptized?" They say to Him, "We are able." And He says to them, "My cup you will indeed drink, and ***with*** the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized; but to sit at My right and at My left is not Mine to give, but ***it is for those*** for whom it has been prepared by My Father." And the ten, having heard, were indignant about the two brothers. But Jesus, having called them to ***Himself***, said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and the great ***ones*** exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life ***as*** a ransom for many." And as they were going out from Jericho, a great crowd followed Him. And look, two blind ***men*** sitting beside the road, having heard that Jesus is passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" And the crowd rebuked them, that they should be silent; but they were crying out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" And Jesus, having stopped, called them and

said, "What do you wish ***that*** I should do for you?" They say to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." And Jesus, having been moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

Chapter 20 Preview

At the end of chapter 19, Peter asked what the disciples would get for leaving everything to follow Jesus. Jesus promised them a great reward, then added a warning: "many first will be last, and last first" (19:30). Chapter 20 opens with a parable that explains that warning. A landowner hires workers at different hours of the day and pays every one of them the same wage. The ones who worked all day grumble. The owner answers that he has wronged no one, and that he has the right to be generous.

Then Jesus, on the road up to Jerusalem, tells the Twelve for the third time that He will be handed over, killed, and raised on the third day. Right after that, James and John, through their mother, ask for the best seats in His kingdom. Jesus turns the request into a lesson on greatness: the great one is the servant, because "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." The chapter ends outside Jericho, where two blind men call Him "Son of David" and receive their sight.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-2 *"For the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a master of a house, who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. And having agreed with the workers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

The first word, For, ties this parable to the last verse of chapter 19. Jesus is explaining what He meant about the first and the last.

A vineyard owner went out "early in the morning," at sunrise, to the marketplace where day laborers waited to be hired. A denarius was a Roman silver coin, the normal pay for one full day's work by a laborer or a soldier. These men agreed to the wage before they started. They knew exactly what they would be paid, and it was a fair amount.

In the Old Testament, God's people are often pictured as His vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). Here the vineyard is the place of service in God's kingdom, and the owner stands for God Himself.

20:3-5 *And having gone out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the marketplace idle, and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever may be right I will give you.' And they went away. Again, having gone out about* ***the*** *sixth and ninth hour, he did likewise.*

The Jewish day was counted from sunrise, about 6 a.m. The third hour was about 9 in the morning, the sixth hour about noon, and the ninth hour about 3 in the afternoon.

Each time the owner went back to the marketplace, he found more men standing idle, which here means without work, not lazy. Notice that he did not agree on a set wage with these later workers.

He said, "whatever may be right I will give you." They went to work trusting the owner to be fair. That is a picture of how we come to God. We do not bargain with Him. We trust Him.

20:6-7 *And about the eleventh hour, having gone out, he found others standing idle, and he says to them, 'Why have you stood here all the day idle?' They say to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He says to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'*

The eleventh hour was about 5 in the afternoon, with only one hour of daylight left. The owner asked why these men had stood there all day doing nothing. Their answer was simple: "Because no one hired us." They were willing. No one had called them.

Even at the end of the day, the owner still went out looking for workers. That is the heart of God. He keeps calling people right up to the last hour. Some people come to Christ as children and serve Him for seventy years. Others come to Him late in life, even on their deathbed, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43). God receives them all.

20:8-10 *And evening having come, the master of the vineyard says to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them the wages, having begun from the last to the first.' And those **hired** about the eleventh hour, having come, received each a denarius. And the first, having come, thought that they would receive more; and they themselves also received each a denarius.*

The Law of Moses said a hired worker had to be paid at the end of the day (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). The owner told his foreman to pay them "having begun from the last to the first." He did this on purpose, so the first workers would see what the last ones received.

The men who worked one hour got a full denarius. You can imagine the first workers doing the math. If one hour earns a denarius, twelve hours should earn much more. But when their turn came, they "received each a denarius," exactly what they had agreed to.

20:11-12 *And having received **it**, they were grumbling against the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'*

Now they grumbled. Their complaint was not that they were underpaid. It was that someone else was treated as well as they were: "you made them equal to us." They had "borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat," and they felt that should count for something.

I think every one of us can understand that feeling. That is what makes this parable so searching. The grumblers sound like the older brother in Luke 15:25-32, who was angry that his father threw a party for the son who wasted everything. When we start comparing what God gives us with what He gives others, we stop seeing grace and start keeping score.

20:13-15 *But he, answering, said to one of them, 'Friend, I do not wrong you. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what **is** yours and go. But I wish to give to this last **one** as also to you. Or is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what **is** mine? Is your eye evil because I am good?'*

The owner answered one of them and called him Friend. He was not harsh. He made three points. First, "I do not wrong you." He paid exactly what was agreed. Second, he had the right to be generous with his own money: "is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is mine?" Third, he put his finger on the real problem: "Is your eye evil because I am good?" In Jewish speech, an evil eye meant a jealous, stingy heart (Deuteronomy 15:9).

Here is the lesson. Salvation is not a wage. No one earns eternal life by putting in more hours than someone else. Everything God gives is grace, and grace by its nature is given to people who do not deserve it. If we were all paid what we earned, none of us would want the wage (Romans 6:23).

20:16 *Thus the last will be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few chosen."*

"Thus the last will be first, and the first last." Jesus says the same words as 19:30, only in reverse order, so the parable sits between them like bookends. In God's kingdom the order of this world gets turned upside down. The ones who think they have earned the front of the line may find themselves at the back. The ones who came late, knowing they had nothing to offer, are welcomed in full.

"For many are called, but few chosen." The invitation goes out widely, but not everyone who hears it truly receives it with a humble heart. Jesus uses the same saying again in 22:14. In the setting of this parable, the warning is aimed at people like the grumbling workers: religious people who served God in a spirit of bargaining and resented His mercy to sinners. That fits the Pharisees well, and it is a warning for church people today.

Does this mean all believers receive exactly the same reward in heaven? No. Other passages teach that God rewards faithful service (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:8-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10). This parable is about the gift of salvation itself, which is the same for every believer, and about the attitude of our hearts toward God's generosity.

20:17-19 *And Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside privately on the road, and He said to them, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and they will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and to flog and to crucify; and on the third day He will rise again."*

Jesus was now "going up to Jerusalem." Jerusalem sits high in the hills of Judea, so travelers always spoke of going up to it. He took the Twelve aside privately on the road and told them, for the third time, what was waiting there (16:21; 17:22-23).

This is the most detailed of the three predictions. Jesus says He will be "handed over to the chief priests and scribes." The chief priests were the leading priests in Jerusalem, most of them Sadducees, and the scribes were the trained experts in the Law of Moses. They would "condemn Him to death." Then they would "hand Him over to the Gentiles," meaning the Romans, because the Jewish leaders did not have the legal right to carry out a death sentence under Roman rule

(John 18:31). A Gentile is anyone who is not Jewish. The Romans would "mock and to flog and to crucify" Him. Every part of this came true in chapters 26 and 27.

But Jesus never ends the prediction at the cross. "On the third day He will rise again." He was not a victim caught off guard. He walked toward Jerusalem knowing every detail, because He came to die for us.

20:20-21 *Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, worshiping and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She says to Him, "Say that these two sons of mine may sit, one at Your right and one at* ***Your*** *left, in Your kingdom."*

Right after Jesus spoke about His death, "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" came with her sons, James and John. Comparing 27:56 with Mark 15:40, many Bible teachers think her name was Salome, and some believe she was the sister of Jesus' mother, which would make James and John His cousins. Scripture does not say this plainly, so I hold it loosely.

She bowed before Him and asked that her two sons sit "one at Your right and one at Your left, in Your kingdom." Those were the two highest places of honor beside a king. Mark 10:35 tells us the request really came from James and John themselves. They believed Jesus was the King and that His kingdom was coming. That part was right. But they had just heard Him speak of suffering and death, and they were thinking about thrones.

20:22 *But Jesus, answering, said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup which I am about to drink, and to be baptized* ***with*** *the baptism with which I am baptized?" They say to Him, "We are able."*

"You do not know what you are asking for." To sit beside Jesus in glory, a person had to share His suffering. The cup in the Old Testament is often a picture of what God pours out for someone to drink, and many times it means His wrath against sin (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17). In Gethsemane Jesus will pray about this same cup (26:39). His baptism here means being plunged under, overwhelmed by suffering.

James and John answered quickly: "We are able." They meant it, but they did not know what they were saying. Within days they would run away when He was arrested (26:56).

20:23 *And He says to them, "My cup you will indeed drink, and* ***with*** *the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized; but to sit at My right and at My left is not Mine to give, but* ***it is for those*** *for whom it has been prepared by My Father."*

Jesus told them that they would drink His cup. They would suffer for Him. James was the first of the twelve apostles to die for Christ, killed with the sword by King Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-2). John lived a long life, but he suffered for the gospel and was exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). They did not share Christ's cup of wrath for sin. Only He could drink that. But they shared in His sufferings as His servants.

The places at His right and left, Jesus said, "is not Mine to give." The Son was not saying He lacked power. He was showing His submission to the Father's plan. Those seats are "for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

20:24 *And the ten, having heard, were indignant about the two brothers.*

The other ten disciples "were indignant about the two brothers." Were they angry because the request was wrong? Probably not. More likely they were angry because James and John asked first. The same pride was in all of them. Luke 22:24 tells us they argued about who was greatest even at the Last Supper. It is easy to see pride in someone else and miss it in ourselves.

20:25-27 *But Jesus, having called them to **Himself**, said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and the great **ones** exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you, let him be your slave;*

Jesus called them together and gave them a lesson that turns the world's idea of greatness upside down. Among "the rulers of the Gentiles," greatness means being on top and giving orders. The great ones "exercise lordship over them."

"But it will not be so among you." In Christ's kingdom, the one who wants to be great must be "your servant," and the one who wants to be first must be "your slave." A servant waited on others. A slave belonged to someone else and had no rights of his own. That is the kind of leadership Jesus calls for in His church. Pastors, elders, and every believer are called to serve, not to be served. If we want a title more than we want a towel, we have missed the point (John 13:12-15).

20:28 *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many."*

This is one of the key verses of the whole Gospel. Jesus points to Himself as the pattern: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

"Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite name for Himself. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14, where one "like a son of man" receives an everlasting kingdom from God. The King of glory came to serve.

A ransom was the price paid to set a slave or a prisoner free. Jesus paid that price with His own life. The word for here carries the idea of taking someone else's place. He died in our place, as our substitute. Isaiah 53:12 says the Servant of the Lord "bore the sin of many." Here the cross is not an accident or a failure. It is the reason He came. The word many does not mean that some are left out of His offer. It points to the great number of people His one death would set free (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

20:29 *And as they were going out from Jericho, a great crowd followed Him.*

They were now leaving Jericho, about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem and the last major town on the road up from the Jordan Valley. Crowds of pilgrims were heading to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and many of them followed Jesus.

Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 tell this story too. Mark names one blind man, Bartimaeus, and Luke places the healing as Jesus came near Jericho. Matthew tells us there were two men. Some explain this by the fact that there were two Jerichos in that day, the old town and the newer Roman town built by Herod, so Jesus could have been leaving one and entering the other. Mark and Luke may simply focus on the one who was better known. The accounts do not contradict each other.

20:30-31 *And look, two blind **men** sitting beside the road, having heard that Jesus is passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" And the crowd rebuked them, that they should be silent; but they were crying out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"*

These two blind men could not see, but they saw something the leaders of Israel would not see. They cried out, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" "Son of David" was a title for the Messiah, the promised King from David's family line (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The word Messiah means anointed one, and Christ is the Greek form of the same word. Matthew opened his book by calling Jesus "son of David" (1:1), and here two blind beggars call Him by that royal name just before He rides into David's city as King.

The crowd told them to be quiet. They only shouted louder. When people try to keep you from coming to Jesus, keep calling out to Him.

20:32-33 *And Jesus, having stopped, called them and said, "What do you wish **that** I should do for you?" They say to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened."*

Jesus stopped. A crowd was pressing on Him, He was on His way to the cross, and He stopped for two blind beggars on the side of the road. Then He asked, "What do you wish that I should do for you?"

That is the same question He had asked the mother of James and John (20:21). Look at the difference in the answers. The brothers asked for power and position. The blind men asked for mercy: "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." Jesus already knew what they needed, but He invited them to ask. He still invites us to bring our needs to Him in prayer (Philippians 4:6).

20:34 *And Jesus, having been moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.*

"And Jesus, having been moved with compassion, touched their eyes." The word for compassion means a deep feeling from the inside. Jesus did not heal them coldly or from a distance. He felt for them, and He touched them.

"Immediately their eyes received sight." There was no waiting period. And the first thing they did with their new sight was to follow Him. That is what real faith does. Jesus does not open our eyes so we can go our own way. He opens them so we can see Him and walk behind Him.

Chapter 20 Summary

Jesus told the parable of the workers in the vineyard to show that the gift of God's kingdom is by grace, not by earning. Workers hired at dawn and at the last hour all received the same denarius, and the owner rebuked the grumblers for resenting his generosity, because the last will be first and the first last. On the road up to Jerusalem, Jesus told the Twelve a third time that He would be handed over, condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified, and raised on the third day. When James and John, through their mother, asked for the places of honor in His kingdom, Jesus told them they would share His cup of suffering and taught that greatness in His kingdom means being a servant, just as He came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Leaving Jericho, He had compassion on two blind men who called Him Son of David, opened their eyes, and they followed Him.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What did the first workers agree to be paid, and what did they receive? (20:2, 10)

2. Why did the first workers grumble against the owner? (20:11-12)

3. What three things did the owner say in answer to the grumbler? (20:13-15)

4. What details did Jesus give about His coming death in this third prediction? (20:18-19)

5. What did the mother of James and John ask for, and how did Jesus answer? (20:21-23)

6. How did Jesus say greatness works among His followers? (20:26-27)

7. What does it mean that Jesus gave His life "as a ransom for many"? (20:28)

8. What did the blind men call Jesus, and what did they do after they received their sight? (20:30, 34)

9. Have you ever resented God's kindness to someone else? How does this parable speak to that?

10. Where is one place this week where you could serve someone instead of waiting to be served?

Chapter 21: The King Comes to Jerusalem

Scripture

21:1-11 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; having untied ***them***, bring ***them*** to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you will say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even a colt, ***the*** foal of a beast of burden.'" And the disciples, having gone and having done just as Jesus commanded them, brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments on them, and they set ***Him*** on them. And the very large crowd spread their own garments on the road; and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading ***them*** on the road. And the crowds, those going before and those following, were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed ***is*** the ***One*** coming in ***the*** name of ***the*** Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when He had entered into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, the ***One*** from Nazareth of Galilee."

21:12-22 And Jesus entered into the temple of God and cast out all those selling and buying in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling the doves. And He says to them, "It has been written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers." And blind and lame ***people*** came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But the chief priests and the scribes, having seen the wonders that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," were indignant, and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus says to them, "Yes; did you never read, 'Out of ***the*** mouth of infants and nursing ***ones*** You have prepared praise for Yourself'?" And having left them, He went out of the city to Bethany, and He spent the night there. And in the morning, returning into the city, He became hungry. And having seen one fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only. And He says to it, "Let no fruit come from you any longer, forever." And immediately the fig tree withered. And the disciples, having seen ***it***, marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither immediately?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do the ***thing*** of the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and be thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And all things, as many as you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

21:23-32 And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, saying, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "I also will ask you one word, which if you tell Me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where was it? From heaven or from men?" And they were reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the crowd; for all hold John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things. But what do you think? A man had two children, and having come to the first, he said, 'Child, go,

work today in my vineyard.' And answering, he said, 'I do not want to'; but afterward, having regretted ***it***, he went. And having come to the second, he said likewise. And answering, he said, 'I ***will***, sir,' and he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father?" They say to Him, "The first." Jesus says to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going before you into the kingdom of God. For John came to you in ***the*** way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and you, having seen ***it***, did not regret ***it*** afterward so as to believe him.

21:33-46 Hear another parable. There was a certain man, a master of a house, who planted a vineyard, and placed a fence around it, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to farmers, and went abroad. And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to receive his fruits. And the farmers, having taken his slaves, beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they did to them likewise. And afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, having seen the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and take possession of his inheritance.' And having taken him, they cast ***him*** out of the vineyard and killed ***him***. Therefore, when the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" They say to Him, "Wretches! He will wretchedly destroy them, and he will rent out the vineyard to other farmers who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus says to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, '***The*** stone which those building rejected, this has become ***the*** head of ***the*** corner; this was from ***the*** Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Because of this I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation producing its fruits. And the ***one*** having fallen on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." And the chief priests and the Pharisees, having heard His parables, knew that He is speaking about them. And seeking to lay hold of Him, they feared the crowds, since they were holding Him as a prophet.

Chapter 21 Preview

This chapter begins the last week of Jesus' life before the cross. He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, just as Zechariah said the King would come, and the crowds shout "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Then He walks into the temple and drives out the people buying and selling there. He heals the blind and the lame, and children sing His praise while the chief priests fume.

The next morning He curses a fig tree that has leaves but no fruit, a picture of a nation full of religion but empty of the fruit God wanted. When the leaders challenge His authority, He answers with a question about John the Baptist, and then tells two parables aimed straight at them. One is about two sons. The other is about wicked farmers who kill the owner's son. The leaders know He is talking about them, and they start looking for a way to arrest Him.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,*

They were coming up the road from Jericho (20:29). Bethphage was a small village on the Mount of Olives, close to Bethany, just east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is a ridge that rises across the Kidron Valley from the city and looks down on the temple.

This hill matters in Bible prophecy. Zechariah 14:4 says the Lord's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives in the day He comes to fight for Jerusalem. Jesus ascended to heaven from this mountain (Acts 1:9-12), and the angels said He would come back in the same way. He comes to the city from the Mount of Olives now, and He will come again there.

21:2-3 *saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; having untied **them**, bring **them** to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you will say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."*

Jesus sent two disciples to the next village with exact instructions. They would find "a donkey tied, and a colt with her." If anyone asked, they were to say, "The Lord has need of them." Jesus knew what they would find before they found it. Whether the owner was a follower who had arranged this ahead of time, or Jesus simply knew by His divine knowledge, Scripture does not say. Either way, the Lord was in full control of the day.

Notice the title He uses for Himself: "The Lord." The owner of the animals would give them up to the true Owner of everything.

21:4-5 *And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even a colt, **the** foal of a beast of burden.'"*

Matthew explains why this happened: "so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled." He quotes Zechariah 9:9, with the opening line taken from Isaiah 62:11, "Say to the daughter of Zion." The daughter of Zion means the people of Jerusalem.

"Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey." Kings in that day rode into a city on a war horse when they came to conquer. A donkey was the animal of a king who came in peace. Solomon rode King David's mule on the day he was crowned (1 Kings 1:33). Jesus was presenting Himself openly as Israel's King, but a gentle King who came to bring peace, not to crush Rome.

Here Jesus Himself arranged a public showing of who He is. Until now He often told people not to spread the word about Him. Now He makes His claim plain. He is the Son of David, the King promised in the prophets.

Matthew mentions both a donkey and her colt. Mark, Luke, and John speak only of the colt, the one Jesus rode. Matthew adds the mother, perhaps because a young colt that had never been ridden (Mark 11:2) would go more calmly with its mother beside it. Zechariah's words name the donkey and the colt, and Matthew shows both were there.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 9:9 (quoted); Isaiah 62:11 (alluded to)

21:6-7 *And the disciples, having gone and having done just as Jesus commanded them, brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments on them, and they set **Him** on them.*

The disciples did exactly what Jesus told them. They put their outer garments on the animals as a saddle, and "they set Him on them." That most likely means they set Him on the garments placed on the colt, not that He rode two animals at once.

Here Zechariah 9:9 came true before the crowd's eyes.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 9:9 (fulfilled)

21:8 *And the very large crowd spread their own garments on the road; and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading **them** on the road.*

The crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches and laid them down. Spreading garments in front of someone was a way of honoring a new king. When Jehu was anointed king of Israel, the men took their garments and put them under him (2 Kings 9:13). John 12:13 tells us the branches were palm branches, which is why we call this Palm Sunday.

21:9 *And the crowds, those going before and those following, were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed **is** the **One** coming in **the** name of **the** Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means save, we pray, or save now. It comes from Psalm 118:25. Over time it also became a shout of praise. The next line comes from Psalm 118:26, a psalm the pilgrims sang as they came up to Jerusalem for the feasts.

Calling Jesus "the Son of David" was calling Him the Messiah. The crowd was right in what they said. But most of them wanted a Messiah who would throw off Rome right away. Within a few days, many voices in the city would be shouting, "Let Him be crucified!" (27:22). A crowd's praise is easy to win and easy to lose. Jesus is looking for hearts that will follow Him when it costs something.

Old Testament links: Psalm 118:26 (quoted); Psalm 118:25 (alluded to)

21:10-11 *And when He had entered into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, the **One** from Nazareth of Galilee."*

"All the city was stirred." The word means shaken, the way an earthquake shakes the ground. Matthew uses the same word for the earthquake at the cross (27:51). Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims for the Passover, and the whole city wanted to know, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, the One from Nazareth of Galilee." They were right that He was a prophet, the Prophet Moses promised (Deuteronomy 18:15). But He was far more than that. That question, "Who is this?", is still the most important question anyone can ask. Matthew wrote his whole book to answer it.

21:12 *And Jesus entered into the temple of God and cast out all those selling and buying in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling the doves.*

Jesus went into the temple. The temple area had several courts. The outer court was called the Court of the Gentiles, the only part non-Jews could enter to pray. That court had been turned into a market. People who traveled from far away needed animals for their sacrifices, and they needed to change their money into the coins the temple accepted for the yearly temple tax. The money changers charged a fee for the exchange, and the animal sellers often charged high prices. Doves were the offering of the poor (Leviticus 12:8), so even the poorest worshipers were being squeezed.

Jesus "cast out all those selling and buying" and "overturned the tables of the money changers." This was not a man losing His temper. It was the Lord of the temple cleaning His house. John 2:13-17 tells of an earlier cleansing at the start of His ministry. Three years later, the market was back.

21:13 *And He says to them, "It has been written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."*

Jesus quoted two prophets. From Isaiah 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." In Isaiah the full verse says it would be a house of prayer for all peoples, and the market was set up in the one court where Gentiles could come to pray. From Jeremiah 7:11, "a den of robbers." A den is where robbers hide after they have done their stealing. Jeremiah used the phrase for people who sinned all week and then ran to the temple, thinking it would keep them safe.

God's house is meant to be a place where people meet Him. When religion becomes a business, or a hiding place for people who don't want to change, the Lord is not pleased.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 7:11 (quoted); Isaiah 56:7 (quoted)

21:14 *And blind and lame **people** came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.*

After the tables were turned over, "blind and lame people came to Him in the temple, and He healed them." What a picture. The traders were thrown out, and the hurting were welcomed in.

In 2 Samuel 5:8, a saying arose that the blind and the lame would not come into the house. Now the Son of David brings them into the temple courts and makes them whole. That is the kind of King He is.

21:15-16 *But the chief priests and the scribes, having seen the wonders that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," were indignant, and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus says to them, "Yes; did you never read, 'Out of **the** mouth of infants and nursing **ones** You have prepared praise for Yourself'?"*

The chief priests and the scribes saw two things: "the wonders that He did" and "the children crying out in the temple." The miracles should have opened their eyes. Instead, they "were indignant." They were angry that anyone would call Jesus the Son of David.

"Do You hear what these are saying?" They wanted Him to stop the children. Jesus answered with Psalm 8:2: "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing ones You have prepared praise for Yourself." In that psalm, the praise of little children is given to God Himself. Jesus is saying that the children were right to praise Him, and that God had planned it. The religious experts with all their learning missed what the children saw.

Old Testament links: Psalm 8:2 (quoted)

21:17 *And having left them, He went out of the city to Bethany, and He spent the night there.*

Jesus left the city each night and stayed in Bethany, about two miles east of Jerusalem on the far side of the Mount of Olives. Bethany was the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:1), and it is likely He stayed with them. Even the Son of God valued the rest and company of close friends in His hardest week.

21:18-19 *And in the morning, returning into the city, He became hungry. And having seen one fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only. And He says to it, "Let no fruit come from you any longer, forever." And immediately the fig tree withered.*

In the morning, on the way back into the city, Jesus was hungry. He was fully God, but He was also fully man, and He felt hunger like we do.

He saw a fig tree "and found nothing on it except leaves only." Fig trees in that land put out small early figs at about the same time as their leaves. A tree full of leaves gave the promise of fruit. This one had the show without the fruit. Jesus said, "Let no fruit come from you any longer, forever," and the tree withered.

Why would Jesus curse a tree? This is the only miracle of judgment He did during His time on earth, and it was an acted-out lesson. In the Old Testament the fig tree is sometimes a picture of Israel (Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10). Jesus had just come to the temple and found plenty of religious activity, but not the fruit of real faith and righteousness God was looking for. The tree was a warning of judgment on empty religion. And it is a warning for us. A church or a Christian can have all the leaves, the activity and the look of life, and still bear no fruit.

Old Testament links: Jeremiah 8:13 (alluded to)

21:20-22 *And the disciples, having seen **it**, marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither immediately?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do the **thing** of the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and be thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And all things, as many as you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."*

The disciples were amazed at how fast the tree withered. Jesus used the moment to teach about faith. "If you have faith and do not doubt," they could do more than wither a fig tree. They could say to "this mountain" to be thrown into the sea. They were standing on the Mount of Olives, and from there you can see the Dead Sea on a clear day.

Is this a promise that we can get anything we want just by believing hard enough? No. Scripture interprets Scripture. Prayer is asking according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15), in Jesus' name (John 14:13), from a heart that is right with Him (James 4:3). Moving a mountain was a common picture in that day for doing something that looks impossible. Jesus is teaching that when we trust God and pray in line with His will, nothing is too hard for Him. "All things, as many as you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

21:23 *And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, saying, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"*

Back in the temple, while Jesus was teaching, "the chief priests and the elders of the people" came to Him. The elders were older leading men of the nation who sat with the chief priests and scribes on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council in Jerusalem.

They asked two questions: "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" "These things" meant the triumphal entry, the cleansing of the temple, and His teaching there. The temple was their territory. They had not given Him permission, and they wanted to know who did.

21:24-27 *And Jesus, answering, said to them, "I also will ask you one word, which if you tell Me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where was it? From heaven or from men?" And they were reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the crowd; for all hold John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

Jesus answered with a question of His own, a common way for teachers to debate in that day. "The baptism of John, from where was it? From heaven or from men?" Was John's ministry from God or just a man's idea?

This was not a dodge. John had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God and had seen the Spirit come down on Him (John 1:29-34). If John was sent from God, then his witness about Jesus answered their question about authority.

Look at how the leaders reasoned. They did not ask what was true. They asked what would happen to them if they answered. If they said John was from heaven, Jesus would ask why they did not believe him. If they said John was from men, the crowd would turn on them, because all the people held John to be a prophet.

So they said, "We do not know." These were the men in charge of teaching the nation, and they claimed they could not tell whether the most famous prophet of their day was from God. Jesus answered, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." People who refuse the light they have already been given are not going to receive more.

21:28-30 *But what do you think? A man had two children, and having come to the first, he said, 'Child, go, work today in my vineyard.' And answering, he said, 'I do not want to'; but afterward, having regretted **it**, he went. And having come to the second, he said likewise. And answering, he said, 'I **will**, sir,' and he did not go.*

Now Jesus told a parable. A man had two sons and asked them both to work in his vineyard. The first said, "I do not want to," but later he regretted it and went. The second said, "I will, sir," and never went.

We all know people like both sons. Some start out saying no to God, and then their hearts are changed. Others say all the right words, but their lives never follow. Which one pleases the father?

21:31-32 *Which of the two did the will of the father?" They say to Him, "The first." Jesus says to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going before you into the kingdom of God. For John came to you in **the** way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and you, having seen **it**, did not regret **it** afterward so as to believe him.*

The leaders gave the right answer: "The first." Then Jesus made the point plain. "The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going before you into the kingdom of God." Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for Rome, often cheating their own people, and they were seen as traitors. Prostitutes were the lowest of the low in the eyes of respectable people.

Those people had said no to God with their lives, but when John came preaching repentance, they believed and turned. The religious leaders had said yes to God with their mouths, but they would not believe John, and even after seeing sinners changed, they "did not regret it afterward so as to believe him." The door was still open to them. Jesus says these sinners are "going before you," not that the leaders could never come. But they had to come the same way the sinners did, through repentance and faith.

21:33 *Hear another parable. There was a certain man, a master of a house, who planted a vineyard, and placed a fence around it, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to farmers, and went abroad.*

"Hear another parable." This one would hit the leaders even harder. A landowner planted a vineyard, built a fence around it, dug a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented it out to farmers and went away.

Every Jewish listener would recognize this picture from Isaiah 5:1-7, the song of the vineyard. There God says plainly that the vineyard is the house of Israel. God had done everything for His people. He had chosen them, given them His Law, His prophets, and His temple, and He expected fruit. The farmers in Jesus' story stand for the leaders who were put in charge of God's people.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 5:1-2 (alluded to)

21:34-36 *And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to receive his fruits. And the farmers, having taken his slaves, beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they did to them likewise.*

At harvest time, the owner sent his slaves to collect his share of the fruit. The farmers beat one, killed another, and stoned another. He sent more, and they treated them the same way.

These servants are the prophets God sent to Israel over the centuries. Many of them were rejected, beaten, and killed (2 Chronicles 24:20-21; 36:15-16; Hebrews 11:36-37). Jesus will say the same thing again in 23:34-37. Notice how patient the owner is. Again and again he sends messengers when he could have come in judgment. That is the patience of God.

21:37-39 *And afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, having seen the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and take possession of his inheritance.' And having taken him, they cast* ***him*** *out of the vineyard and killed* ***him****.*

"And afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" The owner sent the one closest to his heart. In this parable Jesus is clearly calling Himself the Son, sent after all the prophets, and He is telling them what they are about to do to Him.

The farmers said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and take possession of his inheritance." They knew who he was and killed him anyway. They "cast him out of the vineyard and killed him." Jesus would be led out of Jerusalem and crucified outside the city gate (Hebrews 13:12).

21:40-41 *Therefore, when the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" They say to Him, "Wretches! He will wretchedly destroy them, and he will rent out the vineyard to other farmers who will give him the fruits in their seasons."*

Jesus asked what the owner would do to those farmers. The leaders answered without thinking about who the story was about: "He will wretchedly destroy them, and he will rent out the vineyard to other farmers who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Like King David when Nathan told him the story of the poor man's lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-7), they pronounced judgment on themselves.

That judgment came in A.D. 70, when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and the rule of the chief priests ended.

21:42 *Jesus says to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, '**The** stone which those building rejected, this has become **the** head of **the** corner; this was from **the** Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?*

Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23, the same psalm the crowds sang when He entered the city. "The stone which those building rejected, this has become the head of the corner." The builders were the leaders of Israel. They looked at Jesus and threw Him aside as useless. But God made Him the cornerstone, the most important stone in the whole building, the one that sets the line for every other stone. Peter preached this same verse to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:11) and wrote about it in 1 Peter 2:6-8. The resurrection is how God turned the rejected stone into the head of the corner.

Old Testament links: Psalm 118:22-23 (quoted)

21:43 *Because of this I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation producing its fruits.*

"The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a nation producing its fruits." Who is Jesus speaking to, and who is this nation?

In context, Jesus is speaking to the chief priests and Pharisees (21:45), the leaders of that generation. Their privilege of leading God's people was being taken from them. The nation producing its fruits is best understood as all who believe in Jesus and bear the fruit of His kingdom. In this present age that is the church, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles (1 Peter 2:9). Peter even calls the church "a holy nation."

This verse does not mean God is finished with the nation of Israel. Paul says plainly that God has not rejected His people (Romans 11:1-2), and that a time is coming when "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). A partial hardening has come on Israel until the full number of Gentiles comes in. Jesus Himself promised the Twelve that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). God's promises to Israel still stand, and He will keep every one of them when Jesus returns.

21:44 *And the **one** having fallen on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."*

"The one having fallen on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." There are two pictures here. A person can stumble over Christ, rejecting Him now, and be broken (Isaiah 8:14-15). And there is the day when the stone falls in judgment. Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45 tells of a stone cut without hands that strikes the kingdoms of this world and grinds them to powder, and then becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. That stone is Christ and His coming kingdom.

There is a sense in which it is better to fall on the stone and be broken. A person who comes to Jesus broken over sin finds mercy (Psalm 51:17). The one who refuses Him will one day face Him as Judge.

Some Greek copies leave out this verse, but most of the old copies have it, and it is in the Received Text the SLB follows.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 8:14-15 (alluded to); Daniel 2:34-35 (alluded to)

21:45-46 *And the chief priests and the Pharisees, having heard His parables, knew that He is speaking about them. And seeking to lay hold of Him, they feared the crowds, since they were holding Him as a prophet.*

The chief priests and Pharisees "knew that He is speaking about them." There was no mistaking it. The Pharisees were a strict religious party who prided themselves on keeping the Law of Moses and the traditions of the elders down to the smallest detail. Now they and the priests wanted to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who held Him to be a prophet.

Here is a hard truth. These men understood exactly what Jesus was saying. Understanding was not their problem. Their hearts were. They heard the truth and decided to kill the One who told it. It is possible to sit under God's Word, understand it clearly, and still refuse to bow to it. The question is not only whether we understand Jesus, but whether we will receive Him.

Chapter 21 Summary

Jesus sent two disciples to bring a donkey and her colt, and He rode into Jerusalem as the gentle King of Zechariah 9:9 while crowds spread their garments and branches and shouted Hosanna to the Son of David. He cleansed the temple, calling it a house of prayer that had been made a den of robbers, healed the blind and the lame, and defended the children who praised Him. The next morning He cursed a fruitless fig tree as a picture of empty religion and taught His disciples about faith and prayer. When the chief priests and elders questioned His authority, He asked them about John's baptism, and they refused to answer. He told the parable of the two sons, showing that repentant sinners were entering the kingdom ahead of the leaders, and the parable of the wicked farmers who killed the owner's son. Quoting Psalm 118, He said the rejected stone had become the cornerstone, and the kingdom would be taken from those leaders and given to a people who would bear its fruit. The leaders knew He meant them and looked for a way to seize Him.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. Which Old Testament prophecy did Jesus fulfill by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey? (21:4-5)

2. What did the crowds shout, and what does Hosanna mean? (21:9)

3. What two Scriptures did Jesus quote when He cleansed the temple? (21:13)

4. Who praised Jesus in the temple, and how did the chief priests and scribes react? (21:15-16)

5. What did Jesus find on the fig tree, and what does that picture teach? (21:19)

6. Why would the leaders not answer Jesus' question about John's baptism? (21:25-27)

7. In the parable of the two sons, which son did the will of the father, and why? (21:28-31)

8. Who do the slaves and the son stand for in the parable of the farmers? (21:34-39)

9. Jesus is the stone the builders rejected. What does it look like to build your life on Him? (21:42)

10. Is there an area of your life that has leaves but no fruit? What would bearing fruit there look like?

Chapter 22: Questions in the Temple

Scripture

22:1-14 And Jesus, answering, spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man, a king, who made a wedding feast for his son. And he sent his slaves to call those having been called to the wedding feast, and they were not willing to come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Say to those having been called, "Look, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and the fattened ***animals are*** slaughtered, and all things ***are*** ready; come to the wedding feast."' But they, having paid no attention, went away, the one to his own field, the other to his business; and the rest, having seized his slaves, mistreated and killed ***them***. And the king, having heard ***it***, was angry; and having sent his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he says to his slaves, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those having been called were not worthy. Therefore go to the outlets of the roads, and as many as you find, call to the wedding feast.' And those slaves, having gone out into the roads, gathered together all, as many as they found, both evil and good; and the wedding feast was filled with those reclining. And the king, having come in to look at those reclining, saw there a man not dressed ***in*** a wedding garment, and he says to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Having bound his feet and hands, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.' For many are called, but few chosen."

22:15-33 Then the Pharisees, having gone, took counsel how they might trap Him in ***His*** word. And they send to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God in truth, and You are not concerned about anyone; for You do not look at ***the*** face of men. Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, having known their malice, said, "Why do you test Me, hypocrites? Show Me the coin of the tribute." And they brought to Him a denarius. And He says to them, "Whose ***is*** this image and the inscription?" They say to Him, "Caesar's." Then He says to them, "Therefore give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." And having heard, they marveled; and having left Him, they went away. On that day Sadducees came to Him, those saying there is no resurrection, and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If anyone dies not having children, his brother shall marry his wife and shall raise up seed for his brother.' Now there were with us seven brothers; and the first, having married, died, and not having seed, he left his wife to his brother. Likewise also the second, and the third, until the seven. And last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection therefore, of which of the seven will she be wife? For all had her." But Jesus, answering, said to them, "You are going astray, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? God is not ***the*** God of ***the*** dead, but of ***the*** living." And the crowds, having heard, were astonished at His teaching.

22:34-46 But the Pharisees, having heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, were gathered together at the same ***place***. And one of them, a lawyer, questioned ***Him***, testing Him and saying,

"Teacher, which commandment ***is*** great in the law?" And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love ***the*** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is ***the*** first and great commandment. And ***the*** second ***is*** like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets." And the Pharisees having been gathered together, Jesus questioned them, saying, "What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?" They say to Him, "Of David." He says to them, "How then does David in ***the*** Spirit call Him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right ***hand*** until I put Your enemies ***as*** a footstool of Your feet"'? If then David calls Him Lord, how is He his son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day to question Him any longer.

Chapter 22 Preview

Jesus is still in the temple, and the leaders are still looking for a way to bring Him down. He begins with one more parable, about a king who gives a wedding feast for his son. The invited guests refuse to come, so the king sends his servants into the roads to bring in anyone they can find. But one man shows up without a wedding garment and is thrown out.

Then come three test questions from three different groups. The Pharisees and the Herodians ask about paying taxes to Caesar. The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, ask a trick question about a woman with seven husbands. A lawyer asks which commandment is the greatest. Jesus answers each one with wisdom that leaves them speechless. Then He asks them a question of His own from Psalm 110: if the Christ is David's son, how can David call Him Lord? No one can answer, and from that day no one dares to question Him again.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-2 *And Jesus, answering, spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens has been likened to a man, a king, who made a wedding feast for his son.*

"Jesus, answering, spoke to them again in parables." He is still answering the chief priests and Pharisees who wanted to arrest Him (21:45-46). This is the third parable in a row aimed at them.

"The kingdom of the heavens" is Matthew's usual way of saying the kingdom of God. Jewish people often said heaven in place of God's name out of reverence. The kingdom is pictured as "a wedding feast" that a king makes for his son. In Scripture, a wedding feast is a picture of joy, fellowship, and celebration. The prophets spoke of the Lord preparing a great feast for all peoples (Isaiah 25:6-8), and Revelation 19:7-9 speaks of "the supper of the marriage of the Lamb." The King is God the Father, and the Son is Jesus.

22:3 *And he sent his slaves to call those having been called to the wedding feast, and they were not willing to come.*

In that day, a host sent out two invitations. The first went out ahead of time. The second came when the feast was ready, telling those already invited that it was time to come. The slaves went to call "those having been called," the people who had already received the first invitation, "and they were not willing to come."

The invited guests stand for the people of Israel, especially their leaders. God had invited them through the Law and the prophets for centuries. When the time came and the Son was among them, they would not come. To refuse a king's invitation to his son's wedding was a terrible insult.

22:4 *Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Say to those having been called, "Look, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and the fattened **animals are** slaughtered, and all things **are** ready; come to the wedding feast."'*

The king did not give up. He sent more slaves with a warm and detailed message: "Look, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and the fattened animals are slaughtered, and all things are ready." Everything had been provided. The guests did not have to bring anything. They only had to come.

This is how the gospel works. God has prepared everything. Jesus has done the work. The invitation is simply to come (Revelation 22:17).

22:5-6 *But they, having paid no attention, went away, the one to his own field, the other to his business; and the rest, having seized his slaves, mistreated and killed **them**.*

Some guests "paid no attention" and went off to their farms and their businesses. Their sin was not that farming and business were wrong. It was that they thought those things were more important than the king's invitation. Many people today are lost, not because they hate God, but because they are too busy to care.

Others were worse. They "seized his slaves, mistreated and killed them." This points to the way the messengers of God would be treated. The apostles and early believers were arrested, beaten, and some were killed in Jerusalem (Acts 5:40; 7:58-60; 12:1-2).

22:7 *And the king, having heard **it**, was angry; and having sent his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*

"And the king, having heard it, was angry; and having sent his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city." This is a clear warning of what happened in A.D. 70, when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and burned the temple. God used a pagan army to carry out His judgment, as He had used Babylon centuries before (Jeremiah 25:8-9).

God is patient, but His patience has an end. Those who keep refusing His grace will one day face His wrath.

22:8-10 *Then he says to his slaves, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those having been called were not worthy. Therefore go to the outlets of the roads, and as many as you find, call to the wedding feast.' And those slaves, having gone out into the roads, gathered together all, as many as they found, both evil and good; and the wedding feast was filled with those reclining.*

The feast was still ready, but "those having been called were not worthy." So the king sent his slaves to "the outlets of the roads," the places where the main roads leave the city and people gather. They were to invite everyone they found.

The slaves gathered "both evil and good." This is the gospel going out to all people, Jews and Gentiles, the respectable and the outcast (Romans 1:16). The tax collectors and prostitutes Jesus mentioned in 21:31 are in that crowd. No one is too far gone to be invited. And "the wedding feast was filled." God's house will be full.

22:11-12 *And the king, having come in to look at those reclining, saw there a man not dressed **in** a wedding garment, and he says to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.*

When the king came in to see his guests, he found "a man not dressed in a wedding garment." The king said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment?" The man had no answer. He "was speechless."

What is the wedding garment? Since the guests were pulled in off the roads, many Bible teachers believe the king provided proper clothing for them, as some kings did for their guests. Whether or not that was the custom, the meaning is clear from Scripture. The garment pictures the righteousness that God provides and that a person must have to stand before Him. Isaiah 61:10 speaks of being clothed with garments of salvation and a robe of righteousness. Revelation 19:8 says the bride is clothed in fine linen, which is "the righteous acts of the saints." This man wanted the feast on his own terms, in his own clothes. He accepted the invitation outwardly but did not receive what the king offered.

That is the person who claims to belong to Christ but has never been made new, who wants heaven but has never repented or trusted Jesus for His righteousness. We cannot come to God in the rags of our own goodness (Isaiah 64:6). We must be clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Philippians 3:9).

22:13 *Then the king said to the servants, 'Having bound his feet and hands, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.'*

"Having bound his feet and hands, take him away and cast him out into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." The feast was in a bright banquet hall. Outside was the dark night. Jesus uses this same phrase in 8:12 and 25:30 for the final judgment of the lost. Weeping speaks of sorrow and regret, and gnashing of teeth speaks of anguish and anger. This is a picture of hell, and Jesus speaks of it more than anyone else in the Bible. He spoke of it because He did not want anyone to go there.

22:14 *For many are called, but few chosen."*

"For many are called, but few chosen." This is the same saying as in 20:16. The call of the gospel goes out to many. Not everyone who hears it truly comes in God's way. The chosen are those who answer the call and are clothed in the garment the King provides.

Bible teachers have long discussed how God's choosing and our response fit together. Some see God's choosing as the cause of a person's faith. Others see God choosing those He knew would believe. Both agree the call is real, that every person is responsible to answer it, and that the ones who are saved will give all the glory to God.

22:15-17 *Then the Pharisees, having gone, took counsel how they might trap Him in **His** word. And they send to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God in truth, and You are not concerned about anyone; for You do not look at **the** face of men. Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"*

Now the Pharisees "took counsel how they might trap Him in His word." They sent their disciples "with the Herodians." The Herodians were Jews who supported the family of King Herod and the Roman rule that kept the Herods in power. Normally the Pharisees and Herodians did not get along. They joined forces against Jesus.

They started with flattery. "Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God in truth." Everything they said was true, but they did not mean a word of it.

Then the trap: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" Tribute was a tax paid directly to the Roman emperor, called Caesar. Many Jews hated it as a sign that they were under a pagan ruler. If Jesus said yes, the people would think He was siding with Rome. If He said no, the Herodians could report Him to the Romans as a rebel. They thought they had Him either way.

22:18-20 *But Jesus, having known their malice, said, "Why do you test Me, hypocrites? Show Me the coin of the tribute." And they brought to Him a denarius. And He says to them, "Whose **is** this image and the inscription?"*

Jesus saw right through them. He "having known their malice" called them "hypocrites." A hypocrite was an actor on a stage who wore a mask. They were acting like honest seekers, but they were setting a trap.

He asked to see "the coin of the tribute," and they brought Him a denarius. The coin of that time most likely carried the image of the emperor Tiberius and an inscription calling him the son of the divine Augustus. Jesus asked, "Whose is this image and the inscription?"

Notice something small but telling. Jesus had to ask for the coin. His enemies had one in their pocket, right there in the temple.

22:21-22 *They say to Him, "Caesar's." Then He says to them, "Therefore give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." And having heard, they marveled; and having left Him, they went away.*

"Caesar's." Then Jesus gave one of the most famous answers ever spoken: "Therefore give back the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God."

The words "give back" mean to pay what is owed. Since the coin bore Caesar's image, it was right to give it back to him. Christians are to obey the government and pay taxes (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). But Caesar is not God. There are things that belong to God alone: our worship, our hearts, our lives. If coins bear Caesar's image, what bears God's image? We do. Man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). So we are to give ourselves to God.

When the government demands what belongs only to God, "it is necessary to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The questioners marveled. They had nothing to say and walked away.

22:23 *On that day Sadducees came to Him, those saying there is no resurrection, and they questioned Him,*

"On that day Sadducees came to Him, those saying there is no resurrection." The Sadducees were a smaller but powerful party, made up mostly of wealthy priestly families who controlled the temple. They accepted only the five books of Moses as their final authority, and they denied the resurrection of the body, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8). The high priest and many chief priests were Sadducees.

22:24 *saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If anyone dies not having children, his brother shall marry his wife and shall raise up seed for his brother.'*

They began with the Law of Moses. In Deuteronomy 25:5-6, if a man died without children, his brother was to marry the widow, and their first son would carry on the dead brother's name. This custom kept a family's name and land from being lost in Israel. The Sadducees used this law to set up what they thought was an impossible puzzle.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (quoted); Genesis 38:8 (alluded to)

22:25-28 *Now there were with us seven brothers; and the first, having married, died, and not having seed, he left his wife to his brother. Likewise also the second, and the third, until the seven. And last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection therefore, of which of the seven will she be wife? For all had her."*

Seven brothers each married the same woman, and each died without children. Then the woman died. "In the resurrection therefore, of which of the seven will she be wife? For all had her."

They were not asking because they wanted to know. They were trying to make the resurrection look foolish. Their thinking was that if there is life after death, it must be like this life, and this situation would make heaven a mess. Many people still argue the same way, judging the life to come by the limits of this one.

22:29 *But Jesus, answering, said to them, "You are going astray, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.*

"You are going astray, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus named their two errors.

First, they did not know the Scriptures. These were men who studied the Law, but they missed what it taught. Second, they did not know the power of God. They thought the resurrection would be impossible or confusing, as if God could not raise the dead into a new kind of life. Those same two errors are behind most false teaching today. People either do not know what the Bible says, or they put limits on what God can do.

22:30 *For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.*

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." The life to come is not just this life continued. Marriage is God's good gift for this life (Genesis 2:24), but in the resurrection people will not marry. We will be "like angels" in this way: not that we become angels, but that we will live forever and no longer need marriage to carry on the human family (Luke 20:35-36).

Does this mean husbands and wives will not know each other in heaven? Scripture does not say that. I believe we will know one another, and our love will be fuller, not less. But the relationship of marriage belongs to this age. Notice too that Jesus mentions angels. The Sadducees did not believe in them, and He states plainly that they are real.

22:31-32 *But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? God is not **the** God of **the** dead, but of **the** living."*

Now Jesus answered their real question, the resurrection itself, and He did it from the books of Moses, the very books they accepted. He quoted Exodus 3:6, where God spoke to Moses at the burning bush: "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

God spoke in the present tense, I am, not I was. At the time He spoke those words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for hundreds of years. Yet God still called Himself their God. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." They were still alive to God. And since God's covenant promises to them included the land and a future, those promises demand that they will be raised. God would not call Himself the God of people who had ceased to exist.

Old Testament links: Exodus 3:6 (quoted)

22:33 *And the crowds, having heard, were astonished at His teaching.*

"The crowds, having heard, were astonished at His teaching." Jesus had taken a verse the Sadducees had read all their lives and showed them something they never saw. That is what happens when the Author of the Book teaches it.

22:34-36 *But the Pharisees, having heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, were gathered together at the same **place**. And one of them, a lawyer, questioned **Him**, testing Him and saying, "Teacher, which commandment **is** great in the law?"*

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had "silenced the Sadducees," they gathered for another try. One of them, "a lawyer," asked the question. A lawyer was an expert in the Law of Moses, much like a scribe. He was not a lawyer in a courtroom the way we think of one.

"Teacher, which commandment is great in the law?" The rabbis counted 613 commands in the Law of Moses and argued over which ones were heavier and which were lighter. This question was a test, but it was also a real question people argued about.

22:37-38 *And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love **the** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is **the** first and great commandment.*

Jesus answered from Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the Shema, the confession every devout Jew recited each day: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The word Shema means hear, from the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4.

"This is the first and great commandment." God does not want part of us. He wants the whole person: the heart, the soul, and the mind. Love for God is not only a feeling. It is a whole life given to Him. Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not pick a rule about sacrifices or Sabbath or tithing. He goes to the root of all of it, a heart that loves God.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 6:5 (quoted)

22:39 *And **the** second **is** like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" This comes from Leviticus 19:18. The lawyer asked for one commandment, and Jesus gave him two, because they cannot be separated. John says plainly that whoever says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar (1 John 4:20). Love for God will always show itself in love for people.

"As yourself" does not mean we are commanded to love ourselves first. It assumes that we already look after our own needs. Jesus is saying to care about your neighbor's good the way you naturally care about your own.

Old Testament links: Leviticus 19:18 (quoted)

22:40 *On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets."*

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets." Everything God commanded in the Old Testament hangs on these two like a door hangs on its hinges. Paul says the same thing: love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

Here is the problem. Who has kept these two commands? No one has loved God with all their heart for one whole day, let alone a lifetime. That is why we need a Savior. The Law shows us what perfect love looks like, and it shows us how far short we fall. Only Jesus kept it perfectly, and He gives His righteousness to all who trust Him (Romans 3:20-24).

22:41-42 *And the Pharisees having been gathered together, Jesus questioned them, saying, "What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?" They say to Him, "Of David."*

Now Jesus turned the tables and asked them a question. "What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?" The Christ means the Messiah. They answered at once, "Of David." That was the standard answer, and it was right. The Messiah would come from David's family line (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1).

22:43-45 *He says to them, "How then does David in **the** Spirit call Him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right **hand** until I put Your enemies **as** a footstool of Your feet"'? If then David calls Him Lord, how is He his son?"*

"How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?" Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1. Notice that Jesus says David spoke "in the Spirit." He is telling us that David wrote this psalm, and that he wrote it by the Holy Spirit. That is a strong statement about the inspiration of Scripture.

"The Lord said to my Lord." The first Lord is God the Father. The second is the Messiah. David, the greatest king of Israel, calls his own descendant "my Lord" (22:44). In that culture no father would call his son his lord. So how can the Messiah be both David's son and David's Lord?

The answer is the truth Matthew has been showing from chapter 1. The Messiah is David's son by human birth, through Mary and the legal line of Joseph. And He is David's Lord because He is God the Son, who existed before David (John 8:58). Jesus is both fully man and fully God. Psalm 110:1 is the Old Testament verse most often quoted in the New Testament, and the apostles used it to show that Jesus now sits at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:34-36; Hebrews 1:13).

"Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies as a footstool of Your feet." That is where Jesus is today. And there is a day coming when every enemy will be put under His feet.

Old Testament links: Psalm 110:1 (quoted)

22:46 *And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day to question Him any longer.*

"And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day to question Him any longer." The best minds in Israel had come with their hardest questions, and they had all been silenced. Now He had asked them the one question that mattered most, who the Messiah really is, and they would not answer.

That is still the question. Who do you say Jesus is? A good teacher, a prophet, a man from Nazareth? Or the Son of David who is also David's Lord?

Chapter 22 Summary

Jesus told the parable of the king's wedding feast. The invited guests refused to come or killed the king's servants, so the king destroyed them and burned their city, then filled the feast with people gathered from the roads, both bad and good. One guest without a wedding garment was cast into the outer darkness, because many are called but few chosen. The Pharisees and Herodians asked whether to pay tribute to Caesar, and Jesus answered that they should give Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, asked about a woman married to seven brothers, and Jesus answered that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God, since in the resurrection people do not marry and God is the God of the living. A lawyer asked about the greatest commandment, and Jesus answered with love for God with all the heart, soul, and mind, and love for neighbor as oneself. Then Jesus asked how the Christ could be David's son if David called Him Lord in Psalm 110, and no one could answer Him.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. How did the invited guests respond to the king's invitation, and what did the king do? (22:3-7)

2. Who did the king's slaves gather in from the roads? (22:9-10)

3. What happened to the man without a wedding garment, and what does the garment picture? (22:11-13)

4. What trap did the Pharisees and Herodians set, and how did Jesus answer it? (22:17-21)

5. What two errors did Jesus say the Sadducees made? (22:29)

6. How did Jesus prove the resurrection from Exodus 3:6? (22:31-32)

7. What are the two greatest commandments, and why do they go together? (22:37-40)

8. How can the Messiah be both David's son and David's Lord? (22:42-45)

9. What things in your life might be keeping you from giving God your whole heart, soul, and mind?

10. Jesus said to give God what belongs to God. What does that look like in your life this week?

Chapter 23: Woes to the Hypocrites

Scripture

23:1-12 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have sat down on the seat of Moses. Therefore all things, as many as they tell you to keep, keep and do; but do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do. For they tie up heavy and hard-to-bear burdens and lay ***them*** on the shoulders of men, but they are not willing to move them with their finger. And they do all their works in order to be seen by men; and they broaden their phylacteries and enlarge the fringes of their garments. And they love the place of honor at the banquets and the first seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your instructor, the Christ, and you are all brothers. And do not call ***anyone*** on the earth your father; for One is your Father, the ***One*** in the heavens. Nor be called instructors; for your instructor is One, the Christ. But the greater of you shall be your servant. And whoever will exalt himself will be humbled, and whoever will humble himself will be exalted.

23:13-24 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of the heavens before men; for you yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow those entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour the houses of the widows, and for a pretext ***you*** pray at length; because of this you will receive greater judgment. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you go around the sea and the dry ***land*** to make one proselyte, and when he becomes ***one***, you make him a son of Gehenna twofold more than yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is obligated.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctifies the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that ***is*** on it is obligated.' Fools and blind! For which ***is*** greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore the ***one*** having sworn by the altar swears by it and by all the things on it. And the ***one*** having sworn by the sanctuary swears by it and by the ***One*** dwelling in it. And the ***one*** having sworn by heaven swears by the throne of God and by the ***One*** sitting on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and the dill and the cumin, and you have left aside the weightier ***matters*** of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith. These it was necessary to do, and not to be leaving those aside. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but swallow the camel!

23:25-39 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may also become clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs, which outside indeed appear beautiful, but inside are full of bones of ***the*** dead and of all uncleanness. Thus you also outside indeed appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' So you bear witness to yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you, fill up

the measure of your fathers! Serpents, offspring of vipers! How are you to escape from the judgment of Gehenna? Because of this, look, I send to you prophets and wise ***men*** and scribes; and ***some*** of them you will kill and crucify, and ***some*** of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, so that on you may come all righteous blood being poured out on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 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.'"

Chapter 23 Preview

This is Jesus' last public sermon in Matthew, and it is the strongest warning He ever gave. Speaking to the crowds and His disciples in the temple, He exposes the scribes and Pharisees. They teach the Law of Moses, but they do not live it. They pile burdens on people and do everything to be seen. Jesus tells His followers not to be like them, because in His kingdom the greatest is the servant.

Then He turns and speaks to the leaders directly, with eight woes. A woe is a cry of grief and a warning of judgment. They shut people out of the kingdom, play games with oaths, tithe garden herbs while ignoring justice and mercy, and look clean on the outside while they are full of sin inside. The chapter ends with Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, the city He longed to gather like a hen gathers her chicks. Her house will be left desolate until the day she says, "Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord."

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-2 *Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have sat down on the seat of Moses.*

"Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples." The leaders had been silenced (22:46). Now Jesus warns the people about them.

"The scribes and the Pharisees have sat down on the seat of Moses." The scribes were the trained experts who copied, studied, and taught the Law of Moses. Most of them belonged to the Pharisees, the strict religious party that tried to keep every detail of the Law and the traditions that had grown up around it. To sit on Moses' seat meant to teach with the authority of Moses, as the official interpreters of the Law. Some synagogues even had a stone seat with that name, where the teacher sat to read and explain the Law.

23:3 *Therefore all things, as many as they tell you to keep, keep and do; but do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do.*

"Therefore all things, as many as they tell you to keep, keep and do." When they faithfully taught what Moses wrote, the people should obey it, because it was God's Word. Jesus is not approving all their traditions. He condemned many of those (15:3-9). He is saying that God's Word does not lose its authority just because the one reading it is a hypocrite.

"But do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do." This was their great failure. They talked about holiness but did not live it. Every teacher and preacher should tremble at this verse. James warns that teachers will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

23:4 *For they tie up heavy and hard-to-bear burdens and lay **them** on the shoulders of men, but they are not willing to move them with their finger.*

"For they tie up heavy and hard-to-bear burdens and lay them on the shoulders of men." Picture a man loading a pack animal until it can barely stand. The Pharisees took God's Law and added rule upon rule. They had, for example, dozens of rules about what counted as work on the Sabbath.

"But they are not willing to move them with their finger." They would not lift a finger to help anyone carry the load. Compare that with Jesus, who said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (11:28). False religion piles on burdens. Jesus lifts them.

23:5 *And they do all their works in order to be seen by men; and they broaden their phylacteries and enlarge the fringes of their garments.*

"They do all their works in order to be seen by men." That is the root of the whole problem. Jesus warned about this in the Sermon on the Mount (6:1-18).

Phylacteries were small leather boxes holding pieces of parchment with verses of Scripture written on them, such as Exodus 13:1-16 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. Jewish men tied them to the forehead and the left arm during prayer, following a literal reading of Deuteronomy 6:8. The Pharisees made theirs wider so people would notice. The fringes, or tassels, were worn on the corners of the outer garment as God commanded, to remind the people of His commandments (Numbers 15:37-40). They made theirs longer to look more devoted.

God gave those things to point people to Him. The Pharisees used them to point people to themselves.

23:6-7 *And they love the place of honor at the banquets and the first seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'*

They loved "the place of honor at the banquets," the seat next to the host, and "the first seats in the synagogues." A synagogue was a local meeting place where Jews gathered on the Sabbath to read and hear the Scriptures and to pray. The best seats were at the front, facing the people, where everyone could see who sat there.

They loved being greeted in the marketplace with titles of respect, and being called "Rabbi, Rabbi." Rabbi means my great one or my teacher. There is nothing wrong with honoring a teacher. The sin is loving the honor, wanting the title more than the work.

23:8 *But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your instructor, the Christ, and you are all brothers.*

"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your instructor, the Christ, and you are all brothers." Jesus is telling His disciples not to set themselves up as masters over other believers. In the church there is one Teacher with final authority, Christ, and the rest of us are brothers and sisters, learning together at His feet.

Does this mean it is a sin to call someone teacher or doctor? I don't believe Jesus is forbidding every title. Paul calls himself a teacher (1 Timothy 2:7), and the church has teachers as a gift from Christ (Ephesians 4:11). The point is the spirit behind it. No believer should be lifted up as if he stood between other believers and God, or as if his word were final in place of Christ's.

23:9 *And do not call **anyone** on the earth your father; for One is your Father, the **One** in the heavens.*

"And do not call anyone on the earth your father; for One is your Father, the One in the heavens." In context, Jesus means a spiritual father in the sense of a final religious authority, the source of a person's spiritual life and teaching. The rabbis honored great teachers of the past by calling them father. Jesus says only God holds that place.

This is not about our earthly fathers. The Bible commands us to honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12). Paul could even say he became a spiritual father to the Corinthians through the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15). Jesus is warning against giving any human leader the honor and authority that belong to God alone. Many sincere people use religious titles today with no thought of putting a man in God's place, but the warning still stands for all of us.

23:10 *Nor be called instructors; for your instructor is One, the Christ.*

"Nor be called instructors; for your instructor is One, the Christ." The word here means a guide or leader, one who goes ahead and shows the way. Jesus repeats the point for emphasis. He alone is our final guide. Every pastor and Bible teacher is only a fellow student pointing others to Him.

23:11-12 *But the greater of you shall be your servant. And whoever will exalt himself will be humbled, and whoever will humble himself will be exalted.*

"But the greater of you shall be your servant." Jesus said the same thing in 20:26-27, and He showed it by washing the disciples' feet (John 13:4-15).

"Whoever will exalt himself will be humbled, and whoever will humble himself will be exalted." This is one of God's unchanging laws. Proverbs 29:23 says pride brings a man low. James 4:6 tells us God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. The Pharisees were climbing up. The way up in God's kingdom is down.

23:13 *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of the heavens before men; for you yourselves do not enter, nor do you allow those entering to go in.*

Now Jesus speaks to the leaders directly. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" A woe is a cry of sorrow and a solemn warning of judgment, the opposite of a blessing. In chapter 5 Jesus began His first great sermon with blessings on the humble. Here He ends His public teaching with woes on the proud.

The first woe: "you shut up the kingdom of the heavens before men." They held the keys of knowledge (Luke 11:52). They should have opened the Scriptures and pointed the people to the Messiah. Instead, they rejected Him and turned others away from Him (John 9:22). They did not go in themselves, and they blocked the door for anyone else trying to enter. That is a fearful thing for any religious leader to do.

23:14 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour the houses of the widows, and for a pretext* ***you*** *pray at length; because of this you will receive greater judgment.*

The next woe: "you devour the houses of the widows, and for a pretext you pray at length." The Law of Moses commanded special care for widows (Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 24:17). Some of these teachers took advantage of widows, perhaps by managing their property and taking it for themselves, or by living off their gifts. All the while they put on a show of long prayers to look holy. "Because of this you will receive greater judgment." Greater knowledge brings greater responsibility. Using religion to cheat the helpless is one of the worst sins there is.

I should say a word about this verse. Most of the older Greek copies of Matthew do not have it here, though it is in the Received Text that the SLB follows. Many modern Bibles put it in brackets or a footnote. The same words are found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47, which nearly every copy has, so we know Jesus said them. No teaching of the faith rests on this verse alone.

23:15 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you go around the sea and the dry* ***land*** *to make one proselyte, and when he becomes* ***one****, you make him a son of Gehenna twofold more than yourselves.*

"You go around the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte." A proselyte was a Gentile who converted to Judaism, was circumcised, and took on the Law of Moses. The Pharisees worked very hard to win converts.

But they were not bringing people to God. They were bringing them into their own system. "When he becomes one, you make him a son of Gehenna twofold more than yourselves." Gehenna was the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where some kings of Judah once burned their children as sacrifices to false gods (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31). It became a picture of the place of final judgment, hell. A son of Gehenna is someone who belongs there. New converts often become more zealous than their teachers. They learned the Pharisees' pride and their rules and ended up worse off. Zeal is not enough. It has to be zeal for the truth.

23:16-17 *Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is obligated.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctifies the gold?*

"Woe to you, blind guides." A guide is supposed to see the road. A blind guide leads people into the ditch (15:14).

The Pharisees had worked out rules about which oaths counted and which did not. Swearing "by the sanctuary," the temple building itself, was "nothing," meaning it was not binding. But swearing "by the gold of the sanctuary" was binding. This gave people a way to make promises that sounded holy but that they never meant to keep.

Jesus says this is foolish. "Which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctifies the gold?" The gold was only holy because it was in God's house. To value the gold above the temple was to have everything upside down.

23:18-19 *And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that **is** on it is obligated.' Fools and blind! For which **is** greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?*

They did the same with the altar. Swearing by the altar was "nothing," but swearing by the gift on the altar was binding. Jesus asks again, "which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?" An offering was made holy by being placed on God's altar. The altar was greater. Their rules showed that they cared more about gold and gifts than about God.

23:20-22 *Therefore the **one** having sworn by the altar swears by it and by all the things on it. And the **one** having sworn by the sanctuary swears by it and by the **One** dwelling in it. And the **one** having sworn by heaven swears by the throne of God and by the **One** sitting on it.*

Jesus cuts through the whole system. Whoever swears by the altar swears by everything on it. Whoever swears by the temple swears by "the One dwelling in it." Whoever swears by heaven swears "by the throne of God and by the One sitting on it."

In other words, there is no such thing as a promise God does not hear. Every oath touches God, because everything belongs to Him. Jesus taught in 5:33-37 that His people should simply be honest: let your yes mean yes and your no mean no. A Christian should not need to swear by anything to be believed.

23:23 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and the dill and the cumin, and you have left aside the weightier **matters** of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith. These it was necessary to do, and not to be leaving those aside.*

"You tithe the mint and the dill and the cumin." A tithe is a tenth. The Law commanded the people to give a tenth of their crops to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30). Mint, dill, and cumin were small kitchen herbs. The Pharisees were so careful that they counted out every tenth leaf from their herb gardens.

"And you have left aside the weightier matters of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith." These were the heavy, important things. Micah 6:8 says the same: do justice, love steadfast love, and walk humbly with your God.

Notice that Jesus did not say tithing was wrong. "These it was necessary to do, and not to be leaving those aside." They should have done both. The problem was not being careful about small things. It was being careful about small things while ignoring the big ones. Many churchgoers today are like this. They are careful about the outward details and careless about honesty, kindness, and faith.

Old Testament links: Micah 6:8 (alluded to)

23:24 *Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but swallow the camel!*

"Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but swallow the camel!" The Pharisees poured their wine through a cloth to strain out tiny insects, because gnats were unclean under the Law (Leviticus 11:20-23). The camel was also unclean (Leviticus 11:4), and it was the largest animal in that land. Jesus paints a picture that would have made His listeners laugh if it were not so serious: a man carefully picking a gnat out of his cup and then gulping down a whole camel, hump and all. They avoided the smallest sins and swallowed the biggest ones.

23:25-26 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may also become clean.*

"You cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence." The Pharisees had many rules about washing cups and dishes the right way (Mark 7:3-4). They kept the outside looking clean. But what was inside the cup? Things gained by "plunder," greed and taking from others, and "self-indulgence," a lack of self-control.

"Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup." The heart has to be cleaned first. When God cleans the heart, the outside life will follow. Trying to fix only the outside is like painting a rotten fence. Only God can create a pure heart in us (Psalm 51:10).

23:27-28 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs, which outside indeed appear beautiful, but inside are full of bones of* ***the*** *dead and of all uncleanness. Thus you also outside indeed appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

"You resemble whitewashed tombs." Touching a grave made a Jew ceremonially unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:16). Before the big feasts, tombs near the roads were painted with white lime so that pilgrims would see them and not touch them by accident. Around Passover, the tombs around Jerusalem would be freshly painted and shining white in the sun. Jesus may have been able to point to them as He spoke.

They looked beautiful on the outside, but inside they were "full of bones of the dead and of all uncleanness." That is what the Pharisees were like: "outside indeed appear righteous to men, but

inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Lawlessness is a strong word for men who prided themselves on keeping the Law. They kept its outward rules but broke its heart.

23:29-31 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' So you bear witness to yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

"You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous." They honored the prophets of the past with fine memorials. And they said, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."

Jesus caught them with their own words. By calling those murderers "our fathers," they admitted they were their sons. And they were about to prove it by killing the greatest Prophet of all. It is easy to honor God's messengers who are safely dead. It is much harder to listen to the ones who are speaking to us today.

23:32 *And you, fill up the measure of your fathers!*

"And you, fill up the measure of your fathers!" This is a hard word. Jesus is saying, go ahead and finish what your fathers started. Their fathers had filled the cup of guilt partway by killing the prophets. These leaders would fill it to the top by killing the Son. God would allow their sin to come to its full measure, and then judgment would fall (Genesis 15:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16).

23:33 *Serpents, offspring of vipers! How are you to escape from the judgment of Gehenna?*

"Serpents, offspring of vipers! How are you to escape from the judgment of Gehenna?" John the Baptist called them the same thing (3:7). A serpent brings to mind the devil in the Garden (Genesis 3:1). Jesus is not insulting them for sport. He is telling them the truth about where their path ends. Love tells the truth, even when it hurts. These are some of the most sobering words Jesus ever spoke, and He spoke them to the most religious men in the nation.

23:34 *Because of this, look, I send to you prophets and wise **men** and scribes; and **some** of them you will kill and crucify, and **some** of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,*

"Because of this, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes." Notice who is sending. Jesus says, "I send to you prophets." He speaks as the Lord who sends the prophets, something only God does. These messengers are the apostles and preachers of the early church.

He tells them exactly what they will do. Some would be killed and crucified, some flogged in the synagogues and chased from city to city. The book of Acts shows this happening: Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:58-60), James was killed (Acts 12:2), and Paul, who once did the persecuting, was later flogged in synagogues and driven from city to city himself (2 Corinthians 11:24-26).

23:35 *so that on you may come all righteous blood being poured out on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.*

"So that on you may come all righteous blood being poured out on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berekiah." Abel was the first murder in the Bible (Genesis 4:8). In the order of the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles comes last, and the last murder of a prophet it records is Zechariah, stoned in the court of the temple (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). So from Abel to Zechariah is like saying from the first page of the Old Testament to the last.

2 Chronicles calls that Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. Matthew says "son of Berekiah," which is also the name of the prophet Zechariah's father (Zechariah 1:1). Some think Jehoiada was his grandfather, and that son here means descendant, which is common in Scripture. Others think Jesus meant the prophet Zechariah, whose death the Old Testament does not record. Scripture does not settle it for us. The point is clear either way: the whole history of rejecting God's messengers was coming to a head in that generation.

Old Testament links: Genesis 4:8 (alluded to); 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (alluded to)

23:36 *Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

"Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." This judgment would fall on the people living at that time. And it did. About forty years later, in A.D. 70, the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, destroyed the city, and burned the temple to the ground. The generation that rejected its King saw the judgment Jesus spoke of.

23:37 *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!*

Now the tone changes. The anger gives way to weeping. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem." When a name is repeated like this in Scripture, it shows deep feeling (2 Samuel 18:33). Luke tells us Jesus wept over the city (Luke 19:41).

"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!" What a tender picture. A mother hen spreads her wings over her chicks to protect them from danger, even if it costs her life. "How often" shows that Jesus had longed for them again and again, and in that He speaks as the God who had called to Israel through all its history.

Here we see both the heart of God and the will of man. He was willing. They were not. God does not force anyone to come to Him. He offers, He calls, and He weeps when people refuse.

23:38 *Look, your house is left to you desolate.*

"Look, your house is left to you desolate." "Your house" is likely the temple, which Jesus had called "My house" when He cleansed it (21:13). Now He calls it "your house." When the Lord leaves, a

building is only stones. In the very next verse of the story, He walks out of the temple for the last time (24:1). Ezekiel once saw the glory of God depart from the temple before Babylon destroyed it (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:23). Now the Son of God departs, and Rome will soon destroy it again.

23:39 *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.'"*

"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.'"

This verse gives great hope. Jesus did not say never. He said until. A day is coming when Israel will welcome Him with the words of Psalm 118:26. The prophets tell of that day. Zechariah 12:10 says they will look on the One they pierced and mourn for Him. Paul says "all Israel will be saved" when the Deliverer comes from Zion (Romans 11:26). I believe this will happen at the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus returns to the earth and the people of Israel turn to Him in faith. God is not finished with Israel. The city that rejected her King will one day welcome Him.

Old Testament links: Psalm 118:26 (quoted)

Chapter 23 Summary

Jesus warned the crowds and His disciples that the scribes and Pharisees sat on Moses' seat and taught the Law but did not live it. They loaded people with heavy burdens, did their works to be seen, and loved honor and titles. Jesus told His followers not to seek such titles, because they have one Teacher, one Father, and one Leader, and the greatest among them must be a servant. Then He spoke woes on the scribes and Pharisees for shutting people out of the kingdom, cheating widows while praying long prayers, making converts worse than themselves, twisting oaths, tithing herbs while neglecting justice, mercy, and faith, cleaning the outside while the inside was full of greed, looking like whitewashed tombs, and honoring the prophets their fathers killed. He said the judgment for all the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zechariah would come on that generation. Then He wept over Jerusalem, which would not be gathered to Him, and said her house was left desolate until the day she says, "Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord."

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. Why did Jesus tell the people to do what the scribes and Pharisees taught but not what they did? (23:2-3)

2. Why did the Pharisees do their works, and what were some of the ways they showed it? (23:5-7)

3. What does Jesus say about the titles Rabbi, father, and instructor? (23:8-10)

4. What did Jesus say about those who exalt themselves and those who humble themselves? (23:12)

5. What did the Pharisees teach about oaths, and how did Jesus answer? (23:16-22)

6. What are the weightier matters of the law that the Pharisees left aside? (23:23)

7. What did Jesus mean by comparing them to whitewashed tombs? (23:27-28)

8. What does Jesus' cry over Jerusalem show about His heart? (23:37)

9. Are there ways you care more about how your faith looks on the outside than what is going on inside?

10. Jesus said until in 23:39, not never. How does that shape the way you think about God's plan for Israel?

Chapter 24: The Olivet Discourse: Signs of His Coming

Scripture

24:1-14 And Jesus, having gone out, was going from the temple; and His disciples came to ***Him*** to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will by no means be left here stone upon stone which will not be thrown down." And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what ***is*** the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?" And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Watch out that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you are going to hear of wars and reports of wars; see, do not be alarmed; for it is necessary for all things to take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in ***various*** places. And all these ***are the*** beginning of birth pains. Then they will hand you over to tribulation and will kill you; and you will be hated by all the nations on account of My name. And then many will be caused to stumble, and they will hand over one another and will hate one another. And many false prophets will rise up and will lead many astray. And because lawlessness is multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold. But the ***one*** having endured to ***the*** end, he will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

24:15-28 Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in ***the*** holy place (let the ***one*** reading understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains; let the ***one*** on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; and let the ***one*** in the field not turn back to take his garments. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those nursing in those days! And pray that your flight may not happen in winter nor on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not happened from ***the*** beginning of ***the*** world until now, nor by any means will happen. And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but because of the elect those days will be shortened. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here ***is*** the Christ,' or 'Here,' do not believe ***it***. For false christs and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Look, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; 'Look, in the inner rooms,' do not believe ***it***. For just as the lightning comes out from ***the*** east and shines as far as ***the*** west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass may be, there the vultures will be gathered together.

24:29-41 And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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. And He will send His angels with a trumpet of great sound, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from ***the*** ends of ***the*** heavens to their ends. Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth the leaves, you know that the summer ***is*** near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near,

at ***the*** doors. Truly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen. The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens, except My Father alone. And just as the days of Noah ***were***, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For just as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two will be in the field; the one is taken and the one is left. Two ***women will be*** grinding at the millhouse; one is taken and one is left.

24:42-51 Therefore keep watch, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief comes, he would have kept watch and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Because of this you also be ready, for in an hour that you do not suppose, the Son of Man comes. Who then is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has set over his household, to give them the food in season? Blessed ***is*** that slave whom his master, having come, will find so doing. Truly I say to you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master delays to come,' and begins to beat the fellow slaves, and to eat and drink with those who are drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day in which he does not expect ***him*** and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in two and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.

Chapter 24 Preview

As Jesus leaves the temple for the last time, His disciples point out its beautiful buildings. Jesus tells them that not one stone will be left on another. Later, on the Mount of Olives, they ask Him when this will happen, and what the sign of His coming and of the end of the age will be. His answer, which runs through chapter 25, is called the Olivet Discourse, because He gave it on the Mount of Olives. It is the longest prophecy Jesus gave.

He describes false christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution, which He calls the beginning of birth pains. Then He speaks of the abomination of desolation that Daniel foretold, standing in the holy place, and a great tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. Immediately after that tribulation, the sun and moon will go dark, and the Son of Man will come on the clouds with power and great glory. No one knows the day or the hour, so Jesus closes this chapter with pictures of readiness: the days of Noah, a thief in the night, and a faithful slave whose master returns when he does not expect him.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *And Jesus, having gone out, was going from the temple; and His disciples came to* ***Him*** *to point out to Him the buildings of the temple.*

"And Jesus, having gone out, was going from the temple." He had just said, "your house is left to you desolate" (23:38). Now He walked out of it for the last time.

The disciples pointed out "the buildings of the temple." Herod the Great had begun rebuilding and expanding the temple about 20 B.C., and the work was still going on in Jesus' day (John 2:20). It was one of the most impressive buildings in the Roman world, built of huge white stones, with parts covered in gold that shone in the sun. To the disciples, from a small country like Galilee, it must have looked like it would stand forever.

24:2 *And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will by no means be left here stone upon stone which will not be thrown down."*

"Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will by no means be left here stone upon stone which will not be thrown down."

This came true about forty years later. In A.D. 70 the Roman army under Titus captured Jerusalem after a long siege, and the temple was burned and torn down. The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived through those days, described the destruction in his history of the Jewish war. The buildings the disciples admired were gone within one lifetime.

24:3 *And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what **is** the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?"*

They walked across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives, where they could look back over the temple. There "the disciples came to Him privately." Mark 13:3 tells us it was Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

They asked, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what is the sign of Your coming and of the consummation of the age?" There are really three parts to their question: when will the temple be destroyed, what will be the sign of His coming, and what will be the sign of the end of the age. The disciples likely thought all three would happen at the same time.

Jesus answers in a way that covers both near and far events. Luke's account records more of what He said about the near event, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: "when you see Jerusalem being encircled by encampments, then know that her desolation has drawn near" (Luke 21:20-24). Matthew's account focuses on the far event, His coming at the end of the age. I believe most of what Jesus describes in Matthew 24 looks ahead to the future Tribulation and His Second Coming to the earth.

The word for coming here is parousia, which means presence or arrival. It was used for the official visit of a king to a city. The "consummation of the age" means the end and completion of this present age, when Christ comes to set up His kingdom.

24:4 *And Jesus, answering, said to them, "Watch out that no one leads you astray.*

Before Jesus gives any signs, He gives a warning: "Watch out that no one leads you astray." The first danger at the end is not war or famine. It is deception. Notice how often Jesus comes back to this in the chapter (24:5, 11, 24). Satan is a liar (John 8:44), and the closer we come to the end, the more lies there will be. The best protection is to know what Jesus actually said.

I should explain how I read this chapter. I believe the church, the body of Christ, will be taken up to meet the Lord in the air before the Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; John 14:1-3). God "did not appoint us for wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and Jesus promised the church at Philadelphia, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 3:10). In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples about events centered on Judea, the temple, and the Sabbath (24:15-20). I believe these words will speak most directly to those who come to faith during the Tribulation, especially the believing remnant of Israel. But every believer can learn from what He says here about staying awake, staying faithful, and not being deceived.

24:5 *For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.*

"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray." There have always been false messiahs. In the years before A.D. 70, several men stirred up crowds with promises of deliverance (Acts 5:36-37). Throughout history, others have claimed to be the Christ or to speak for Him with new revelations. As the end draws near, Jesus says there will be many. If anyone ever tells you Christ has come back in secret, or that he himself is Christ, you know he is a liar.

24:6 *And you are going to hear of wars and reports of wars; see, do not be alarmed; for it is necessary for all things to take place, but the end is not yet.*

"You are going to hear of wars and reports of wars; see, do not be alarmed." Wars are not, by themselves, a sign that the end has come. "It is necessary for all things to take place, but the end is not yet."

Notice the calm in Jesus' voice. He does not want His people panicking every time there is a war in the news. History is in God's hands. Things must happen in the order He has set. Fear and date setting have done a lot of damage in the church. Jesus says, "do not be alarmed."

24:7 *For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in* ***various*** *places.*

"Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." This sounds like more than local wars. It is the language of whole nations and empires going to war. "And there will be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in various places." A pestilence is a deadly disease that spreads among many people.

These things have happened in every generation. But Jesus is describing a time when they come together and grow worse. When John saw the seals opened in Revelation 6, he saw the same pattern: a rider who conquers, war, famine, and death by sword, hunger, and plague (Revelation 6:1-8). Many Bible teachers believe the events of 24:4-8 match the first part of the seven-year Tribulation.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 19:2 (alluded to)

24:8 *And all these **are the** beginning of birth pains.*

"And all these are the beginning of birth pains." A woman in labor has pains that come closer together and grow stronger until the child is born. Isaiah and Jeremiah used this same picture for the time of trouble before God's kingdom comes (Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 30:6-7). The point is that these troubles are not random. They are leading somewhere. They get worse, and then something new is born. After the pain comes the kingdom.

24:9 *Then they will hand you over to tribulation and will kill you; and you will be hated by all the nations on account of My name.*

"Then they will hand you over to tribulation and will kill you; and you will be hated by all the nations on account of My name." Tribulation means pressure, distress, being crushed. The apostles faced this in their own day, and believers in many countries face it now. But in the Tribulation, the hatred of God's people will become worldwide: "hated by all the nations." Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-14 speak of a great number who are killed for their faith in those days.

Notice why they are hated: "on account of My name." The world does not hate people for being nice. It hates the name of Jesus (John 15:18-21).

24:10 *And then many will be caused to stumble, and they will hand over one another and will hate one another.*

"And then many will be caused to stumble, and they will hand over one another and will hate one another." When persecution comes, people who only went along with the faith on the outside will fall away. Some will even betray their own families and friends to save themselves (10:21). Hard times show what is real. A faith that has never been tested has not yet shown what it is made of.

24:11 *And many false prophets will rise up and will lead many astray.*

"And many false prophets will rise up and will lead many astray." A false prophet claims to speak for God but does not. In the Tribulation, a great false prophet will rise to lead the world to worship the beast (Revelation 13:11-14; 19:20). Even now, John warns that "many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). How do we tell them apart? We test every message by the Word of God (Acts 17:11). If it does not match Scripture, it is not from God, no matter how impressive the speaker is.

24:12 *And because lawlessness is multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold.*

"And because lawlessness is multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold." Lawlessness means living as if there is no law, no God to answer to. When sin increases everywhere, people's hearts grow hard. Love for God and love for others cools down like a fire left without wood.

We see a taste of this already. When people are surrounded by evil long enough, they stop being shocked by it. Paul says the last days will be marked by people who are lovers of self, lovers of money, and without natural love (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Believers must guard their hearts and keep their love warm (Revelation 2:4-5).

24:13 *But the **one** having endured to **the** end, he will be saved.*

"But the one having endured to the end, he will be saved." What does this mean? Is Jesus teaching that we are saved by holding on long enough?

No. Scripture teaches plainly that salvation is by grace through faith, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9). In the setting of the Tribulation, the end means the end of that time of trouble, and saved most likely means delivered, brought safely through to the coming of the King and into His kingdom. The same word is used for being rescued from danger (8:25). Those who endure to the end of the Tribulation will be rescued when Jesus returns.

There is also a wider truth here. Real faith keeps going. People who truly belong to Christ will endure, not because they are strong, but because He keeps them (Philippians 1:6). Endurance does not earn salvation. It shows that salvation is real.

24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.*

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come." "The gospel of the kingdom" is the good news that the King is coming and that people must repent and believe to enter His kingdom. John the Baptist and Jesus preached it (3:2; 4:23).

God will make sure every nation hears before the end. In the Tribulation He will use many messengers, including the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:1-8), the two witnesses in Jerusalem (Revelation 11:3), and even an angel "having an eternal gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Revelation 14:6). God's mercy offers salvation right up to the end.

For us today, this verse is a call to get the gospel out. We do not know how close the end is. Every day we have is a day to share the good news.

24:15 *Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in **the** holy place (let the **one** reading understand),*

Now Jesus gives the sign that marks the middle of the Tribulation: "the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place." An abomination is something God hates, especially an idol or an act of false worship. "Of desolation" means it brings ruin and leaves God's holy place empty and defiled.

Daniel spoke of this in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. In Daniel 9:27, a coming ruler makes a covenant with Israel for "one seven," a period of seven years, and in the middle of the seven he will "cause sacrifice and grain offering to cease," and then comes "one who makes desolate." Daniel 11:31 was first fulfilled about 167 B.C., when the Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes set up an altar to the false god Zeus in the temple and offered a pig on it. But Jesus speaks of the abomination as still future in His day. It did not happen when He spoke, and I do not believe the events of A.D. 70 fulfilled it completely.

Paul tells us what it will be. "The man of sin" will take his seat "in the temple of God as God, displaying himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Revelation 13:14-15 speaks of an image of the beast that the world is forced to worship. This is the Antichrist, the final world ruler who opposes Christ. For this to happen, there must be a temple in Jerusalem again, with sacrifices being offered. I believe a temple will be rebuilt, and the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel at the halfway point of the seven years and set himself up to be worshiped there.

"Let the one reading understand." This is a call to pay close attention. God gave this prophecy so that His people would recognize it when it happens.

Some Bible teachers believe Daniel 9:27 was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, but I believe it is still future, and that the abomination it describes will be set up in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation.

Old Testament links: Daniel 9:27 (alluded to); Daniel 12:11 (alluded to); Daniel 11:31 (alluded to)

24:16 *then let those in Judea flee to the mountains;*

"Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains." When the abomination is set up, there will be no time to waste. The hills of Judea are rugged, with caves and hiding places. Revelation 12:6, 13-14 describes the woman, a picture of Israel, fleeing into the wilderness where God protects her for "a time and times and half a time," three and a half years.

Notice how Jewish this setting is. Judea, the temple, the holy place, and in a moment, the Sabbath. Jesus is speaking about the land of Israel and the people of Israel in the last days.

24:17-18 *let the **one** on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; and let the **one** in the field not turn back to take his garments.*

"Let the one on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house." Houses in that land had flat roofs, used like a porch for rest and work. Often there was an outside stairway. Jesus says, do not even go inside to grab your things. "Let the one in the field not turn back to take his garments." A man working in the field would leave his outer cloak at the edge. Leave it. Run.

The danger will be so sudden and so great that a few seconds will matter. Things can be replaced. Lives cannot.

24:19 *But woe to those who are pregnant and to those nursing in those days!*

"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those nursing in those days!" This is not a curse but a cry of pity. A pregnant woman or a mother with a nursing baby cannot run fast or travel far. Jesus feels for the most helpless in this time of terror. His compassion shows even while He describes the darkest days in history.

24:20 *And pray that your flight may not happen in winter nor on a Sabbath.*

"And pray that your flight may not happen in winter nor on a Sabbath." Winter in Judea brings cold rain, and streams that are dry in summer can flood and become hard to cross. On a Sabbath,

city gates might be closed, and travel would be limited for observant Jews. This tells us again that Jesus is speaking about a time when the Sabbath is being kept in Israel, which fits a future time when Jewish worship has been restored.

Jesus tells them to pray about the details. God cares about the timing of our troubles, and prayer matters even when the big events are already decided.

24:21 *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not happened from **the** beginning of **the** world until now, nor by any means will happen.*

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, nor by any means will happen." Jesus says this time will be worse than anything that has ever happened or ever will happen. That includes the flood, the Holocaust, and every war in history. This is why I cannot see the A.D. 70 destruction as the complete fulfillment. As terrible as it was, worse things have happened since.

Jeremiah 30:7 calls this "a time of distress for Jacob," and adds "from it he will be saved." Daniel 12:1 describes "a time of distress" such as never occurred. Revelation 6-19 shows us the details: the seals, trumpets, and bowls of God's judgment poured out on a world that has rejected Him. The second half of the seven years is often called the Great Tribulation because of this verse.

Old Testament links: Daniel 12:1 (alluded to); Jeremiah 30:7 (alluded to)

24:22 *And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but because of the elect those days will be shortened.*

"And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but because of the elect those days will be shortened." So terrible will this time be that if it went on, no one would survive. The word saved here means kept physically alive. But God has set a limit. Daniel and Revelation give the length: 1,260 days, or forty-two months, for the last half (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). The days are cut short in the sense that God has fixed an end to them and will not let them run on.

"The elect" are God's chosen people who are alive in that time. That includes the believing remnant of Israel and all who come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation. God's love for His people shapes even the length of His judgments.

24:23-25 *Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here **is** the Christ,' or 'Here,' do not believe **it**. For false christs and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Look, I have told you beforehand.*

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ,' or 'Here,' do not believe it." In days of fear, people will grab onto anyone who promises rescue.

"False christs and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." This is important. Not every miracle comes from God.

Satan can do signs and wonders too (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13-14). Miracles alone do not prove a message is true. The test is always the Word of God (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

"If possible" tells us it is not possible for the elect to be finally led astray. God keeps His own. "Look, I have told you beforehand." Jesus warned us ahead of time so that no one would have an excuse.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (alluded to)

24:26 *Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; 'Look, in the inner rooms,' do not believe* ***it****.*

"Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; 'Look, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it." Some false messiahs will claim to be hiding in the desert, gathering an army. Others will claim a secret coming, known only to a few insiders in a back room. Jesus says, do not go and look. His coming will not be secret.

24:27 *For just as the lightning comes out from* ***the*** *east and shines as far as* ***the*** *west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

"For just as the lightning comes out from the east and shines as far as the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Lightning does not need an announcement. No one has to tell you where it is. It lights up the whole sky at once, and everyone sees it.

That is how Jesus will return to the earth. It will be sudden, public, and impossible to miss. "Every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). Anyone who says Christ has come back quietly is lying.

24:28 *For wherever the carcass may be, there the vultures will be gathered together.*

"For wherever the carcass may be, there the vultures will be gathered together." The word translated vultures can also mean eagles. In Luke 17:37 Jesus uses the same saying in answer to the question, "Where, Lord?" Just as you can tell where a dead animal lies by the birds circling over it, the coming of the Son of Man will be obvious wherever judgment is due.

This also points to the scene in Revelation 19:17-18, 21, where an angel calls the birds to feast on the armies gathered against Christ at His return. The coming of the King will bring swift judgment on a world that is spiritually dead.

24:29 *And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

"And immediately after the tribulation of those days." This tells us when the Second Coming happens. It comes after the Tribulation, at its end, not before it and not in the middle.

How does this fit with a pre-tribulation rapture? I believe Scripture speaks of two stages of Christ's coming. First, He comes in the air for His church before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Then, after the Tribulation, He comes with His saints to the earth to

judge and to reign (Zechariah 14:4-5; Jude 14; Revelation 19:11-16). Matthew 24:29-31 describes the second of these, His glorious return to the earth.

Then the heavens are shaken. "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." The prophets spoke of the same signs for the Day of the Lord (Isaiah 13:9-10; Joel 2:31; 3:15). Revelation 6:12-14 shows them too. I take these words to describe real events in the sky. God who made the heavens can shake them.

Old Testament links: Joel 2:10 (alluded to); Isaiah 13:10 (alluded to); Isaiah 34:4 (alluded to); Joel 2:31 (alluded to)

24:30 *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.*

"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky." Scripture does not tell us exactly what this sign will be. It may be His own glory blazing across the sky. The sign of His coming that the disciples asked about (24:3) is His coming itself.

"And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn." The tribes of the earth will mourn in fear because their Judge has come. But there is a godly mourning too. Zechariah 12:10-12 says Israel "will look to Me, to Him whom they have pierced; and they will mourn over Him." The people of Israel will see Jesus and mourn in repentance for having rejected Him, and they will be saved (Romans 11:26).

"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." This is Daniel 7:13-14 fulfilled. The angels told the disciples, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner" (Acts 1:11). He left on the clouds from the Mount of Olives, and He will return the same way.

Old Testament links: Daniel 7:13 (alluded to); Zechariah 12:10-12 (alluded to)

24:31 *And He will send His angels with a trumpet of great sound, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from **the** ends of **the** heavens to their ends.*

"And He will send His angels with a trumpet of great sound, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the heavens to their ends."

Some readers see this as the rapture of the church. I believe it is a different gathering. The rapture is the Lord Himself coming in the air and believers being caught up to meet Him (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Here, after the Tribulation, the angels gather God's elect from all over the earth to the King who has come to the earth. The prophets spoke of a great trumpet that would gather the scattered people of Israel back to the land (Isaiah 27:12-13; Deuteronomy 30:3-4). I believe this gathering includes the believing remnant of Israel and all who believed during the Tribulation, brought together to enter Christ's kingdom on earth.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 2:6 (alluded to); Isaiah 27:13 (alluded to); Deuteronomy 30:4 (alluded to)

24:32-33 *Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth the leaves, you know that the summer **is** near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at **the** doors.*

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree." In Israel, most trees stay green all winter, but the fig tree loses its leaves. When its branches turn tender and new leaves come out, you know summer is near.

"So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors." "All these things" means the signs Jesus just described: the birth pains, the abomination, the great tribulation. The people who see those things happen can know the coming of the King is very close, right at the door.

Some Bible teachers see the fig tree here as a picture of the nation of Israel, and point to Israel's return to its land in 1948 as a sign of the last days. That may be so, and God's bringing Israel back to the land is remarkable. But Jesus' point here is simple: just as leaves tell you summer is coming, these signs tell you He is coming.

24:34 *Truly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen.*

"Truly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen." This is one of the most debated verses in the chapter. What does "this generation" mean? There are three main views.

First, some say it means the generation alive when Jesus spoke, and that everything here was fulfilled in A.D. 70. But the Son of Man did not come on the clouds in A.D. 70, and the great tribulation unlike any before or after did not end that way, so this view has to treat most of the chapter as figures of speech.

Second, some say the word for generation, genea, can mean a race or a people, and that Jesus is promising that the Jewish people will not pass away until all these things happen. That is certainly true, and God's preservation of Israel through history is a wonder.

Third, many take it to mean the generation that sees "all these things" (24:33), the signs Jesus just described. The people who see the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation will not die off before He returns. The whole series of events will happen within one lifetime. Those who hold this third view say it fits best with the verse right before it. Good Bible teachers hold each of these views, and what Jesus says next matters more than the debate: His words will not fail.

24:35 *The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*

"The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." This is a staggering claim. Nothing seems more permanent than the sky and the earth. Yet Jesus says His words are more lasting than creation itself. Only God could say that. Isaiah 40:8 says the word of our God stands forever. Jesus speaks of His own words the same way.

Whatever happens in the world, whatever the headlines say, every promise He made will be kept.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 40:8 (alluded to)

24:36 *But concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens, except My Father alone.*

"But concerning that day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels of the heavens, except My Father alone." Mark 13:32 adds "nor the Son." How can the Son of God not know?

When the Son became a man, He did not stop being God, but He chose not to use all His divine rights on His own (Philippians 2:6-8). He lived in dependence on the Father, and the Father had kept the timing of this day in His own authority (Acts 1:7). Now that Jesus is raised and glorified, I believe He knows.

Here is the plain lesson: no one knows the date. Not prophecy teachers, not date setters, not anyone. Every person who has set a date for Christ's return has been wrong. Our job is not to calculate. It is to be ready.

24:37-39 *And just as the days of Noah **were**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For just as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

"And just as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." What were the days of Noah like? "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark." Those things are not sins in themselves. The point is that people went on with ordinary life as if nothing would ever change. Noah preached righteousness to them for years (2 Peter 2:5), and they ignored him.

"And they did not know until the flood came and took all away." The flood came suddenly, and it took them all away in judgment. Only the eight in the ark were spared. Jesus says His coming will be like that: sudden, unexpected for the world, and bringing judgment on everyone who is not ready.

Old Testament links: Genesis 7:7 (alluded to)

24:40-41 *Then two will be in the field; the one is taken and the one is left. Two **women will be** grinding at the millhouse; one is taken and one is left.*

"Then two will be in the field; the one is taken and the one is left. Two women will be grinding at the millhouse; one is taken and one is left."

Many people read these verses as the rapture, with believers taken to heaven and unbelievers left behind. I understand why, and some pre-tribulation teachers I respect read it that way. But look at the context. In the verse right before, the flood "took all away." Those who were taken in Noah's day were taken in judgment. The ones left were Noah and his family, who went on to live in a new

world. Luke 17:34-37 records the same saying, and when the disciples ask "Where, Lord?" Jesus answers with the picture of a body and vultures. The ones taken are taken to judgment.

So I believe these verses describe the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation. The unbelievers are taken away in judgment, and the believers are left to enter the kingdom of Christ on earth. Two people can be doing the very same work side by side, and one is ready while the other is not. There will be no time then to get ready.

24:42 *Therefore keep watch, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes.*

"Therefore keep watch, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes." To keep watch means to stay awake and alert, like a guard on duty. Jesus does not say to keep calculating. He says to keep watching. Since we do not know the hour, every hour matters.

For believers today, waiting for Christ to come for His church, the call is the same. We look for "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), and we live each day as if it might be the day.

24:43 *But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief comes, he would have kept watch and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.*

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief comes, he would have kept watch." The night was divided into watches, periods of about three hours. A thief does not send a note telling you when he will break in. If you knew, you would be waiting at the door.

Paul uses the same picture: "the day of the Lord comes in this way, as a thief in the night" for the unbelieving world (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). But he tells believers that this day should not overtake them like a thief, because they are children of the light.

24:44 *Because of this you also be ready, for in an hour that you do not suppose, the Son of Man comes.*

"Because of this you also be ready, for in an hour that you do not suppose, the Son of Man comes." Ready means right with God now. Not planning to get ready. Not meaning to someday. Ready.

Let me ask you plainly: if Jesus came today, would you be ready to meet Him? If you are not sure, settle it now. Turn from your sin and trust Christ. There may not be a later.

24:45 *Who then is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has set over his household, to give them the food in season?*

"Who then is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has set over his household, to give them the food in season?" Now Jesus tells a short parable about two slaves. A trusted slave in a large household was often put in charge of the other servants and the daily needs of the house.

The faithful slave does his job: he gives the household their food at the right time. This is a picture of anyone the Lord has put in charge of others, including pastors and teachers who feed God's

people with His Word (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2-4). It also applies to every believer, because each of us has been given something to look after for the Master.

24:46-47 *Blessed **is** that slave whom his master, having come, will find so doing. Truly I say to you that he will set him over all his possessions.*

"Blessed is that slave whom his master, having come, will find so doing." The master did not tell the slave the day he would return. The slave was faithful anyway. When the master came, he found him doing his work.

The reward is great: "he will set him over all his possessions." Faithfulness now leads to greater responsibility in the kingdom to come. Jesus says the same in 25:21 and Luke 19:17. What we do with what He gives us now matters forever.

24:48-49 *But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master delays to come,' and begins to beat the fellow slaves, and to eat and drink with those who are drunk,*

"But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master delays to come.'" Notice that he says it in his heart. He may not say it out loud. But inside, he decides the master is not coming back any time soon, so he can live however he wants.

He "begins to beat the fellow slaves, and to eat and drink with those who are drunk." When a person stops believing the master is coming, he abuses the people under him and indulges himself. Peter warns of scoffers in the last days who say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4). What we believe about the return of Christ shapes how we live.

24:50-51 *the master of that slave will come on a day in which he does not expect **him** and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in two and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.*

"The master of that slave will come on a day in which he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know." The evil slave was wrong. The master did come, and he came when the slave least expected it.

The judgment is severe. He "will cut him in two and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites." To cut in two was one of the harshest punishments of that time. Here it pictures being cut off completely in judgment. This slave was never truly faithful. He was a hypocrite, a servant on the outside but not in his heart, and he ends up where the hypocrites belong. "There will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." That is the same phrase Jesus uses for hell (8:12; 22:13).

The question for each of us is simple. When the Master comes, what will He find us doing?

Chapter 24 Summary

As Jesus left the temple, He told His disciples that not one stone would be left on another, which came true in A.D. 70. On the Mount of Olives they asked when this would be and what the sign of His coming and the end of the age would be. Jesus warned them not to be led astray by false

christs, and said wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are the beginning of birth pains. His people would be hated by all nations, many would fall away, false prophets would arise, and love would grow cold, but the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations before the end. When the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel stands in the holy place, those in Judea must flee, for there will be great tribulation such as the world has never seen, shortened for the sake of the elect. False christs will do great signs, but His coming will be like lightning that everyone sees. Immediately after the tribulation, the heavens will be shaken, and the Son of Man will come on the clouds with power and great glory and send His angels to gather His elect. Like the fig tree's leaves, these signs show He is near. No one knows the day or hour, and His coming will be like the days of Noah, when judgment came suddenly. So His servants must keep watch, stay ready, and be found faithful when the Master returns.

Keeping watch, to me, means living as if Jesus could come around the corner at any second. That is not fear. It is readiness. I want Him to find me doing what He asked.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. What did Jesus say about the temple, and when did it happen? (24:2)

2. What three things did the disciples ask Jesus on the Mount of Olives? (24:3)

3. What is the first warning Jesus gave, and why do you think He put it first? (24:4-5)

4. What did Jesus call the wars, famines, and earthquakes, and what does that picture mean? (24:7-8)

5. What is the abomination of desolation, and which prophet spoke of it? (24:15)

6. How did Jesus describe the great tribulation? (24:21-22)

7. What will the coming of the Son of Man be like, and what will happen immediately after the tribulation? (24:27-30)

8. What does the comparison with the days of Noah teach about His coming? (24:37-41)

9. What does it mean for you to keep watch and be ready? (24:42-44)

10. If the Master came back today, what would He find you doing with what He has given you? (24:45-51)

Chapter 25: Be Ready: Virgins, Talents, Sheep and Goats

Scripture

25:1-13 Then the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and the ***other*** five ***were*** foolish. Those who ***were*** foolish, having taken their lamps, did not take oil with themselves; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all became drowsy and were sleeping. And in the middle of ***the*** night there was a cry: 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us ***some*** of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those ***who were*** ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. And afterward the remaining virgins also come, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he, answering, said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

25:14-30 For ***it is*** just as a man going on a journey called his own slaves and handed over to them his possessions. And to one he gave approximately 375 pounds (five talents), and to another approximately 150 pounds (two ***talents***), and to another approximately 75 pounds (one ***talent***), to each according to his own ability; and he went on the journey immediately. Now the one who had received the five talents, having gone, traded with them and made another five talents. Likewise also the one ***who had received*** the two, he also gained another two. But the one who had received the one, having gone away, dug in the ground and hid the money of his master. And after a long time the master of those slaves comes and settles accounts with them. And the one who had received the five talents, having come, brought another five talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over five talents to me; look, I have gained another five talents in addition to them.' And his master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.' And the one who had received the two talents also, having come, said, 'Master, you handed over two talents to me; look, I have gained another two talents in addition to them.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.' And the one who had received the one talent also, having come, said, 'Master, I knew you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering from where you did not scatter. And having been afraid, having gone away, I hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what ***is*** yours.' And his master, answering, said to him, 'Wicked and lazy slave! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather from where I did not scatter? Therefore you ought to have put my money with the bankers, and having come, I would have received what ***is*** mine with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give ***it*** to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, ***it*** will be given, and he will have abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.'

25:31-46 Now when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on ***the*** throne of His glory. And all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right, but the goats on ***the*** left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from ***the*** foundation of ***the*** world. For I was hungry and you gave Me ***something*** to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed ***You***, or thirsty and give ***You*** drink? And when did we see You a stranger and take ***You*** in, or naked and clothe ***You***? And when did we see You sick or in prison and come to You?' And the King, answering, will say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did ***it*** to one of these My brothers, the least ***ones***, you did ***it*** to Me.' Then He will also say to those on ***the*** left, 'Go from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you did not give Me ***anything*** to eat; I was thirsty and you did not give Me drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do ***it*** to one of the least of these, neither did you do ***it*** to Me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Chapter 25 Preview

Jesus is still on the Mount of Olives, finishing His answer to the disciples' question about His coming. Chapter 24 ended with a call to be ready and faithful. Chapter 25 gives three more pictures of what that means. In the first, ten young women wait for a bridegroom. Five bring extra oil and five do not, and when he comes at midnight, the foolish ones are shut out. The lesson is to be ready, because no one knows the day or the hour.

In the second, a master leaves on a long journey and gives his slaves different amounts of money to manage. Two put it to work and are rewarded. One buries it and is cast out. The lesson is to be faithful with what He has given us. In the third, Jesus describes His return in glory, when He sits on His throne and separates the nations like a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The ones who cared for His brothers in their need inherit the kingdom. The others go away into eternal punishment.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1 *Then the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom.*

"Then the kingdom of the heavens will be likened to ten virgins." The first word, Then, ties this parable to the end of chapter 24, the time of the Son of Man's coming.

In a Jewish wedding of that day, the couple was first legally promised to each other, sometimes for a year. On the wedding day, the bridegroom went with his friends to the bride's home, usually in the evening, and brought her back in a joyful procession to his own home or his father's home for the feast. Young unmarried women, friends of the bride, waited along the way with lamps to light the road and join the procession. The lamps were most likely torches or small clay lamps that needed oil to keep burning.

25:2-4 *Now five of them were wise, and the **other** five **were** foolish. Those who **were** foolish, having taken their lamps, did not take oil with themselves; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

"Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish." On the outside, all ten looked the same. All had lamps. All were waiting. All were invited.

The difference was oil. "Those who were foolish, having taken their lamps, did not take oil with themselves; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." The wise ones prepared for a delay. The foolish ones thought they had enough for a short wait. They had the look of being ready without the substance.

What does the oil picture? Many Bible teachers see it as the Holy Spirit, since oil is often a picture of the Spirit in Scripture (Zechariah 4:1-6). Others see it more generally as real, living faith, the inner reality that matches the outward profession. Either way, the point is the same. Having a lamp is not enough. Being in the church, knowing the songs, and carrying a Bible are not enough. You must have the real thing inside, and no one else can give it to you.

25:5 *Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all became drowsy and were sleeping.*

"Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all became drowsy and were sleeping." The bridegroom took longer than expected. Notice that all ten fell asleep, the wise and the foolish. Jesus does not blame them for sleeping. Sleep in this parable is not the problem. The wise were prepared even while they slept. Their lamps had oil, and their extra flasks were full.

The delay is a reminder that Jesus' return has already taken longer than many expected. Peter tells us why: the Lord is patient, "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

25:6 *And in the middle of **the** night there was a cry: 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!'*

"And in the middle of the night there was a cry: 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet him!'" Midnight was the least expected hour, when everyone was deep in sleep. His coming was sudden. There was no more time to prepare. The time for getting ready was over. It was time to go.

25:7-9 *Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us **some** of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'*

"Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps." They cut the burnt wick and adjusted the flame so it would burn bright. But the foolish ones found their lamps "going out." They asked the wise for some of their oil.

The wise said, "No, lest there not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." This sounds harsh, but it is the heart of the parable. Some things cannot be borrowed. You cannot borrow someone else's faith. A godly mother, a believing husband, a pastor you respect: none of them can give you their relationship with God. Ezekiel 14:14 says even Noah, Daniel, and Job could deliver only themselves by their righteousness. Each person must come to God for himself.

25:10 *And while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those **who were** ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut.*

"And while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut."

Four words here are some of the most sobering in the Bible: "the door was shut." When Noah and his family went into the ark, the Lord shut them in (Genesis 7:16). The door that kept them safe also shut everyone else out. There is a day coming when the door of opportunity will close. Today it is still open. Jesus says, "I am the door" (John 10:9). Go through Him while you can.

25:11-12 *And afterward the remaining virgins also come, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he, answering, said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'*

"And afterward the remaining virgins also come, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us!'" They called him lord, a title of respect. They wanted in. But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."

These words sound like 7:21-23, where many say "Lord, Lord" on that day, and Jesus answers, "I never knew you." The problem is not that Jesus did not know who they were. It is that they had no real relationship with Him. They knew about Him, they were around Him, they said the right words. But they did not belong to Him.

25:13 *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." This is the point of the whole parable. Watching here does not mean staring at the sky. It means being prepared at all times, so that whenever He comes, you are ready.

In its setting, this parable speaks of the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation, when the King returns to bring His people into the joy of His kingdom, and those who only looked ready are shut out. But the lesson is for all of us. I believe Christ will come for His church before the

Tribulation, and that could happen at any moment. Are you ready? Not your family. Not your church. You.

25:14 *For **it is** just as a man going on a journey called his own slaves and handed over to them his possessions.*

"For it is just as a man going on a journey called his own slaves and handed over to them his possessions." This second parable is about faithful service while the Master is away. The man going on a journey is a picture of Jesus, who would soon go back to heaven and leave His work in the hands of His servants.

The slaves did not own what they managed. It was "his possessions." Everything we have, our time, money, abilities, opportunities, and the gospel itself, belongs to the Lord. We are managers, not owners (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

25:15 *And to one he gave approximately 375 pounds (five talents), and to another approximately 150 pounds (two **talents**), and to another approximately 75 pounds (one **talent**), to each according to his own ability; and he went on the journey immediately.*

The master gave five talents to one slave, two to another, and one to another. A talent was not a coin but a large unit of weight used for silver or gold. The SLB gives the weight in pounds in this verse: "approximately 375 pounds (five talents)," about 150 pounds for two talents, and about 75 pounds for one. Even one talent of silver was worth many years of wages for a working man. Our English word talent, meaning a natural ability, comes from this parable.

He gave "to each according to his own ability." The master knew each slave and gave each what he could handle. God does not give everyone the same gifts or the same amount, but He gives every one of His servants something (Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:10). No one has been given nothing.

25:16-17 *Now the one who had received the five talents, having gone, traded with them and made another five talents. Likewise also the one **who had received** the two, he also gained another two.*

"Now the one who had received the five talents, having gone, traded with them and made another five talents." Notice the words "having gone." He went right away and put the money to work. The one with two did the same and gained two more.

Both doubled what they were given. They did not have the same amount, but they had the same faithfulness. God does not measure us by how much we have, but by what we do with what He gave us.

25:18 *But the one who had received the one, having gone away, dug in the ground and hid the money of his master.*

"But the one who had received the one, having gone away, dug in the ground and hid the money of his master." Burying money was a common way to keep it safe in that day, since there were no banks as we know them for ordinary people. He did not steal it or waste it. He just did nothing with it.

This is the sin of the wasted life. It is possible to avoid open sin and still be unfaithful, simply by doing nothing for the Master. Many people who are given one talent think it does not matter what they do because they have so little. But every gift matters to God.

25:19 *And after a long time the master of those slaves comes and settles accounts with them.*

"And after a long time the master of those slaves comes and settles accounts with them." Two important truths are in this verse. First, "after a long time." Jesus was telling His disciples His return would not be right away. Second, "settles accounts." There will be a day of reckoning. Every servant will give an account to the Master.

For believers, Paul calls this the judgment seat of Christ, where each believer will "receive back the things done through the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10). That judgment is not about whether we are saved. It is about rewards for faithful service (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

25:20-21 *And the one who had received the five talents, having come, brought another five talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over five talents to me; look, I have gained another five talents in addition to them.' And his master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

The slave with five talents came with joy: "look, I have gained another five talents in addition to them." He was not proud. He started with "you handed over five talents to me." He knew it all came from the master.

And the master said, "Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master." Five talents was a fortune, yet the master calls it "a few things." Compared to what is coming in the kingdom, everything we manage now is small. The reward for faithfulness is more responsibility and a share in the master's own joy. Is there anything you want to hear more than "Well done" from Jesus?

25:22-23 *And the one who had received the two talents also, having come, said, 'Master, you handed over two talents to me; look, I have gained another two talents in addition to them.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

The slave with two talents came next. He had gained two more. And look at what the master said to him. It is word for word the same as what he said to the first slave. He had less to start with and less to show at the end, but he was just as faithful, and he received the same praise.

This should encourage everyone who feels small. God does not compare you to the person with five talents. He asks whether you were faithful with the two He gave you.

25:24-25 *And the one who had received the one talent also, having come, said, 'Master, I knew you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering from where you did not scatter. And having been afraid, having gone away, I hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what* ***is*** *yours.'*

The third slave came with excuses. "Master, I knew you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering from where you did not scatter." He blamed the master. He said he was afraid, so he hid the talent in the ground. "Look, you have what is yours."

Notice what is wrong here. He did not really know his master at all. The master had just shown great generosity to the other two. This slave saw only a hard, demanding man. His fear was not the healthy fear of the Lord that leads to obedience. It was the kind of fear that makes a person hide. When we see God wrongly, we serve Him wrongly, or not at all.

25:26-27 *And his master, answering, said to him, 'Wicked and lazy slave! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather from where I did not scatter? Therefore you ought to have put my money with the bankers, and having come, I would have received what* ***is*** *mine with interest.*

"Wicked and lazy slave!" The master called his excuse what it was. He used the slave's own words against him. If you really believed I was that kind of master, then you should have at least put the money "with the bankers." Then I would have "received what is mine with interest." Even the least effort would have been better than nothing.

The slave was called wicked not because he did something evil, but because he did nothing good with what was entrusted to him. James 4:17 says that whoever knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

25:28-29 *Therefore take the talent from him, and give* ***it*** *to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has,* ***it*** *will be given, and he will have abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*

"Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents." The talent went to the one who had been most faithful.

"For to everyone who has, it will be given, and he will have abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." Jesus said the same thing about hearing God's Word (13:12). Those who use what God gives them receive more. Those who neglect it lose even what they have. This is true of spiritual gifts, opportunities, and understanding. Use it or lose it.

25:30 *And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.'*

"And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." This is the language of final judgment (8:12; 22:13; 24:51). This slave was not a true servant who was a little less productive. His life showed that he never truly knew or trusted his master. He belonged to the master's household in name only.

Here is the balance we must keep. We are not saved by our works. But a person who truly belongs to Christ will serve Him. Faith that produces nothing is not saving faith (James 2:17-18).

25:31 *Now when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on **the** throne of His glory.*

"Now when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory." This is not a parable, though it uses the picture of a shepherd. It is Jesus describing what He will do when He returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, the event He described in 24:29-31.

He will come in glory, with all the holy angels. And "then He will sit on the throne of His glory." This is the throne of David, the King's throne on earth (Luke 1:32-33; 19:28). The rejected Carpenter from Nazareth will sit as King and Judge.

Old Testament links: Daniel 7:13 (alluded to)

25:32-33 *And all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right, but the goats on **the** left.*

"And all the nations will be gathered before Him." The word for nations can also mean Gentiles. This is the judgment of the people of the nations who are alive on the earth when Jesus returns. It is not the same as the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, which comes after the thousand years and is for the unbelieving dead. Joel 3:1-2 also speaks of God gathering the nations for judgment when He restores the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.

"He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." In that land, sheep and goats often grazed together in the same flock during the day, but at night the shepherd separated them. They look somewhat alike from a distance, but the shepherd knows the difference. The right side was the place of honor and favor. The left was the place of rejection.

Notice that the judgment is of people one by one. Each is a sheep or a goat. No one is judged by his nation alone.

Old Testament links: Ezekiel 34:17 (alluded to)

25:34 *Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from **the** foundation of **the** world.*

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The Son of Man is now called "the King." Matthew's whole Gospel has been pointing to this.

The sheep are "blessed of My Father." They inherit the kingdom. You do not earn an inheritance. You receive it because you belong to the family. And this kingdom was "prepared for you from the foundation of the world." God planned this before creation. These are the people who enter

Christ's kingdom on earth at His return, alive in their natural bodies, and who go on to live in the thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6).

25:35-36 *For I was hungry and you gave Me **something** to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*

"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

These are simple acts of kindness. Nothing here is spectacular. A meal, a cup of water, a coat, a visit. And yet the King says they were done for Him.

Does this mean these people were saved by their good works? No. The King says the kingdom was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, long before they did anything. Their works were the evidence of their faith, the fruit that showed what they were. During the Tribulation, helping Christ's people will be very dangerous. Those who refuse the mark of the beast will not be able to buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-17). Anyone who feeds, shelters, or visits them in prison will be putting their own life on the line. Only those who truly believed would take that risk.

25:37-39 *Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed **You**, or thirsty and give **You** drink? And when did we see You a stranger and take **You** in, or naked and clothe **You**? And when did we see You sick or in prison and come to You?'*

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?" The righteous are surprised. They did not keep a record of their good deeds. They did not help others in order to get a reward. They simply did it, because their hearts had been changed.

That is the way real kindness works. The Pharisees did their works to be seen (23:5). These people did not even remember their works. Jesus remembered every one.

25:40 *And the King, answering, will say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did **it** to one of these My brothers, the least **ones**, you did **it** to Me.'*

"And the King, answering, will say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these My brothers, the least ones, you did it to Me.'"

Who are "these My brothers"? There are two main views. Many teachers believe they are the Jewish people, Jesus' brothers according to the flesh, who will be hunted and persecuted during the Tribulation (24:9, 16-22). Others believe they are Jesus' followers, His spiritual brothers (12:48-50; 28:10), including the messengers who carry the gospel of the kingdom to all nations in those days (24:14). Some combine the two and include both the believing Jewish remnant and all who belong to Christ in that time. Either way, the way people treat those who belong to Jesus is the way they treat Jesus Himself. When Saul persecuted the church, Jesus said to him, "why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

This has a plain application for us. When we care for fellow believers in need, especially the "least ones," the forgotten and the suffering, we are doing it for the Lord.

25:41 *Then He will also say to those on **the** left, 'Go from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.*

"Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Go from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."

Notice the difference. The sheep hear the word come. The goats hear, "Go from Me." To be separated from Christ forever is the heart of what hell is.

Notice too that the eternal fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels." It was not made for people. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). But people who reject Him and side with the devil will share the devil's end. Hell is real, it is eternal, and Jesus spoke of it plainly so that no one would have to go there.

25:42-43 *For I was hungry and you did not give Me **anything** to eat; I was thirsty and you did not give Me drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'*

The King repeats the list, but this time it is what they did not do: "I was hungry and you did not give Me anything to eat." These people are not condemned for terrible crimes. They are condemned for doing nothing for Christ's people in their need. Their lack of love showed that they did not know or love the King. Indifference to Jesus' people is indifference to Jesus.

25:44 *Then they themselves also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*

"Then they themselves also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'" They are surprised too. They seem to say, if we had known it was You, we would have helped. But that is the point. They saw people in need who belonged to Christ and decided they were not worth the risk or the trouble.

25:45 *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do **it** to one of the least of these, neither did you do **it** to Me.'*

"Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, neither did you do it to Me." Jesus so closely identifies Himself with His people that their need is His need. Our faith is not tested only in church on Sunday. It is tested by what we do when one of the least of His people needs help and no one is watching.

25:46 *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This verse settles an important question. Some teach that hell is not forever, that the lost will simply cease to exist or that everyone will eventually be saved. But Jesus uses the same word, "eternal," for both the punishment and the life. If eternal life lasts forever, so does eternal punishment. I take Jesus at His word, and it breaks my heart.

And it should move us. Every person you know will spend eternity somewhere. That is why the gospel matters so much. The Judge on the throne is the same Jesus who died to save sinners. Today He still invites sinners to come to Him (11:28).

Old Testament links: Daniel 12:2 (alluded to)

Chapter 25 Summary

Jesus told three more pictures of His coming. Ten virgins waited for the bridegroom, but only the five wise ones brought oil, and when he came at midnight, they went in with him to the wedding feast and the door was shut on the foolish ones, so we must watch, since we do not know the day or the hour. A master going on a journey gave his slaves five talents, two talents, and one talent, each according to his ability. The first two put the money to work and doubled it, and the master praised them as good and faithful and set them over many things. The third buried his talent and blamed his master, and he was called wicked and lazy and cast into the outer darkness. Then Jesus described His return in glory, when He will sit on His throne and separate the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Those who fed, clothed, and visited His brothers in their need will inherit the kingdom prepared for them, because what they did for the least of His brothers they did for Him. Those who did nothing will go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into eternal life.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What was the difference between the wise and foolish virgins? (25:2-4)

2. Why did the wise virgins refuse to share their oil, and what does that teach? (25:8-9)

3. What happened when the bridegroom came, and what lesson did Jesus draw from it? (25:10-13)

4. How did the master decide how much to give each slave? (25:15)

5. What did the master say to the slaves with five and two talents? (25:21, 23)

6. What excuse did the third slave give, and what does it show about how he saw his master? (25:24-25)

7. How will the King separate the nations when He comes in His glory? (25:31-33)

8. What did the sheep do, and why were they surprised? (25:35-39)

9. What gifts, time, or opportunities has God given you, and are you using them or burying them?

10. Who are the "least ones" around you that you could help this week? (25:40)

Chapter 26: The Last Supper and Gethsemane

Scripture

26:1-16 And it came about, when Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover takes place, and the Son of Man is handed over to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people were gathered together into the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they plotted together in order that they might seize Jesus by deceit and kill ***Him***. But they were saying, "Not during the feast, so that a riot may not arise among the people." Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in ***the*** house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured ***it*** on His head as He was reclining. And having seen ***it***, His disciples became indignant, saying, "For what ***purpose is*** this waste? For this fragrant oil could have been sold for much and given to ***the*** poor." But Jesus, having known ***it***, said to them, "Why do you cause trouble for the woman? For she did a beautiful work toward Me. For you always have the poor with you, but Me you do not always have. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did ***it*** to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this ***woman*** did will also be spoken of for a memorial of her." Then one of the twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, having gone to the chief priests, said, "What are you willing to give me, and I will hand Him over to you?" And they set for him thirty silver ***coins***. And from that time he was seeking an opportunity that he might hand Him over.

26:17-30 Now on the first ***day*** of the Unleavened ***Bread*** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; with you I am keeping the Passover with My disciples."'" And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover. Now evening having come, He was reclining with the twelve. And while they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will hand Me over." And being exceedingly grieved, each of them began to say to Him, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" And He, answering, said, "The one who dipped the hand with Me in the dish, this one will hand Me over. The Son of Man indeed goes, just as it has been written concerning Him; but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is handed over! It would have been good for him if that man had not been born." And Judas, who was handing Him over, answering, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He says to him, "You have said ***it***." And while they were eating, Jesus, having taken the bread and having blessed ***it***, broke ***it***, and was giving ***it*** to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 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. But I say to you that I will by no means drink from now on of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." And having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

26:31-46 Then Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble in Me during this night; for it has been written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee." And Peter, answering, said to Him, "Even if all will be caused to stumble in You, I will never be caused to stumble." Jesus said to him,

"Truly I say to you that during this night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter says to Him, "Even if it is necessary for me to die with You, I will by no means deny You." Likewise all the disciples also said. Then Jesus comes with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He says to the disciples, "Sit here while I, having gone away over there, pray." And having taken along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and to be deeply distressed. Then He says to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with Me." And having gone forward a little, He fell on His face, praying and saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You ***will***." And He comes to the disciples and finds them sleeping, and He says to Peter, "So, were you not able to watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed ***is*** willing, but the flesh ***is*** weak." Again, for a second time, having gone away, He prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup is not able to pass from Me unless I drink it, let Your will be done." And having come, He finds them sleeping again, for their eyes had become heavy. And having left them, having gone away again, He prayed a third time, saying the same word. Then He comes to His disciples and says to them, "Are you sleeping for the rest ***of the time*** and taking your rest? Look, the hour has drawn near, and the Son of Man is handed over into ***the*** hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Look, the one handing Me over has drawn near."

26:47-56 And while He was still speaking, look, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the one handing Him over gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, it is He; seize Him." And immediately, having come up to Jesus, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, "Friend, ***do that*** for which you are here." Then, having come up, they laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. And look, one of those with Jesus, having stretched out the hand, drew his sword, and having struck the slave of the high priest, cut off his ear. Then Jesus says to him, "Return your sword into its place; for all who take a sword will perish by a sword. Or do you think that I am not able now to call upon My Father, and He will furnish Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?" In that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Did you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture Me? Every day I was sitting with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But all this has come about so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled.

26:57-68 And those who had seized Jesus led ***Him*** away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. And Peter was following Him from afar up to the courtyard of the high priest, and having entered inside, he was sitting with the attendants to see the outcome. And the chief priests and the elders and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death, and they did not find ***any***; even though many false witnesses came forward, they did not find ***any***. But at last two false witnesses, having come forward, said, "This ***man*** was saying, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" And the high priest, having stood up, said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What are these testifying against You?" 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." Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy. What do you think?" And they, answering, said, "He is liable to death." Then they spat into His face and struck Him with fists; and others slapped ***Him***, saying, "Prophesy to us, Christ: who is the one who struck You?"

26:69-75 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard; and a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied ***it*** before all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." And when he had gone out to the gateway, another ***servant girl*** saw him, and she says to those there, "This ***man*** also was with Jesus the Nazarene." And again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man." And after a little while those who stood ***by***, having come up, said to Peter, "Truly you also are ***one*** of them, for even your speech makes you evident." Then he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, who had said to him, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And having gone outside, he wept bitterly.

Chapter 26 Preview

Jesus has finished His teaching. Now Matthew turns to the last two days before the cross. The leaders plot to kill Him. In Bethany a woman pours costly oil on His head, and Jesus says she has prepared Him for burial. Judas goes to the chief priests and agrees to hand Him over for thirty pieces of silver. On the night of the Passover, Jesus eats with the Twelve, tells them one of them will betray Him, and gives them the bread and the cup, His body and His blood of the new covenant, which we still remember at the Lord's Table today.

Then He goes to Gethsemane to pray. In deep sorrow He asks the Father if the cup could pass from Him, and then gives Himself to the Father's will, while His closest friends fall asleep. Judas arrives with a crowd and betrays Him with a kiss. The disciples run away. Jesus is taken before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, where He says plainly that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and they condemn Him for blasphemy. Meanwhile, in the courtyard, Peter denies three times that he even knows Him, and then the rooster crows.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-2 *And it came about, when Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover takes place, and the Son of Man is handed over to be crucified."*

"And it came about, when Jesus had finished all these words." Matthew uses a phrase like this at the end of each of Jesus' five great teaching sections (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). This is the last time. The teaching is over. Now comes the cross.

"You know that after two days the Passover takes place, and the Son of Man is handed over to be crucified." The Passover was the yearly feast remembering the night God brought Israel out of Egypt. Each family killed a lamb and put its blood on their doorposts, and the Lord passed over those houses when He struck down the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12). Jesus knew He would die at Passover as the true Passover Lamb. Paul says it plainly: "our Passover was sacrificed for us:

Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus was not caught in a plot. He told them the day before the plotters met.

26:3-5 *Then the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people were gathered together into the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they plotted together in order that they might seize Jesus by deceit and kill **Him**. But they were saying, "Not during the feast, so that a riot may not arise among the people."*

"Then the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people were gathered together into the courtyard of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas." The high priest was the highest religious leader in Israel and the head of the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas held the office from about A.D. 18 to 36. He had already said it was better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to perish (John 11:49-53).

They plotted to seize Jesus "by deceit and kill Him." But they said, "Not during the feast, so that a riot may not arise among the people." Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims, and many of them saw Jesus as a prophet. The leaders wanted to wait until the crowds left. But God had other plans. Jesus, "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7), would die at Passover time, the true Passover Lamb, exactly as He had said.

26:6-7 *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in **the** house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured **it** on His head as He was reclining.*

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper." This Simon had likely been healed by Jesus, since a man with active leprosy could not have guests in his home. John 12:1-8 tells of the same kind of event and tells us the woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

She brought "an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil." Alabaster was a soft, creamy stone carved into fine jars. The oil was so costly that, according to Mark and John, it was worth about a year's wages (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). She "poured it on His head as He was reclining." In those days people ate reclining on cushions around a low table. Kings were anointed on the head. Whether she understood it or not, she was anointing the King.

26:8-9 *And having seen **it**, His disciples became indignant, saying, "For what **purpose is** this waste? For this fragrant oil could have been sold for much and given to **the** poor."*

His disciples became indignant, saying, "For what purpose is this waste?" John tells us Judas led the complaint, and that he did not care about the poor but was a thief who stole from the money bag (John 12:4-6). The other disciples went along with him.

"This fragrant oil could have been sold for much and given to the poor." That sounds very spiritual. But it missed the point. What looks like waste to the world is not waste when it is poured out on Jesus. Nothing given to Him in love is ever wasted.

26:10-12 *But Jesus, having known **it**, said to them, "Why do you cause trouble for the woman? For she did a beautiful work toward Me. For you always have the poor with you, but Me you do not always have. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did **it** to prepare Me for burial.*

Jesus defended her. "Why do you cause trouble for the woman? For she did a beautiful work toward Me." The word beautiful means good, fitting, noble.

"For you always have the poor with you, but Me you do not always have." Jesus was not saying we should not care for the poor. The Law commanded care for them (Deuteronomy 15:11), and Jesus Himself cared for them. He was saying there is a time for special devotion to Him, and that time was running out. In a few days He would be gone.

"For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial." In that day, bodies were anointed with spices and oils for burial. Jesus would die and be buried so quickly that there would be no time to do it properly (27:57-61; 28:1). This woman did it ahead of time. She may have understood what the disciples kept missing, that He really was going to die.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 15:11 (alluded to)

26:13 *Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this **woman** did will also be spoken of for a memorial of her."*

"Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of for a memorial of her." And here we are, reading about her two thousand years later, in a part of the world she never knew existed. Jesus kept His word.

Think about the contrast. The disciples called her gift a waste, and Jesus made it a memorial forever. Our love for Jesus may look foolish to others. He sees it, He values it, and He does not forget it (Hebrews 6:10).

26:14-16 *Then one of the twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, having gone to the chief priests, said, "What are you willing to give me, and I will hand Him over to you?" And they set for him thirty silver **coins**. And from that time he was seeking an opportunity that he might hand Him over.*

Matthew sets this right next to the woman's gift. She gave a fortune to honor Jesus. Judas sold Him for a little money. "Then one of the Twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, having gone to the chief priests." He was "one of the Twelve." He had walked with Jesus for three years, seen the miracles, heard the teaching, and been sent out to preach. Being close to Jesus is not the same as belonging to Him.

"What are you willing to give me, and I will hand Him over to you?" They set "thirty silver coins." Under the Law, that was the price paid to a master when a slave was killed by an ox (Exodus 21:32). Zechariah 11:12-13 prophesied that the Lord's shepherd would be valued at thirty pieces of silver, a price that was thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord. The Son of God was sold for the price of a slave.

Why did Judas do it? Scripture tells us he loved money (John 12:6), and that Satan entered into him (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Perhaps he was also disappointed that Jesus was not the kind of king he wanted. Scripture does not tell us everything that was in his heart. But it tells us enough to warn us. Sin that is allowed to grow in the heart can lead a person to do what they once would never have imagined.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 11:12 (fulfilled)

26:17 *Now on the first **day** of the Unleavened **Bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"*

"Now on the first day of the Unleavened Bread." The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day feast that began with the Passover meal. All yeast, or leaven, had to be removed from Jewish homes. By Jesus' day, the whole week was often called Passover. The lambs were killed in the temple on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, and the meal was eaten that evening (Exodus 12:6-8; Leviticus 23:5-6).

The disciples asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" Preparing meant getting the lamb, having it killed at the temple, roasting it, and preparing the unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine.

26:18-19 *And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; with you I am keeping the Passover with My disciples."'" And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover.*

"Go into the city to a certain man." Mark and Luke tell us the disciples would find a man carrying a water jar who would lead them to a large upper room (Mark 14:13-15; Luke 22:10-12). Jesus did not name the man, perhaps so that Judas would not know the place ahead of time and the meal would not be interrupted.

"My time is near." Jesus was not hiding from His hour. He walked straight toward it. "And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover."

26:20-22 *Now evening having come, He was reclining with the twelve. And while they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will hand Me over." And being exceedingly grieved, each of them began to say to Him, "Surely it is not I, Lord?"*

"Now evening having come, He was reclining with the twelve." The Passover had to be eaten at night. They reclined on their left side around the table, with their feet stretched out behind them.

During the meal Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will hand Me over." Imagine the shock. Each of them began to say to Him, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" The way the question is asked in Greek expects the answer no. They were not accusing each other. Each one looked at his own heart. That is a good response. When we hear a warning about sin, the right question is not who He is talking about, but whether it is me.

26:23-24 *And He, answering, said, "The one who dipped the hand with Me in the dish, this one will hand Me over. The Son of Man indeed goes, just as it has been written concerning Him; but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is handed over! It would have been good for him if that man had not been born."*

"The one who dipped the hand with Me in the dish, this one will hand Me over." At the Passover they dipped bread and herbs into a shared bowl of sauce. Several people would share the same dish. Jesus was saying the betrayer was someone close, sharing His very table. Psalm 41:9 had foretold that a close friend who ate His bread would lift up his heel against Him (John 13:18).

"The Son of Man indeed goes, just as it has been written concerning Him; but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is handed over!" Here we see two truths side by side. God's plan was written in Scripture and would be carried out. And Judas was fully responsible for what he chose to do. God's sovereignty never excuses man's sin (Acts 2:23).

"It would have been good for him if that man had not been born." These are some of the saddest words Jesus ever spoke. For Judas, there would be no good ending.

Old Testament links: Psalm 41:9 (fulfilled)

26:25 *And Judas, who was handing Him over, answering, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He says to him, "You have said **it**."*

Judas, who was handing Him over, answering, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Notice he called Jesus Rabbi, teacher, while the others called Him Lord. He asked the same question as the others, acting innocent, though he had already taken the money.

He says to him, "You have said it." That was a way of saying yes. Jesus knew everything, and still He let Judas sit at His table. John tells us Judas left the room soon after (John 13:30).

26:26 *And while they were eating, Jesus, having taken the bread and having blessed **it**, broke **it**, and was giving **it** to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."*

While they were eating, Jesus, having taken the bread and having blessed it, broke it, and was giving it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

At the Passover, the bread was unleavened, flat bread without yeast. Leaven is often a picture of sin in Scripture, and this bread pictured a sinless body. Jesus took that bread, which had always reminded Israel of the haste of leaving Egypt, and gave it a new meaning. "This is My body." Luke adds His words, "which is being given for you; do this for My remembrance" (Luke 22:19).

26:27-28 *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.*

Having taken the cup and having given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you." The Passover meal had several cups of wine. This was likely the third cup, often called the cup of blessing (1 Corinthians 10:16).

"For this is My blood, the blood of the new covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." A covenant is a binding agreement. The old covenant at Mount Sinai was sealed with the blood of animals (Exodus 24:8). Jeremiah 31:31-34 promised that God would make "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," in which He would write His law on their hearts and remember their sins no more. Jesus says His blood seals that new covenant. His blood is "poured out," a word used for the blood of sacrifices poured at the altar. It is "for many," the same idea as 20:28. And it is "for forgiveness of sins." That is why He came.

Verses 26-28 are the beginning of what we call the Lord's Supper or Communion. What did Jesus mean by "This is My body" and "this is My blood"? Many Christians believe Jesus was speaking the way He often did, using a picture. He was standing right there in His body when He said it. He also called Himself the door and the vine. Paul tells us the Lord's Supper is a remembrance and a proclamation: Jesus said, "do this in My remembrance," and "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). Christians have understood it in other ways too. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Lutherans teach that Christ's body and blood are truly present with the bread and wine, and many Reformed Christians believe Christ is spiritually present to believers in the meal. Whatever our view, every Christian should come to the Lord's Table with reverence, examining his own heart (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

Some teachers say the church has taken Israel's place in this covenant, but I believe the church shares now in its forgiveness through Jesus' blood, while God will still keep every promise of it to the nation of Israel when Christ returns (Romans 11:26-27).

Old Testament links: Exodus 24:8 (alluded to); Jeremiah 31:31 (alluded to)

26:29 *But I say to you that I will by no means drink from now on of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father."*

"But I say to you that I will by no means drink from now on of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." In the middle of the sorrow of that night, Jesus looks ahead. He would not drink wine again until the kingdom.

This is a promise. Jesus will sit down at table with His people again. The Lord's Supper looks back to the cross, and it also looks forward to the day when He returns and we eat with Him in His kingdom (Revelation 19:9). Every time we take Communion, we remember that He is coming back.

26:30 *And having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

"And having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." At the end of the Passover meal, the Jews sang the second part of what is called the Hallel, Psalms 115-118. Hallel means praise. Think of Jesus singing these words on the way to the cross: "A stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Psalm 118:22). And Psalm 118:24 says this is the day the Lord has made. He sang praise to the Father on the night He was betrayed.

26:31-32 *Then Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble in Me during this night; for it has been written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee."*

"All of you will be caused to stumble in Me during this night." To stumble here means to fall away in fear, to desert Him. Jesus quoted Zechariah 13:7: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Notice who strikes the shepherd in Zechariah: the Lord Himself. The cross was the plan of God (Isaiah 53:10).

But Jesus did not end with the warning. "But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee." Even while telling them they would fail Him, He promised to meet them again. He knew they would fall, and He had already planned their restoration. That is grace.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 13:7 (quoted)

26:33-35 *And Peter, answering, said to Him, "Even if all will be caused to stumble in You, I will never be caused to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that during this night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter says to Him, "Even if it is necessary for me to die with You, I will by no means deny You." Likewise all the disciples also said.*

Peter, answering, said to Him, "Even if all will be caused to stumble in You, I will never be caused to stumble." Peter meant it. He loved Jesus. But he trusted his own strength, and he compared himself with the others. Even if all of them fail, not me.

Jesus answered, "during this night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter would not just stumble. He would deny even knowing Jesus, not once, but three times, before morning.

"Even if it is necessary for me to die with You, I will by no means deny You." And all the disciples said the same thing. Pride says I would never. Proverbs 16:18 says pride comes before breaking, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. Paul says, "let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The safest place for a believer is not confidence in himself, but dependence on the Lord.

26:36 *Then Jesus comes with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He says to the disciples, "Sit here while I, having gone away over there, pray."*

"Then Jesus comes with them to a place called Gethsemane." Gethsemane means oil press. It was an olive grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from the city. John says Jesus often met there with His disciples, which is how Judas knew where to find Him (John 18:1-2).

An oil press crushed olives under great weight until the oil flowed. That is a fitting name for the place where Jesus was pressed under the weight of what was coming. "Sit here while I, having gone away over there, pray." Before the cross, He prayed.

26:37-38 *And having taken along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and to be deeply distressed. Then He says to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with Me."*

He took "Peter and the two sons of Zebedee," James and John, a little farther. These three had seen His glory on the mountain of the transfiguration (17:1-2). Now they would see His agony.

"He began to be sorrowful and to be deeply distressed." The words describe crushing grief and anguish. "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." His sorrow was so heavy it felt like it could kill Him. Jesus was fully man. He felt real emotions, real dread, and real grief. Hebrews 4:15 says we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.

Why such sorrow? He knew the physical pain of the cross was coming. But more than that, He was about to bear the sin of the world and the wrath of God against it. The sinless One would be made "sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He knew what that meant.

"Remain here and watch with Me." In His darkest hour, He wanted His friends close.

26:39 *And having gone forward a little, He fell on His face, praying and saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You **will**."*

Having gone forward a little, He fell on His face, praying and saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

He fell on His face. This is the posture of complete humility and desperate prayer. "My Father" shows the close love between the Son and the Father, even here.

"This cup" is the cup of God's wrath against sin (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17). Jesus had spoken of it in 20:22. Now He asks if there is any other way. Was it wrong for Him to ask? No. He was honest with the Father about what He felt. But He did not stop there. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." That is the heart of all true prayer. We bring our honest requests, and we surrender to God's will. The first Adam chose his own will in a garden and brought sin into the world. The last Adam chose the Father's will in a garden and brought salvation (Romans 5:19).

Was there another way? The answer of heaven was no. If there had been another way to save us, the Father would not have sent His Son to the cross. The cross shows how serious sin is and how great God's love is.

26:40-41 *And He comes to the disciples and finds them sleeping, and He says to Peter, "So, were you not able to watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed **is** willing, but the flesh **is** weak."*

"And He comes to the disciples and finds them sleeping." They were exhausted from the long day and their own sorrow (Luke 22:45). He said to Peter, "So, were you not able to watch with Me one hour?" Just hours earlier, Peter had promised to die with Him. He could not even stay awake with Him.

"Watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation." Jesus knew a great test was coming that night. Prayer was the way to be ready for it. Peter slept instead of praying, and a few hours later he fell.

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Their hearts wanted to be faithful, but their human weakness was real. Every believer knows this struggle (Romans 7:18-25). The answer is not to try harder in our own strength, but to watch and pray and lean on God's strength.

26:42-44 *Again, for a second time, having gone away, He prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup is not able to pass from Me unless I drink it, let Your will be done." And having come, He finds them sleeping again, for their eyes had become heavy. And having left them, having gone away again, He prayed a third time, saying the same word.*

Again, for a second time, having gone away, He prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup is not able to pass from Me unless I drink it, let Your will be done." Notice the change. In the first prayer He asked if the cup could pass. Now He accepts that it cannot and prays, "let Your will be done," the very words He taught His disciples to pray (6:10).

He came back and found them sleeping again, "for their eyes had become heavy." He did not wake them this time. He went away and prayed "a third time, saying the same word." Repeating a prayer is not the vain repetition He warned against (6:7). Jesus prayed the same prayer three times from a heart pressed to the limit. When we are in great trouble, it is right to keep coming back to the Father with the same need.

26:45-46 *Then He comes to His disciples and says to them, "Are you sleeping for the rest **of the time** and taking your rest? Look, the hour has drawn near, and the Son of Man is handed over into **the** hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Look, the one handing Me over has drawn near."*

"Are you sleeping for the rest of the time and taking your rest? Look, the hour has drawn near, and the Son of Man is handed over into the hands of sinners." The time for watching had passed. The hour He had spoken of so many times had come (John 12:23, 27).

"Rise, let us go. Look, the one handing Me over has drawn near." Jesus did not run away. He did not hide in the olive trees. He got up and walked out to meet the betrayer. After praying, He was ready. "No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down from Myself" (John 10:18).

26:47 *And while He was still speaking, look, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people.*

"And while He was still speaking, look, Judas, one of the Twelve, came." Matthew again reminds us, "one of the Twelve." With him came "a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people." John tells us there were Roman soldiers too, and officers from the temple guard (John 18:3). They came in the dark with weapons and torches to arrest a Man who had been teaching openly in the temple every day.

26:48-49 *Now the one handing Him over gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, it is He; seize Him." And immediately, having come up to Jesus, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed Him.*

The one handing Him over gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, it is He; seize Him." In the dark, among the olive trees, the soldiers needed to know which man to take. A kiss on the cheek was the usual greeting of a disciple to his teacher, a sign of respect and love.

Immediately, having come up to Jesus, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi," and kissed Him. The word for kissed here can mean to kiss warmly or again and again. Judas used the sign of love as the sign of betrayal. Proverbs 27:6 warns of "the kisses of one who hates."

26:50 *But Jesus said to him, "Friend, **do that** for which you are here." Then, having come up, they laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.*

But Jesus said to him, "Friend, do that for which you are here." Even now, Jesus called him Friend. He was not caught off guard. He was in control, even of His own arrest. "Then, having come up, they laid hands on Jesus and seized Him."

26:51-52 *And look, one of those with Jesus, having stretched out the hand, drew his sword, and having struck the slave of the high priest, cut off his ear. Then Jesus says to him, "Return your sword into its place; for all who take a sword will perish by a sword.*

"And look, one of those with Jesus, having stretched out the hand, drew his sword, and having struck the slave of the high priest, cut off his ear." John 18:10 tells us this was Peter, and the slave's name was Malchus. Luke 22:51 tells us Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. Even in His arrest, He healed one of the men who came to take Him.

"Return your sword into its place; for all who take a sword will perish by a sword." Jesus' kingdom would not be won by swords (John 18:36). Peter was trying to fight a spiritual battle with physical weapons. The church has made that mistake many times in history. The gospel is not spread by force.

26:53-54 *Or do you think that I am not able now to call upon My Father, and He will furnish Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?"*

"Or do you think that I am not able now to call upon My Father, and He will furnish Me more than twelve legions of angels?" A Roman legion was about six thousand soldiers. Twelve legions would be more than seventy thousand angels. In 2 Kings 19:35, one angel struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Jesus did not need Peter's sword. He had all of heaven's armies at His call.

"How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must come about this way?" He could have stopped it at any moment. He chose not to, because the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, and we had to be saved.

26:55-56 *In that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Did you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture Me? Every day I was sitting with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But all this has come about so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled.*

"Did you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture Me?" They treated Him like a dangerous criminal. "Every day I was sitting with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me." They were cowards who came in the dark because they feared the people.

"But all this has come about so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Isaiah 53:12 said He would be numbered with the transgressors. Zechariah 13:7 said the sheep would scatter.

"Then all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled." Just as He said (26:31). All of them. The ones who had promised to die with Him ran into the night. Jesus went to the cross alone.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 13:7 (fulfilled)

26:57-58 *And those who had seized Jesus led **Him** away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. And Peter was following Him from afar up to the courtyard of the high priest, and having entered inside, he was sitting with the attendants to see the outcome.*

"And those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled." John tells us they first took Him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas and a former high priest (John 18:13). Then He was brought to Caiaphas, where the council had gathered in the middle of the night.

"And Peter was following Him from afar up to the courtyard of the high priest." To his credit, Peter came back. He and John followed (John 18:15-16). But "from afar." He wanted to be near Jesus without being seen with Him. "He was sitting with the attendants to see the outcome." He sat down among the very men who had arrested his Lord.

26:59-61 *And the chief priests and the elders and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death, and they did not find **any**; even though many false witnesses came forward, they did not find **any**. But at last two false witnesses, having come forward, said, "This **man** was saying, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"*

"And the chief priests and the elders and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death." The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish court, a council of about seventy members plus the high priest. Notice what they were looking for: false testimony. They had already decided the verdict. They only needed a reason. Under their own law, a trial for a capital crime was not supposed to be held at night, but they were in a hurry.

"Even though many false witnesses came forward, they did not find any." The Law required two or three witnesses whose testimony agreed (Deuteronomy 19:15). The lies did not match (Mark 14:56).

Finally two came and claimed He had said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." They twisted His words. He had said, "Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up," and He was speaking of the sanctuary of His body (John 2:19-21).

26:62-64 *And the high priest, having stood up, said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What are these testifying against You?" 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."*

The high priest, having stood up, said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What are these testifying against You?" But Jesus was silent.

Isaiah 53:7 said, "He did not open His mouth; like the lamb that is brought to the slaughter." Jesus did not need to defend Himself against lies. Their own witnesses could not agree. His silence was not weakness. It was the quiet strength of the Lamb of God.

Then the high priest put Him under oath. "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." To adjure means to put someone under a solemn oath before God. Now Jesus spoke, because He had been asked directly, under oath, who He was.

"You have said it." That means yes. "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." Jesus combined two great prophecies: Psalm 110:1, the Lord sitting at God's right hand, and Daniel 7:13, the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. "The Power" was a reverent way of saying God.

Jesus was telling the high priest, You are judging Me now, but one day I will judge you. The Man standing bound before them is the King who will come on the clouds. Caiaphas will see Him again.

Old Testament links: Psalm 110:1 (alluded to); Daniel 7:13 (alluded to); Isaiah 53:7 (alluded to)

26:65-66 *Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy. What do you think?" And they, answering, said, "He is liable to death."*

The high priest tore his garments, saying, "He has blasphemed!" Tearing one's clothes was a sign of grief or horror. Blasphemy means speaking against God, insulting His name or claiming to be equal with Him. In their eyes, Jesus had claimed to be God. And they were right that He claimed it. Their mistake was not believing Him.

"What do you think?" They, answering, said, "He is liable to death." The Law said the blasphemer must be put to death (Leviticus 24:16). The leaders of Israel condemned their own Messiah for telling the truth.

26:67-68 *Then they spat into His face and struck Him with fists; and others slapped **Him**, saying, "Prophesy to us, Christ: who is the one who struck You?"*

"Then they spat into His face and struck Him with fists; and others slapped Him." Spitting in someone's face was one of the worst insults in that culture (Numbers 12:14). Isaiah 50:6 had said, I gave My back to those who strike, and I did not hide My face from humiliations and spitting.

"Prophesy to us, Christ: who is the one who struck You?" Mark and Luke tell us they had blindfolded Him (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64). They mocked Him as a prophet. The One who knew every one of their names, and every thought in their hearts, said nothing. Think of it. The hands He had made struck the face of their Creator, and He took it for them.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 50:6 (alluded to)

26:69-70 *Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard; and a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied **it** before all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying."*

Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard; and a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." This was not a soldier or a priest. It was a servant girl. There was no real danger in what she said.

He denied it before all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." Peter, who had drawn his sword a few hours earlier, could not stand up to a servant girl. Fear does strange things to us. The first denial was a dodge, pretending not to understand.

26:71-72 *And when he had gone out to the gateway, another **servant girl** saw him, and she says to those there, "This **man** also was with Jesus the Nazarene." And again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man."*

Peter moved away from the fire "to the gateway," trying to slip out of sight. Another servant girl saw him and said, "This man also was with Jesus the Nazarene." A Nazarene was a man from Nazareth.

Again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man." This time he swore an oath. He would not even say Jesus' name. Just "the man." The second denial was worse than the first.

26:73-74 *And after a little while those who stood **by**, having come up, said to Peter, "Truly you also are **one** of them, for even your speech makes you evident." Then he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed.*

After a little while those who stood by, having come up, said to Peter, "Truly you also are one of them, for even your speech makes you evident." Galileans had an accent that people in Jerusalem could easily pick out. Peter's own voice gave him away.

He began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man!" To curse here means he called down curses on himself if he was lying. This was the third denial, the worst of all. "And immediately a rooster crowed."

26:75 *And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, who had said to him, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And having gone outside, he wept bitterly.*

"And Peter remembered the word of Jesus." Luke tells us that at that moment, the Lord turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61). Imagine that look. Not anger. Love and sorrow.

"And having gone outside, he wept bitterly." Peter's tears were the tears of real repentance. Here is the difference between Peter and Judas. Both failed Jesus that night. Judas was sorry, but he went and took his own life (27:3-5). Peter wept bitterly, and he came back. Jesus had prayed for him, that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). After the resurrection, Jesus restored him (John 21:15-19), and seven weeks later Peter preached at Pentecost and three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41).

If you have failed the Lord, even badly, do not run away from Him. Run back to Him. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and life (2 Corinthians 7:10). There is no failure too great for His grace.

Chapter 26 Summary

Two days before the Passover, the chief priests and elders plotted to kill Jesus. In Bethany a woman poured costly oil on His head, and when the disciples called it a waste, Jesus said she had prepared Him for burial and would be remembered wherever the gospel is preached. Judas agreed to hand Him over for thirty pieces of silver. At the Passover meal, Jesus said one of the Twelve would betray Him, and He took the bread and the cup and gave them as His body and His blood of the new covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. On the Mount of Olives He told them they would all stumble and Peter would deny Him three times. In Gethsemane, in deep sorrow, He prayed three times for the cup to pass from Him, yet not His will but the Father's, while His disciples slept. Judas came with an armed crowd and betrayed Him with a kiss. Jesus stopped Peter's sword, said He could call twelve legions of angels, and gave Himself up so the Scriptures would be fulfilled, and all the disciples fled. Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, false witnesses could not agree, but when put under oath, Jesus said He was the Christ, the Son of God, and that they would see Him coming on the clouds. They condemned Him for blasphemy, spat on Him, and beat Him. In the courtyard Peter denied Him three times, and when the rooster crowed, he remembered Jesus' word and wept bitterly.

When I take the Lord's Supper, I remember that Jesus' body was broken for my sin and His blood was shed for it. He paid the ultimate price in my place. Communion is when I dig deep and ask for forgiveness. I also look forward to the day I eat it new with Him in His kingdom.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. What did the woman in Bethany do, and how did Jesus defend her? (26:7-13)

2. What price did the chief priests pay Judas, and what Old Testament passages does it bring to mind? (26:15)

3. How did the disciples respond when Jesus said one of them would hand Him over? (26:21-22)

4. What did Jesus say about the bread and the cup at the Last Supper? (26:26-28)

5. What did Jesus pray in Gethsemane, and how did His prayer change from the first time to the second? (26:39, 42)

6. Why did Jesus tell Peter to put away his sword? (26:52-54)

7. What did Jesus say to the high priest when put under oath? (26:63-64)

8. How did Peter's three denials grow worse each time, and how did he respond when the rooster crowed? (26:69-75)

9. When you take the Lord's Supper, what do you remember, and what do you look forward to?

10. Is there an area where you have failed the Lord? What would it look like to come back to Him like Peter did?

Chapter 27: The Crucifixion

Scripture

27:1-10 Now morning having come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus so as to put Him to death. And having bound Him, they led ***Him*** away and handed Him over to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, the one who handed Him over, having seen that He was condemned, having regretted ***it***, brought back the thirty silver ***coins*** to the chief priests and to the elders, saying, "I sinned, having handed over innocent blood." But they said, "What ***is that*** to us? You will see ***to it***." And having thrown down the silver ***coins*** in the temple, he withdrew, and having gone away, he hanged himself. And the chief priests, having taken the silver ***coins***, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is ***the*** price of blood." And having taken counsel, they bought with them the field of the potter for a burial place for the strangers. Therefore that field was called "Field of Blood" until this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty silver ***coins***, the price of the One who had been priced, whom they priced from the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the field of the potter, just as ***the*** Lord directed me."

27:11-26 And Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "You say ***it***." And while He was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate says to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer him, not even to one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. Now at ***the*** feast the governor had been accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner, whom they were wanting. And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had been gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. Now while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "***Let there be*** nothing between you and that righteous ***man***; for I suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. And the governor, answering, said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate says to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all say to him, "Let Him be crucified!" And the governor said, "Why, what evil did He do?" But they were crying out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" And Pilate, having seen that he was gaining nothing, but rather a riot was arising, having taken water, washed ***his*** hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous ***One***; you will see ***to it***." And all the people, answering, said, "His blood ***be*** on us and on our children." Then he released Barabbas to them; but Jesus, having flogged ***Him***, he handed over so that He might be crucified.

27:27-44 Then the soldiers of the governor, having taken Jesus into the Praetorium, gathered the whole cohort to Him. And having stripped Him, they put a scarlet cloak around Him. And having twisted together a crown out of thorns, they put ***it*** on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and having bowed the knee before Him, they were mocking Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And having spit on Him, they took the reed and were striking ***Him*** on His head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the cloak off Him, and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to

crucify ***Him***. Now going out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon; this ***man*** they compelled to carry His cross. And having come to a place called Golgotha, which is called Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mixed with gall to drink; and having tasted ***it***, He was not willing to drink. And having crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots, so that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled: "They divided My garments among themselves, and for My clothing they cast lots." And sitting down, they were guarding Him there. And they put up over His head His accusation written: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Then two robbers are crucified with Him, one on ***the*** right and one on ***the*** left. And those passing by were blaspheming Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build ***it*** in three days, save Yourself! If You are ***the*** Son of God, come down from the cross!" And likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, were saying, "He saved others; Himself He is not able to save. If He is ***the*** King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe Him. He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He wants Him; for He said, 'I am ***the*** Son of God.'" And the robbers who had been crucified with Him also were reviling Him with the same thing.

27:45-56 Now from ***the*** sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until ***the*** ninth hour. 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?" And some of those standing there, having heard, were saying, "This ***man*** is calling Elijah." And immediately one of them, having run and having taken a sponge, and having filled ***it*** with sour wine and having put ***it*** on a reed, was giving Him ***it*** to drink. But the rest were saying, "Leave ***Him***; let us see whether Elijah is coming to save Him." And Jesus, having cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit. And look, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom, and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and having come out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. And the centurion and those with him keeping guard over Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things that were happening, feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was God's Son." And many women were there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, among whom was Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

27:57-66 Now evening having come, a rich man from Arimathea came, named Joseph, who himself also had become a disciple to Jesus. This ***man***, having gone to Pilate, asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. And Joseph, having taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut in the rock; and having rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, he went away. And Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. Now on the next day, which is after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we have remembered that that deceiver said while ***He was*** still living, 'After three days I am raised.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples, having come by night, steal Him away and say to the people, 'He was raised from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." And Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make ***it*** as secure as you know ***how***." And having gone, they made the tomb secure, having sealed the stone, with the guard.

Chapter 27 Preview

This is the darkest and the holiest chapter in Matthew. At dawn the Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Judas, seeing Him condemned, throws the silver back into the temple and hangs himself. Pilate questions Jesus, is amazed at His silence, and tries to release Him, but the crowd demands Barabbas instead and cries out for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate washes his hands, has Jesus flogged, and hands Him over to the soldiers, who mock Him with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns.

Outside the city, at Golgotha, they crucify Him between two robbers. The crowds, the priests, and even the robbers mock Him. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness covers the land, and Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Then He yields up His spirit. The veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom, the earth shakes, tombs are opened, and many saints are raised. A Roman centurion says, "Truly this was God's Son." Joseph of Arimathea lays the body in his own new tomb, and the chief priests have the tomb sealed and guarded. I ask you to read this chapter slowly. This is what our salvation cost.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-2 *Now morning having come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus so as to put Him to death. And having bound Him, they led **Him** away and handed Him over to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

"Now morning having come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus so as to put Him to death." The night trial was over, but the council met again at dawn to make its decision official (Luke 22:66-71).

They had condemned Him, but they could not carry out the sentence. Under Roman rule, only the governor could order an execution (John 18:31). So "having bound Him, they led Him away and handed Him over to Pontius Pilate the governor." Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from about A.D. 26 to 36. He normally lived in Caesarea on the coast, but he came to Jerusalem during the feasts with extra soldiers to keep order.

27:3-4 *Then Judas, the one who handed Him over, having seen that He was condemned, having regretted **it**, brought back the thirty silver **coins** to the chief priests and to the elders, saying, "I sinned, having handed over innocent blood." But they said, "What **is that** to us? You will see **to it**."*

"Then Judas, the one who handed Him over, having seen that He was condemned, having regretted it, brought back the thirty silver coins." Maybe Judas never expected it to go this far. Scripture does not tell us. But when he saw the result, he was filled with regret.

He said, "I sinned, having handed over innocent blood." That was the truth. Even the betrayer testified that Jesus was innocent. But the priests answered coldly, "What is that to us? You will see to it." They had used him, and now they threw him away. Sin always promises more than it gives, and the people who lead us into it do not care what happens to us afterward.

27:5 *And having thrown down the silver **coins** in the temple, he withdrew, and having gone away, he hanged himself.*

"And having thrown down the silver coins in the temple, he withdrew, and having gone away, he hanged himself." Acts 1:18 adds that he fell headlong and his body burst open. The two accounts fit together. Most likely he hanged himself, and later the body fell.

Here is the great difference between Judas and Peter. Both failed Jesus on the same night. Both were sorry. But Paul tells us there are two kinds of sorrow: "the grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret, but the grief of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Peter's sorrow brought him back to Jesus. Judas's sorrow drove him away from Him, into despair. Judas took his sin to the priests. He should have taken it to the Savior.

I need to say this gently, because some who read this have lost someone to suicide, and some may be struggling with dark thoughts themselves. If that is you, please talk to someone today: a pastor, a trusted friend, a doctor, or a crisis line. No sin is too great for Jesus to forgive, and no darkness is too deep for His light. Judas's story ended in despair because he did not come back to Jesus. Yours does not have to.

27:6-8 *And the chief priests, having taken the silver **coins**, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is **the** price of blood." And having taken counsel, they bought with them the field of the potter for a burial place for the strangers. Therefore that field was called "Field of Blood" until this day.*

The chief priests, having taken the silver coins, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." Look at these men. They had no problem paying for an innocent man's death. But they were very careful about where the money went afterward. That is the same hypocrisy Jesus exposed in 23:23-24, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.

They bought "the field of the potter for a burial place for the strangers," meaning foreigners who died in Jerusalem with no family grave. So it was called "Field of Blood" from then on. Acts 1:19 tells us that in Aramaic, the local language, it was called Akeldama, which means field of blood.

27:9-10 *Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty silver **coins**, the price of the One who had been priced, whom they priced from the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the field of the potter, just as **the** Lord directed me."*

Matthew says this fulfilled "what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet." The words most closely match Zechariah 11:12-13, where the shepherd's wage of thirty pieces of silver is thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord. Why does Matthew name Jeremiah?

Jeremiah also spoke of a potter (Jeremiah 18:1-4), of a potter's clay jar broken in the Valley of Hinnom, which would become a burial place (Jeremiah 19:1-11), and of buying a field with silver (Jeremiah 32:6-9). Many Bible teachers believe Matthew is drawing on both prophets and names the greater and better known one, Jeremiah. Some also point out that in the Jewish order of books, Jeremiah stood at the head of the scroll of the prophets, so the whole collection could be called by

his name. Either way, Matthew's point is that even the price paid for Jesus and what was done with it had been foretold.

"The price of the One who had been priced, whom they priced from the sons of Israel." The leaders of Israel set the value of their Messiah at the price of a slave.

Old Testament links: Zechariah 11:12-13 (quoted)

27:11 *And Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "You say* ***it****."*

"And Jesus stood before the governor." Picture this. The Judge of all the earth standing before a Roman official.

Pilate asked, "Are You the King of the Jews?" The leaders had changed the charge. Before their own council, the charge was blasphemy. Rome did not care about Jewish religious arguments. So before Pilate, they accused Him of claiming to be a king, which would make Him a rebel against Caesar (Luke 23:2).

Jesus said to him, "You say it." That was a yes. He was the King of the Jews. But John 18:36 tells us He also explained that His kingdom is not of this world. He was not the kind of rebel Pilate needed to fear.

27:12-14 *And while He was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate says to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer him, not even to one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.*

"And while He was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, He answered nothing." Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" But Jesus gave no answer, "not even to one word, so that the governor marveled greatly."

Pilate had seen many prisoners. Most of them begged, argued, or cursed. He had never seen anyone like this. Jesus was silent like a lamb before its shearers (Isaiah 53:7). He did not defend Himself, because He had come to die. And He knew the charges were lies that answered themselves.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:7 (alluded to)

27:15-16 *Now at* ***the*** *feast the governor had been accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner, whom they were wanting. And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.*

"Now at the feast the governor had been accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner, whom they were wanting." This was a custom to win favor with the people at Passover, the feast of freedom.

"And they were holding at that time a notorious prisoner called Barabbas." Mark and Luke tell us Barabbas had been part of a rebellion in the city and had committed murder (Mark 15:7;

Luke 23:19). He was exactly what the leaders falsely claimed Jesus was, a violent rebel against Rome. His name means son of the father.

27:17-18 *Therefore, when they had been gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.*

Pilate asked, "Whom do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate thought the choice was easy. Surely the people would not choose a murderer over a healer and teacher.

"For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy." Pilate saw through the leaders. They were jealous of Jesus' popularity and power with the people. Envy is a deadly sin. It led Cain to kill Abel, Joseph's brothers to sell him, and the leaders of Israel to hand over their Messiah.

27:19 *Now while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "**Let there be** nothing between you and that righteous **man**; for I suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."*

"Now while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him." The judgment seat was the raised platform where a Roman official sat to give legal rulings. Pilate's 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."

Only Matthew tells us this. God gave Pilate one more warning. Even a pagan Roman woman knew Jesus was "righteous." Pilate had his wife's warning, his own judgment that Jesus was innocent, and the evidence of envy in the accusers. He had every reason to set Jesus free.

27:20-21 *But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. And the governor, answering, said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" And they said, "Barabbas."*

"But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus." The crowd at this hour, gathered at Pilate's palace, may have been a different crowd than the one that welcomed Jesus a few days earlier. Many were likely followers of the leaders. Either way, they were easily moved.

When Pilate asked again, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" they shouted, "Barabbas."

Think about what that choice means. Barabbas was guilty. Jesus was innocent. The guilty man went free, and the innocent Man died in his place. That is the gospel in one picture. We are Barabbas. Jesus took our place.

27:22-23 *Pilate says to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all say to him, "Let Him be crucified!" And the governor said, "Why, what evil did He do?" But they were crying out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"*

Pilate asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" That is a question every person must answer. You cannot stay neutral about Jesus. Pilate tried, and it did not work.

They all say to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Pilate asked, "Why, what evil did He do?" No one gave an answer, because there was none. They only shouted louder, "Let Him be crucified!" Crucifixion was the Roman way of executing slaves, rebels, and the worst criminals. It was slow, shameful, and agonizing. The crowd was not satisfied with Jesus' death. They wanted the worst death there was.

27:24 *And Pilate, having seen that he was gaining nothing, but rather a riot was arising, having taken water, washed **his** hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous **One**; you will see **to it**."*

"And Pilate, having seen that he was gaining nothing, but rather a riot was arising, having taken water, washed his hands before the crowd." This was a public act to say, I am not responsible. He said, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous One; you will see to it."

But washing his hands did not wash away his guilt. Pilate had the power to release Jesus (John 19:10), and he gave in to the crowd to protect his own position. To this day, Christians around the world say in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Washing your hands of Jesus is not possible. Every person will stand before Him.

Old Testament links: Deuteronomy 21:7 (alluded to)

27:25 *And all the people, answering, said, "His blood **be** on us and on our children."*

All the people, answering, said, "His blood be on us and on our children." This is a terrible thing to say. They took responsibility for His death on themselves and their children. Within forty years, Jerusalem was destroyed.

I must say plainly that this verse has been terribly misused. Some people, even in the church, used it through the centuries to justify hatred and violence against the Jewish people. That is wicked and has no place in the heart of a Christian. The crowd that day did not speak for every Jew in every generation. The Romans, the Gentiles, drove in the nails. And in the deepest sense, my sin and yours put Jesus on the cross. Peter told the people of Jerusalem they had killed the Author of life, but in the same breath he told them to repent and their sins would be wiped away (Acts 3:15, 19). Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). His blood is on us all in a better way, too, because it is the blood that cleanses from sin all who trust in Him, Jew and Gentile alike (1 John 1:7).

27:26 *Then he released Barabbas to them; but Jesus, having flogged **Him**, he handed over so that He might be crucified.*

"Then he released Barabbas to them; but Jesus, having flogged Him, he handed over so that He might be crucified."

Roman flogging was brutal. The prisoner was stripped and tied to a post, and soldiers beat his back with a whip made of leather straps with pieces of bone or metal tied into them. It tore the skin and flesh. Some men died from the flogging alone. Matthew does not dwell on the details, and neither will I. But Isaiah 53:5 tells us why He bore it: "by His wound there was healing for us."

27:27 *Then the soldiers of the governor, having taken Jesus into the Praetorium, gathered the whole cohort to Him.*

"Then the soldiers of the governor, having taken Jesus into the Praetorium, gathered the whole cohort to Him." The Praetorium was the governor's headquarters in Jerusalem. A cohort was a unit of Roman soldiers, as many as six hundred men at full strength. The whole unit gathered around one beaten prisoner to make sport of Him.

27:28-29 *And having stripped Him, they put a scarlet cloak around Him. And having twisted together a crown out of thorns, they put **it** on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and having bowed the knee before Him, they were mocking Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

"And having stripped Him, they put a scarlet cloak around Him." This was likely an old soldier's cloak, a red one like the robes worn by Roman officers, to mock Him as a king in royal colors.

They twisted thorns into a crown and pressed it onto His head. They put a reed in His right hand as a pretend scepter. Then they knelt before Him and mocked Him: "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Thorns came into the world because of sin. When Adam sinned, God said the ground would bring forth thorns (Genesis 3:17-18). Now the King who came to undo the curse wore the curse as His crown. Those soldiers knelt in mockery. One day every knee will bow to Him in truth (Philippians 2:10-11).

27:30-31 *And having spit on Him, they took the reed and were striking **Him** on His head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the cloak off Him, and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify **Him**.*

"And having spit on Him, they took the reed and were striking Him on His head." They spat on the face of God. They struck the crown of thorns down onto His head with the reed.

Then they took off the cloak, put His own clothes back on Him, "and led Him away to crucify Him." Isaiah 53:3 says He was despised and rejected by men, a man of pains. He endured it all without a word of hatred. Peter, who saw it, later wrote that when He was reviled, He did not revile in return, but kept handing Himself over to the One who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).

27:32 *Now going out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon; this **man** they compelled to carry His cross.*

"Now going out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon; this man they compelled to carry His cross." A condemned man usually carried the crossbeam of his own cross to the place of execution. Jesus had been so weakened by the beating and the long night that He could not carry it all the way.

Cyrene was a city in North Africa, in what is now Libya, with a large Jewish community. Simon may have come for the Passover. He was "compelled," forced by the soldiers, as Roman soldiers had the right to do. Mark tells us Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), which suggests those sons were known to the early church. Many believe Simon came to faith because of that day. A man who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus may well have ended up taking up the cross to follow Him (16:24).

27:33-34 *And having come to a place called Golgotha, which is called Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mixed with gall to drink; and having tasted **it**, He was not willing to drink.*

"And having come to a place called Golgotha, which is called Place of a Skull." Golgotha is an Aramaic word. The Latin word for skull gives us the name Calvary. It was outside the city walls (John 19:20; Hebrews 13:12), near a road where many people would pass by, which was the point of a crucifixion. Rome wanted people to see.

"They gave Him sour wine mixed with gall to drink." Gall was a bitter substance. Mark says it was wine mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:23). This drink may have been meant to dull the pain. Psalm 69:21 had said, "for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." "Having tasted it, He was not willing to drink." Jesus chose to face the cross with a clear mind. He would drink the full cup the Father gave Him, with nothing to dull it.

Old Testament links: Psalm 69:21 (alluded to)

27:35 *And having crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots, so that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled: "They divided My garments among themselves, and for My clothing they cast lots."*

"And having crucified Him." Matthew says it in four words in our English. The Gospel writers do not describe the horror of the cross in detail. Their first readers knew exactly what crucifixion was. The nails were driven through the wrists and feet, and the cross was raised. A crucified man could only breathe by pushing himself up on the nails. Death often came slowly, over hours or even days, by exhaustion and suffocation. Psalm 22:16, written about a thousand years before, says, "they pierced my hands and my feet."

"They divided His garments, casting lots." The clothing of the condemned man went to the soldiers. Matthew says this fulfilled Scripture: "They divided My garments among themselves, and for My clothing they cast lots" (27:35, quoting Psalm 22:18). As He died, His executors gambled at His feet.

Old Testament links: Psalm 22:18 (quoted); Psalm 22:16 (alluded to)

27:36 *And sitting down, they were guarding Him there.*

"And sitting down, they were guarding Him there." Soldiers guarded a cross until the man died, so no one could rescue him. They sat down and watched. To them, this was one more day of work. They had no idea who they were watching die.

27:37 *And they put up over His head His accusation written: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

"And they put up over His head His accusation written." It was the Roman custom to post the crime of the condemned man. Pilate wrote, "THE KING OF THE JEWS" with His name. John 19:19-20 tells us it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so everyone could read it.

Pilate meant it as an insult to the Jewish leaders. But it was the truth. The sign over the cross told the whole world who was dying there: Israel's true King.

27:38 *Then two robbers are crucified with Him, one on **the** right and one on **the** left.*

"Then two robbers are crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left." Isaiah 53:12 said "with transgressors He was numbered." Remember that James and John had asked for the places at His right and left (20:21). On the cross, those places were taken by two criminals. The word robbers may mean violent bandits or rebels, men like Barabbas.

Luke 23:39-43 tells us one of them later turned to Jesus in faith, and Jesus promised him, "today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:12 (fulfilled)

27:39-40 *And those passing by were blaspheming Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build **it** in three days, save Yourself! If You are **the** Son of God, come down from the cross!"*

"And those passing by were blaspheming Him, wagging their heads." Psalm 22:7 said, "All who see me mock at me; they open wide with the lip; they shake the head."

They threw His own words back at Him: "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" That is the same temptation Satan used in the wilderness: "If You are the Son of God" (4:3, 6). Jesus could have come down. He did not come down, because He was saving us. The nails did not hold Him there. His love did.

Old Testament links: Psalm 22:7 (alluded to)

27:41-43 *And likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, were saying, "He saved others; Himself He is not able to save. If He is **the** King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe Him. He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He wants Him; for He said, 'I am **the** Son of God.'"*

The chief priests, scribes, and elders, the most religious men in Israel, came to mock Him too. "He saved others; Himself He is not able to save." They meant it as a joke, but they spoke the deepest truth of the cross without knowing it. He could not save Himself and save us at the same time. He chose us.

"If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe Him." No, they would not have. Three days later He did something greater than coming down from a cross. He came out of a tomb. And they still did not believe (28:11-15).

"He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He wants Him." These are nearly the words of Psalm 22:8. The leaders who knew the Psalms by heart did not realize they were fulfilling one as they spoke.

Old Testament links: Psalm 22:8 (quoted)

27:44 *And the robbers who had been crucified with Him also were reviling Him with the same thing.*

"And the robbers who had been crucified with Him also were reviling Him with the same thing." At first, both robbers mocked Him. Luke 23:39-43 tells us one of them later changed. As he watched Jesus suffer and heard Him pray for His enemies, he came to believe. That man was saved in his last hours, with nothing to offer but faith. It is never too late to turn to Jesus while you still have breath.

27:45 *Now from **the** sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until **the** ninth hour.*

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." From noon until three in the afternoon, at the brightest time of day, darkness came over the land. This could not have been a normal eclipse of the sun, because Passover was held at the full moon, when a solar eclipse cannot happen. It was an act of God.

Darkness in Scripture often speaks of judgment. In Egypt, before the first Passover, there was darkness over the land for three days (Exodus 10:21-23). Amos 8:9 says that God would make the sun go down at noon. During these three hours, I believe the Father was pouring out His judgment against our sin on His Son. Creation itself went dark.

Old Testament links: Amos 8:9 (alluded to)

27:46 *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?"*

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Matthew gives the words in the language Jesus spoke, and then translates them: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" These are the opening words of Psalm 22.

This is the deepest cry ever heard on earth. For all eternity the Father and the Son had shared perfect love and fellowship. Now, as Jesus bore our sin, He experienced being forsaken. "The LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us" (Isaiah 53:6). God "made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was forsaken so that we would never be. Jesus did not stop being God, and the Trinity was not broken. But in a way we cannot fully understand, He bore the full weight of God's judgment on sin as our substitute.

And notice that even here He calls Him My God. Even in being forsaken, He still trusted. Psalm 22 begins with this cry, but it ends in victory, with all the ends of the earth turning to the Lord (Psalm 22:27-31).

Old Testament links: Psalm 22:1 (quoted)

27:47-49 *And some of those standing there, having heard, were saying, "This **man** is calling Elijah." And immediately one of them, having run and having taken a sponge, and having filled **it** with sour wine and having put **it** on a reed, was giving Him **it** to drink. But the rest were saying, "Leave **Him**; let us see whether Elijah is coming to save Him."*

Some of those standing there, having heard, were saying, "This man is calling Elijah." Eli sounded like Elijah. Many Jews believed Elijah would come in times of great need, and that he would come before the Messiah (Malachi 4:5).

"And immediately one of them, having run and having taken a sponge, and having filled it with sour wine and having put it on a reed, was giving Him it to drink." This was the cheap sour wine the soldiers drank. John tells us Jesus had said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). The rest said, "Leave Him; let us see whether Elijah is coming to save Him." To the end, they were mocking.

This second drink also fits Psalm 69:21, and John tells us Jesus spoke of His thirst "so that the Scripture might be accomplished" (John 19:28).

Old Testament links: Psalm 69:21 (fulfilled)

27:50 *And Jesus, having cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit.*

"And Jesus, having cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up the spirit."

Notice that He cried out "with a loud voice." Crucified men usually died exhausted, barely able to breathe, let alone shout. Jesus still had strength at the end. John tells us what He cried: "It has been finished" (John 19:30). Luke tells us He then said, "Father, into Your hands I will commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). The work of salvation was done.

He "yielded up the spirit." No one took His life from Him. He gave it up. He had said, "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again" (John 10:18). The Son of God died, by His own choice, at the moment He chose, for you and for me.

27:51 *And look, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom, and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split,*

"And look, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom." The veil was the great curtain in the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, the inner room where God's presence dwelt. Only the high priest could go in, once a year on the Day of Atonement, and never without blood (Hebrews 9:7). The veil was a constant reminder that sinful man could not just walk into God's presence.

At the moment Jesus died, God tore the veil "from top to bottom." No man could have done that. It was torn from heaven down. The way into God's presence was now open. Hebrews 10:19-20 says we now have confidence to enter the holy places "by the blood of Jesus," "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." Through Jesus, any believer can come straight to God in prayer. The temple sacrifices were finished. The final sacrifice had been made.

"And the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split." Creation itself responded to the death of its Creator.

27:52-53 *and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and having come out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many.*

"And the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and having come out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many."

Only Matthew records this, and I want to say plainly what it says. When Jesus died, the earthquake opened tombs. Many bodies of the saints were raised. The saints here means godly believers, God's holy people, who had died. "Fallen asleep" is the Bible's gentle way of speaking of the death of believers, because death for them is not the end. Matthew says these were real bodies that were raised. After Jesus' resurrection, they came out of the tombs, went into Jerusalem, "the holy city," and appeared to many people. They were seen. They were witnesses.

The verse ties the opening of the tombs to the moment of His death, and their coming out and appearing to "after His resurrection." Jesus must be the first to rise from the dead in a resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:18). His death broke death's hold, and His resurrection led the way.

What happened to these saints afterward? Scripture does not tell us. Some believe they were raised like Lazarus and later died again. Others believe they were raised in glorified bodies and went to heaven with Jesus when He ascended, as a first sample of the great harvest of resurrection to come. Paul calls Christ "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

What we know for certain is what Matthew says: the death of Jesus defeated death, and graves opened to prove it.

27:54 *And the centurion and those with him keeping guard over Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things that were happening, feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was God's Son."*

The centurion and those with him keeping guard over Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things that were happening, feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was God's Son."

A centurion was a Roman army officer in command of about a hundred soldiers. This man had likely seen many crucifixions. He had heard the mocking, seen the darkness, heard the cry, felt the earthquake. And this Gentile soldier, standing at the foot of the cross, confessed what the leaders of Israel would not: "Truly this was God's Son."

Matthew began his Gospel with Gentile wise men coming to worship the newborn King (2:1-2). Near the end, a Gentile soldier confesses Him as the Son of God. The gospel was already reaching out to all nations.

27:55-56 *And many women were there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, among whom was Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*

"And many women were there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him." The men had fled. The women stayed. They had supported Jesus and cared for His needs from their own means during His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). They could do nothing to stop what was happening, but they would not leave Him.

Matthew names "Mary the Magdalene," from the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, whom Jesus had freed from seven demons (Luke 8:2). He names "Mary the mother of James and Joses," and "the mother of the sons of Zebedee," the woman who had once asked for her sons to sit at His right and left (20:20-21). Now she saw who was at His right and left on the cross. These women would be the first witnesses of the empty tomb.

27:57-58 *Now evening having come, a rich man from Arimathea came, named Joseph, who himself also had become a disciple to Jesus. This **man**, having gone to Pilate, asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up.*

"Now evening having come, a rich man from Arimathea came, named Joseph, who himself also had become a disciple to Jesus." Evening was coming, and the Sabbath would begin at sundown. The Law said a body hung on a tree must not remain there overnight (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Joseph was from Arimathea, a town in Judea. Mark and Luke tell us he was a respected member of the council who had not agreed with their decision (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51). John says he had been a secret disciple because he feared the Jewish leaders (John 19:38). Now, when it was most dangerous, he stepped forward. He went to Pilate and asked for the body. "Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up."

It is striking. When the twelve disciples were hiding, a secret disciple became bold.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:9 (alluded to)

27:59-60 *And Joseph, having taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut in the rock; and having rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, he went away.*

"And Joseph, having taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut in the rock." John 19:39-40 tells us Nicodemus helped him, bringing a large amount of spices to prepare the body.

This was a new tomb, never used. Isaiah 53:9 had said, "with a rich man in His deaths." Rome usually left crucified bodies on the cross or threw them in a common grave. But God made sure His Son was buried with honor in a rich man's tomb, just as the prophet said.

Rolling "a great stone to the door of the tomb" sealed it shut. Tombs of this kind often had a large round stone that rolled in a groove to cover the entrance. It took several strong men to move it.

Old Testament links: Isaiah 53:9 (alluded to)

27:61 *And Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

"And Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb." These women saw exactly where He was buried. That matters. On Sunday morning, they did not go to the wrong tomb. They had watched Him die, and they had watched Him buried. They were faithful to the end, and God would reward their faithfulness by making them the first to hear that He had risen.

27:62-64 *Now on the next day, which is after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we have remembered that that deceiver said while **He was** still living, 'After three days I am raised.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples, having come by night, steal Him away and say to the people, 'He was raised from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."*

"Now on the next day, which is after the Preparation." The Preparation was the day before the Sabbath, Friday, when everything had to be made ready, since no work could be done on the Sabbath. So this was Saturday, the Sabbath. The chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate on the Sabbath, a day they were very strict about, because they were worried.

They told Pilate they remembered that Jesus, whom they called "that deceiver," had said, "After three days I am raised." Here is the irony. The enemies of Jesus remembered His promise to rise, while His own disciples seemed to have forgotten it.

They asked Pilate to make the tomb secure "until the third day, lest His disciples, having come by night, steal Him away." They called His resurrection "the last deception" and feared it would be "worse than the first." They thought they were preventing a hoax. In fact, they were making the evidence for the resurrection even stronger.

27:65-66 *And Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make **it** as secure as you know **how**." And having gone, they made the tomb secure, having sealed the stone, with the guard.*

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." This could mean, use your own temple guard, or take a guard of Roman soldiers. Either way, armed men were posted.

"And having gone, they made the tomb secure, having sealed the stone, with the guard." The seal was likely a cord stretched across the stone and fixed with wax or clay at both ends, stamped with an official mark. Breaking it without permission was a serious crime.

Think about what they did. They put a huge stone in front of the tomb, sealed it with an official seal, and posted armed guards. They did everything human power could do to keep Jesus in the grave. And on the third day, it was not enough.

Chapter 27 Summary

At dawn the chief priests and elders bound Jesus and handed Him over to Pilate. Judas, filled with regret, confessed he had betrayed innocent blood, threw the silver into the temple, and hanged himself, and the priests used the money to buy the potter's field, fulfilling the prophecy. Before Pilate, Jesus said He was the King of the Jews but answered nothing to the charges, and Pilate marveled. Pilate knew the leaders had acted from envy, and his wife warned him about her dream, but the crowd demanded Barabbas and cried out for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate washed his hands, released Barabbas, had Jesus flogged, and handed Him over. The soldiers mocked Him with a scarlet cloak, a crown of thorns, and a reed, and spit on Him. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry His cross to Golgotha, where they crucified Him between two robbers, divided His garments, and posted the charge, The King of the Jews. Passersby, priests, and robbers all mocked Him. Darkness covered the land from noon until three, when Jesus cried, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me, and then with a loud voice yielded up His spirit. The temple veil was torn from top to bottom, the earth shook, tombs were opened, and many saints were raised and appeared in Jerusalem after His resurrection. The centurion confessed that He was truly God's Son. Faithful women watched, and Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in his own new tomb. The chief priests and Pharisees had Pilate seal the stone and set a guard, so no one could say He had risen.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What did Judas do when he saw Jesus condemned, and how did his sorrow differ from Peter's? (27:3-5)

2. What did the chief priests do with the thirty silver coins, and what did it fulfill? (27:6-10)

3. What reasons did Pilate have to release Jesus? (27:18-19, 23-24)

4. How is the exchange of Barabbas for Jesus a picture of the gospel? (27:21, 26)

5. How did the soldiers mock Jesus, and what does the crown of thorns remind us of? (27:28-31)

6. What did the chief priests say about Jesus saving others, and why is it true in a way they did not mean? (27:42)

7. What did Jesus cry out at the ninth hour, and what does it tell us about what He bore for us? (27:46)

8. What happened when Jesus died, and what does the torn veil mean for believers today? (27:51-53)

9. What did the centurion say, and what would it take for you to make that same confession from the heart? (27:54)

10. Spend a few moments thinking about what Jesus endured in this chapter. What does it tell you about how much He loves you?

Chapter 28: He Is Risen

Scripture

28:1-10 Now late on the Sabbath, as it was dawning toward ***the*** first ***day*** of ***the*** week, Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And look, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of ***the*** Lord, having descended out of heaven, having come, rolled away the stone from the door, and was sitting on it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And from the fear of him those keeping guard trembled and became as dead ***men***. And the angel, answering, said to the women, "Do not fear, you; for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, just as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. And having gone quickly, say to His disciples that He has been raised from the dead; and look, He goes before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Look, I have told you." And having gone out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples. And as they were going to tell His disciples, look, Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings!" And having come up, they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus says to them, "Do not fear; go, tell My brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see Me."

28:11-20 Now while they were going, look, some of the guard, having gone into the city, reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. And having been gathered together with the elders, and having taken counsel, they gave many silver ***coins*** to the soldiers, saying, "Say that His disciples, having come by night, stole Him while we were sleeping. And if this is heard by the governor, we will persuade him and keep you free from trouble." And having taken the silver ***coins***, they did as they were instructed. And this word was spread abroad among ***the*** Jews until the present ***day***. And the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And having seen Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 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.

Chapter 28 Preview

Early on the first day of the week, two women come to see the tomb. There is a great earthquake, and an angel rolls the stone away and sits on it. The guards shake with fear and fall like dead men. The angel tells the women not to be afraid: Jesus is not here, for He has been raised, just as He said. As they run to tell the disciples, Jesus Himself meets them, and they take hold of His feet and worship Him.

Meanwhile, the chief priests pay the soldiers to spread a lie, that the disciples stole the body while they slept. But the eleven disciples go to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus named, and there they see Him and worship Him. The risen King says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, and He sends them to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all He commanded. His last words in Matthew are a promise: "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age."

Chapter 28 Study

28:1 *Now late on the Sabbath, as it was dawning toward **the** first **day** of **the** week, Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.*

"Now late on the Sabbath, as it was dawning toward the first day of the week." The Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday. The first day of the week is our Sunday. The women came as the first light was breaking on Sunday morning. Jesus had been in the tomb from Friday evening until early Sunday, part of three days by the Jewish way of counting, where any part of a day counted as a day. He had said He would be raised "on the third day" (16:21; 17:23; 20:19), and He was.

"Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." They had watched Him die (27:56) and watched Him buried (27:61). Mark and Luke tell us they brought spices to anoint His body (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). They came expecting to find a dead body. They were not expecting a resurrection. That matters. The resurrection was not something the disciples dreamed up because they wanted it so badly. None of them expected it.

28:2 *And look, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of **the** Lord, having descended out of heaven, having come, rolled away the stone from the door, and was sitting on it.*

"And look, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, having descended out of heaven, having come, rolled away the stone from the door, and was sitting on it."

The earth shook at His death (27:51), and now it shakes at His resurrection. The angel rolled the stone away. Why? Not to let Jesus out. John tells us that the risen Jesus later came into a locked room (John 20:19, 26). The stone was rolled away to let the witnesses in, so they could see the tomb was empty.

And look at the angel. He "was sitting on it." The great stone that the authorities had sealed and guarded had become a seat. Heaven was not worried about Rome's seal.

28:3-4 *And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And from the fear of him those keeping guard trembled and became as dead **men**.*

"And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." The angel shone with the glory of heaven, the same kind of brightness Daniel saw (Daniel 10:6) and that Jesus showed on the mountain of transfiguration (17:2).

"And from the fear of him those keeping guard trembled and became as dead men." These were trained soldiers posted to guard a dead man. Now the dead man was alive, and the guards looked like dead men. They were overcome with terror. All the power of Rome could not keep Jesus in the grave.

Old Testament links: Daniel 10:6 (alluded to)

28:5-6 *And the angel, answering, said to the women, "Do not fear, you; for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here; for He has been raised, just as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying.*

The angel, answering, said to the women, "Do not fear, you; for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified." The guards had reason to fear. The women did not. They had come in love to seek Jesus, and those who seek Him have nothing to fear from heaven.

"He is not here; for He has been raised, just as He said." These are the greatest words ever spoken over a grave. "He has been raised." The form of the words tells us God raised Him (Acts 2:24; Romans 1:4). "Just as He said." Jesus had told His disciples again and again that He would die and rise on the third day. Every word came true. If He kept that promise, He will keep every promise.

"Come, see the place where the Lord was lying." The angel invited them to look. The faith of the Bible is not a leap in the dark. It rests on facts that could be checked. The tomb was empty, and anyone could go see it.

28:7 *And having gone quickly, say to His disciples that He has been raised from the dead; and look, He goes before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Look, I have told you."*

"And having gone quickly, say to His disciples that He has been raised from the dead; and look, He goes before you into Galilee; there you will see Him." The women were the first to be sent with the news of the resurrection. In that culture, the testimony of women was often not taken seriously in court. If someone were making up this story, they would not have chosen women as the first witnesses. The Gospels tell it this way because that is what happened.

"He goes before you into Galilee." This is the promise Jesus made the night He was betrayed (26:32). The disciples had all deserted Him, but He was still calling them His own and going ahead to meet them.

28:8 *And having gone out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples.*

"And having gone out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, they ran to tell His disciples." Fear and great joy together. They were shaken by what they had seen, and at the same time full of joy. That is a good description of how it feels to meet the living God. The proper response to the resurrection is to run and tell someone.

28:9 *And as they were going to tell His disciples, look, Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings!" And having come up, they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.*

As they were going to tell His disciples, look, Jesus met them, saying, "Greetings!" It was the ordinary greeting of the day. The risen Lord of glory met them on the road with a simple greeting.

"And having come up, they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him." They took hold of His feet. This was not a ghost or a vision. He had a real body they could touch (Luke 24:39). And they

"worshiped Him." Jesus accepted their worship. He had told Satan that worship belongs to God alone (4:10). By receiving their worship, Jesus showed He is God.

28:10 *Then Jesus says to them, "Do not fear; go, tell My brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see Me."*

Then Jesus says to them, "Do not fear; go, tell My brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see Me." Notice what He calls the disciples: "My brothers." These were the men who had run away and left Him to die, and Peter had denied Him three times. Jesus did not call them cowards or traitors. He called them brothers. That is the grace of the risen Christ. Hebrews 2:11 says He is not ashamed to call us brothers.

28:11 *Now while they were going, look, some of the guard, having gone into the city, reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.*

"Now while they were going, look, some of the guard, having gone into the city, reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened." Notice that the guards went to the chief priests, not to Pilate. That suggests they were either the temple guard, or Roman soldiers who had been placed under the priests' direction for this task. Either way, they told the leaders the truth: the earthquake, the angel, the stone rolled away, the empty tomb.

28:12-14 *And having been gathered together with the elders, and having taken counsel, they gave many silver* ***coins*** *to the soldiers, saying, "Say that His disciples, having come by night, stole Him while we were sleeping. And if this is heard by the governor, we will persuade him and keep you free from trouble."*

"And having been gathered together with the elders, and having taken counsel, they gave many silver coins to the soldiers." The same men who paid Judas thirty silver coins to betray Jesus now paid the soldiers "many silver coins" to lie about His resurrection. They had heard the truth from eyewitnesses. They did not deny that the tomb was empty. They paid to cover it up.

They told the soldiers, "Say that His disciples, having come by night, stole Him while we were sleeping." Think about that story for a moment. If the soldiers were asleep, how did they know who took the body? And would Roman soldiers admit to sleeping on duty, which could bring a death sentence? So the leaders promised, "And if this is heard by the governor, we will persuade him and keep you free from trouble." Money and political pull would protect them.

The lie also does not explain what happened next. Would the disciples, who ran away in fear on Thursday night, steal a body and then preach boldly that He was alive, suffer for it, and many of them die for it, knowing it was a lie? People will die for something they believe is true. They do not die for something they know is a lie.

28:15 *And having taken the silver* ***coins****, they did as they were instructed. And this word was spread abroad among* ***the*** *Jews until the present* ***day****.*

"And having taken the silver coins, they did as they were instructed. And this word was spread abroad among the Jews until the present day." When Matthew wrote, years later, this story was

still being told. The early Christian writer Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, also mentions that the Jewish leaders were still saying the disciples stole the body.

The empty tomb has never been explained away. The enemies of Jesus did not claim the tomb still held His body. They admitted it was empty and tried to explain why.

28:16 *And the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

"And the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Eleven now, not twelve. Judas was gone. Matthew does not tell us which mountain it was. Mountains matter in Matthew. Jesus was tempted on a mountain (4:8), preached the Sermon on the Mount (5:1), was transfigured on a mountain (17:1), and gave the Olivet Discourse on a mountain (24:3). Now He gives His final commission on a mountain.

The disciples obeyed. Jesus said go to Galilee, and they went. Obedience is where seeing Jesus begins.

28:17 *And having seen Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.*

"And having seen Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted." They saw the risen Jesus with their own eyes, and they worshiped Him.

"But some doubted." I love that Matthew included this. He did not polish the story to make everyone look good. The word for doubted means to hesitate, to be of two minds. Perhaps some were not sure at first that it was really Him, or they were struggling to take it all in. Paul tells us more than five hundred believers saw Him at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6), and some think this may have been that meeting, which would explain why some there still hesitated.

If you struggle with doubt, you are not the first. Jesus did not send the doubters away. He came closer to them, as the next verse shows.

28:18 *And Jesus, having come up, spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*

Jesus, having come up, spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Jesus came up to them. He came near.

"All authority." Not some. All. In heaven and on earth. Satan once offered Him the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down (4:8-9). Jesus refused, went to the cross, and now the Father has given Him all authority. This is the Son of Man of Daniel 7:14, to whom "was given dominion and honor and a kingdom." Paul says God "highly exalted Him and granted to Him a name, the one above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

That authority is the foundation of everything that follows. We do not go into the world in our own authority. We go in His. And there is no place on earth, no nation, no government, no culture, and no heart where Jesus does not have the right to rule.

Old Testament links: Daniel 7:14 (alluded to)

28:19 *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,*

"Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations." This is called the Great Commission. The main command is "make disciples." A disciple is a learner and follower of Jesus, someone who has turned to Him in faith and is learning to obey Him. Jesus is not just asking for decisions. He is asking for disciples.

"Having gone" assumes that His people will be going. As we go about life, at work, at home, in our neighborhoods, and to the ends of the earth, we are to make disciples. And "all the nations" means every people group, Jew and Gentile alike. Earlier Jesus sent the Twelve only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5-6). Now the door is open to the whole world, just as God promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him (Genesis 12:3).

"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is the public step of obedience for a new disciple. It follows repentance and faith. It does not save a person, but it shows outwardly what God has done inwardly, that the believer has died to the old life and been raised to walk in a new one with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). In the book of Acts, those who believed were baptized (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 16:30-34).

Notice the words carefully: "in the name," singular, "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." One name, three Persons. This is one of the clearest statements of the Trinity in the Bible. There is one God, and He exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each is fully God, and yet there are not three gods, but one. Jesus puts Himself, the Son, right alongside the Father and the Spirit. No mere man could say that. Paul's blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14 names all three the same way: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

28:20 *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.*

"Teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you." Making disciples does not end at baptism. It goes on for life. We are to teach new believers to observe, to keep and obey, everything Jesus commanded. Not just to know it, but to do it. That includes everything in this Gospel: the Sermon on the Mount, the call to forgive, the call to serve, the call to be ready for His return. Notice it says "all things." We do not get to pick our favorite parts.

"And look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age." Matthew began with the name Immanuel, "God with us" (1:23). He ends with Jesus saying, "I am with you." The whole Gospel is wrapped in that promise.

"All the days." The good days and the bad days. The days we feel His presence and the days we don't. Jesus does not send us out alone. He goes with us by His Spirit, and He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). "Until the consummation of the age," the same words the disciples used on the Mount of Olives when they asked about His coming (24:3). He will be with us until the day we see Him face to face.

"Amen." So be it. The King is risen. He has all authority. He has given us our orders. And He is with us. Now we go.

Chapter 28 Summary

Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. A great earthquake struck, an angel rolled away the stone and sat on it, and the guards shook with fear and became like dead men. The angel told the women not to fear, because Jesus had been raised just as He said, and sent them to tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee. As they ran with fear and great joy, Jesus met them, and they took hold of His feet and worshiped Him, and He told them to tell His brothers to go to Galilee. The guards reported everything to the chief priests, who paid them to say the disciples had stolen the body while they slept, and that story was still being told when Matthew wrote. The eleven disciples went to the mountain in Galilee, where they saw Jesus and worshiped Him, though some doubted. Jesus declared that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him, and commanded them to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all He commanded. He promised to be with them all the days, until the consummation of the age.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. Who came to the tomb, and what happened when they arrived? (28:1-4)

2. What did the angel tell the women, and what did he invite them to do? (28:5-7)

3. How did the women respond when Jesus met them, and why does it matter that He accepted their worship? (28:8-9)

4. What did Jesus call His disciples, and why is that surprising after what happened in chapter 26? (28:10)

5. What story did the chief priests pay the soldiers to tell, and why does it not hold up? (28:12-15)

6. How did the disciples respond when they saw Jesus in Galilee? (28:17)

7. What does Jesus claim in 28:18, and why is it the foundation of the Great Commission?

8. How does 28:19 show that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

9. The command is to make disciples, not just converts. Who is someone you could help grow as a follower of Jesus?

10. Jesus promised, "I am with you all the days." How does that promise change the way you face this week? (28:20)

Conclusion

Matthew set out to answer one question: who is Jesus? He opened his book with a family line that runs back through David to Abraham, and he closed it on a mountain in Galilee with the risen Jesus claiming all authority in heaven and on earth. Everything in between points the same way. Jesus is the promised King, the Son of David, the Messiah the prophets foretold. Over and over Matthew showed us that what happened to Jesus happened "so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled" (21:4). He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, was sold for thirty pieces of silver, and died with His garments divided by lot. God wrote the story before it happened, and then He kept every word.

Matthew also showed us what kind of King Jesus is. He taught with authority on the mountain, healed the sick, forgave sinners, welcomed tax collectors and children, and called the weary to come to Him for rest. He told His followers that greatness means serving, because "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (20:28). The leaders of His own nation rejected Him, and He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. But the grave could not hold Him. On the third day He rose, just as He said.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with Matthew, we see a King who is coming back. He warned us in the Olivet Discourse to watch, to be ready, and to be found faithful when He returns. I believe He will first come for His church, and after the Tribulation He will return in power and great glory to sit on the throne of His glory and reign. God has not forgotten His promises to Israel, and the day is coming when Jerusalem will say, "Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord" (23:39).

Until then, He has given us our orders. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (28:18). "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" (28:19). And He has given us His promise: "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (28:20). The question Jesus asked His disciples is the question He asks each of us: "But you, who do you say Me to be?" (16:15). Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized as Jesus commanded, and find a church where you can grow as His disciple and learn to observe all that He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

Old and New Testament Links in Matthew

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
1:2-6	1 Chronicles 2:4	alluded to
1:2-6	2 Samuel 12:24	alluded to
1:2-6	1 Chronicles 2:10	alluded to
1:2-6	Ruth 4:18	alluded to
1:2-6	Ruth 4:21	alluded to
1:2-6	1 Chronicles 1:34	alluded to
1:7-11	1 Chronicles 3:10	alluded to
1:7-11	1 Chronicles 3:13-14	alluded to
1:7-11	1 Chronicles 3:15-16	alluded to
1:7-11	Jeremiah 27:20	alluded to
1:7-11	1 Kings 15:24	alluded to
1:7-11	1 Kings 22:50	alluded to
1:12-16	1 Chronicles 3:17	alluded to
1:12-16	Ezra 3:2	alluded to
1:22-23	Isaiah 7:14	quoted
2:1-2	Micah 5:2	fulfilled
2:1-2	Numbers 24:17	alluded to
2:5-6	Micah 5:2	quoted
2:5-6	2 Samuel 5:2	alluded to
2:11	Isaiah 60:6	alluded to
2:15	Hosea 11:1	quoted
2:17-18	Jeremiah 31:15	quoted
2:19-21	Exodus 4:19	alluded to
3:3	Isaiah 40:3	quoted
3:4	2 Kings 1:8	alluded to
3:17	Psalm 2:7	alluded to
3:17	Isaiah 42:1	alluded to
4:2	Exodus 34:28	alluded to
4:4	Deuteronomy 8:3	quoted
4:5-6	Psalm 91:11-12	quoted
4:7	Deuteronomy 6:16	quoted
4:10	Deuteronomy 6:13	quoted
4:13-16	Isaiah 9:1-2	quoted
5:5	Psalm 37:11	alluded to
5:8	Psalm 24:4	alluded to
5:21	Exodus 20:13	quoted
5:21	Deuteronomy 5:17	quoted
5:21	Exodus 21:12	alluded to
5:27	Exodus 20:14	quoted
5:27	Deuteronomy 5:18	quoted

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
5:31	Deuteronomy 24:1	quoted
5:33	Leviticus 19:12	quoted
5:33	Numbers 30:2	alluded to
5:34-35	Isaiah 66:1	alluded to
5:34-35	Psalm 48:2	alluded to
5:38	Exodus 21:24	quoted
5:38	Leviticus 24:20	quoted
5:38	Deuteronomy 19:21	quoted
5:43	Leviticus 19:18	quoted
6:6	Isaiah 26:20	alluded to
6:13	1 Chronicles 29:11	alluded to
7:23	Psalm 6:8	quoted
8:16-17	Isaiah 53:4	quoted
9:13	Hosea 6:6	quoted
9:36	Numbers 27:17	alluded to
9:36	Ezekiel 34:5	alluded to
10:21	Micah 7:6	alluded to
10:35-36	Micah 7:6	quoted
11:4-5	Isaiah 35:5-6	alluded to
11:4-5	Isaiah 29:18	alluded to
11:9-10	Malachi 3:1	quoted
11:13-14	Malachi 4:5	alluded to
11:23-24	Isaiah 14:13-15	alluded to
11:23-24	Genesis 19:24	alluded to
11:29	Jeremiah 6:16	alluded to
12:3-4	1 Samuel 21:3-6	alluded to
12:3-4	Leviticus 24:9	alluded to
12:5-6	Numbers 28:9-10	alluded to
12:7-8	Hosea 6:6	quoted
12:15-16	Isaiah 42:2	fulfilled
12:17-21	Isaiah 42:1-4	quoted
12:40	Jonah 1:17	pictured
12:41	Jonah 3:5	alluded to
12:42	1 Kings 10:1	alluded to
12:42	2 Chronicles 9:1	alluded to
13:14-15	Isaiah 6:9-10	quoted
13:31-32	Daniel 4:12	alluded to
13:31-32	Ezekiel 17:23	alluded to
13:34-35	Psalm 78:2	quoted
13:40-42	Zephaniah 1:3	alluded to
13:43	Daniel 12:3	alluded to
14:3-4	Leviticus 18:16	alluded to
14:25	Job 9:8	alluded to
15:4	Exodus 20:12	quoted
15:4	Exodus 21:17	quoted
15:4	Deuteronomy 5:16	quoted
15:4	Leviticus 20:9	quoted
15:7-9	Isaiah 29:13	quoted

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
15:31	Isaiah 35:6	alluded to
16:4	Jonah 1:17	alluded to
16:27	Psalm 62:12	alluded to
16:27	Proverbs 24:12	alluded to
17:2	Exodus 34:29	alluded to
17:5	Isaiah 42:1	alluded to
17:5	Deuteronomy 18:15	alluded to
17:10-11	Malachi 4:5-6	alluded to
17:12-13	Malachi 4:5-6	alluded to
18:16	Deuteronomy 19:15	quoted
18:22	Genesis 4:24	alluded to
19:4	Genesis 1:27	quoted
19:5	Genesis 2:24	quoted
19:6	Genesis 2:24	alluded to
19:7	Deuteronomy 24:1	alluded to
19:8	Deuteronomy 24:1	alluded to
19:18-19	Leviticus 19:18	quoted
19:18-19	Exodus 20:12	quoted
19:18-19	Exodus 20:13-16	quoted
19:18-19	Deuteronomy 5:16	quoted
19:18-19	Deuteronomy 5:17-20	quoted
21:4-5	Zechariah 9:9	quoted
21:4-5	Isaiah 62:11	alluded to
21:6-7	Zechariah 9:9	fulfilled
21:9	Psalm 118:26	quoted
21:9	Psalm 118:25	alluded to
21:13	Jeremiah 7:11	quoted
21:13	Isaiah 56:7	quoted
21:15-16	Psalm 8:2	quoted
21:18-19	Jeremiah 8:13	alluded to
21:33	Isaiah 5:1-2	alluded to
21:42	Psalm 118:22-23	quoted
21:44	Isaiah 8:14-15	alluded to
21:44	Daniel 2:34-35	alluded to
22:24	Deuteronomy 25:5-6	quoted
22:24	Genesis 38:8	alluded to
22:31-32	Exodus 3:6	quoted
22:37-38	Deuteronomy 6:5	quoted
22:39	Leviticus 19:18	quoted
22:43-45	Psalm 110:1	quoted
23:23	Micah 6:8	alluded to
23:35	Genesis 4:8	alluded to
23:35	2 Chronicles 24:20-21	alluded to
23:39	Psalm 118:26	quoted
24:7	Isaiah 19:2	alluded to
24:15	Daniel 9:27	alluded to
24:15	Daniel 12:11	alluded to
24:15	Daniel 11:31	alluded to

Verse in this study	Old Testament passage	Kind
24:21	Daniel 12:1	alluded to
24:21	Jeremiah 30:7	alluded to
24:23-25	Deuteronomy 13:1-3	alluded to
24:29	Joel 2:10	alluded to
24:29	Isaiah 13:10	alluded to
24:29	Isaiah 34:4	alluded to
24:29	Joel 2:31	alluded to
24:30	Daniel 7:13	alluded to
24:30	Zechariah 12:10-12	alluded to
24:31	Zechariah 2:6	alluded to
24:31	Isaiah 27:13	alluded to
24:31	Deuteronomy 30:4	alluded to
24:35	Isaiah 40:8	alluded to
24:37-39	Genesis 7:7	alluded to
25:31	Daniel 7:13	alluded to
25:32-33	Ezekiel 34:17	alluded to
25:46	Daniel 12:2	alluded to
26:10-12	Deuteronomy 15:11	alluded to
26:14-16	Zechariah 11:12	fulfilled
26:23-24	Psalm 41:9	fulfilled
26:27-28	Exodus 24:8	alluded to
26:27-28	Jeremiah 31:31	alluded to
26:31-32	Zechariah 13:7	quoted
26:55-56	Zechariah 13:7	fulfilled
26:62-64	Psalm 110:1	alluded to
26:62-64	Daniel 7:13	alluded to
26:62-64	Isaiah 53:7	alluded to
26:67-68	Isaiah 50:6	alluded to
27:9-10	Zechariah 11:12-13	quoted
27:12-14	Isaiah 53:7	alluded to
27:24	Deuteronomy 21:7	alluded to
27:33-34	Psalm 69:21	alluded to
27:35	Psalm 22:18	quoted
27:35	Psalm 22:16	alluded to
27:38	Isaiah 53:12	fulfilled
27:39-40	Psalm 22:7	alluded to
27:41-43	Psalm 22:8	quoted
27:45	Amos 8:9	alluded to
27:46	Psalm 22:1	quoted
27:47-49	Psalm 69:21	fulfilled
27:57-58	Isaiah 53:9	alluded to
27:59-60	Isaiah 53:9	alluded to
28:3-4	Daniel 10:6	alluded to
28:18	Daniel 7:14	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The Jewish historian Josephus is named in the text where his work is used. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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