

MATTHEW

Matthew 19:1-28:20

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The Story of Scripture

Creation

In Genesis, God shows himself to be the Creator. He has always existed, and as we study Scripture, we will find he has always existed as the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. Everything else was created by him from nothing, a fact that shows us he is wholly different from us. As we are introduced to his creation in Genesis 1, we see that everything he has made is good, and we feel a tension because we recognize that the world as we know it misses the mark. It is not good that people get old, that loved ones get sick and die, that the world is filled with violence and corruption.

This tension in the story is intentional. Things are not how God created them or wanted them to be. He created a good world, and at its heart is a garden called Eden that represents the best of it. Here he places a man and woman (Adam and Eve), both created in the image of God, to rule over creation and to fill the earth with the glory of God. This is a world with no sin, no sickness, no violence and no death. They have everything that they need. They have fellowship with God, they have a purpose, and they have the use of all of creation. God gives them life freely with only one condition: they can eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they eat from it, they will die.

The Fall

In the next scene, a serpent enters the garden. This creature suggests that God does not have humanity's best interest in mind, that maybe they know more about what they want than God does. He suggests that God denies them the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he does not want them to be like him. And instead of trusting in the goodness of God as displayed throughout his creation and provision for them, they disobey God. This is known as the Fall. At this point, sin and its consequences enter into the world, and it is corrupted. From here, the Bible shows how the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God leads to increasing destruction and death. It corrupts everything it touches, and humanity can do nothing to rid itself of the problem. Evil is in our world because we invited it in, and there is nothing we can do to shut it out again. This is the tension we are meant to feel as we read Scripture: one that echoes our experience in what is often a cruel world.

But God is gracious. Instead of letting death be the last word, he makes a promise in Genesis 3:15 even as he doles out the consequences of disobedience. When talking to the serpent, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God promises that there will one day be an offspring (or seed or child) of the woman that will defeat the serpent. He will be hurt by the serpent, but in so doing, he will crush its head. This promise will become clearer as the story unfolds.

The Good Seed and Righteousness by Faith

After this, we see the effects of sin driving the world into chaos. Just as God promised, sin has led to death. People are choosing immorality, violence, abuse, destruction, and death. A few faithful hold to the promise of a seed of the woman: a serpent slayer who will set things right, but even these show themselves to be thoroughly infected by sin. The story of Noah illustrates this. Things have gone horribly wrong up to this point: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart

was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). But Genesis 5:28–29 says, “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” Lamech, Noah’s father, understands the promise of Genesis 3:15 that God will send a serpent slayer to set things right. He hopes that his son is this man. And as Noah grows, it looks like he might be; God recognizes that he is the one righteous man on earth.

Because the world is so evil, God floods the earth, saving only Noah and his family. This story teaches us something about the heart of man. Although God has brought judgment upon the earth and is restarting with one righteous man and his family, sin has so permeated the human heart that even Noah, a righteous man who has just been spared judgment, shows his brokenness. The next time we hear about Noah, he is drunk and naked, shaming himself before his children. Even the most righteous man on earth falls far short of God’s standard for humanity. Noah looked like he may be the promised seed of the woman to slay the serpent, but he is as broken as all the rest. Though his faith is to be emulated, he cannot save even himself, much less the world. And by Genesis 11, we see the world openly rebelling against the rule of God again. This shows there is a heart problem with humanity. We choose to cut ourselves off from God, the source of life, and in doing so, we choose destruction. That is the clear trajectory for humanity established in Genesis.

But just as things are looking hopeless, God steps in and chooses a man who will later be renamed Abraham to receive a great promise. In Genesis 12:1–2, God says to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Of particular importance here is the idea that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (more on that in a minute). Of immediate concern to Abraham is how God can make him a great nation even though he has no children and has a barren wife. But in Genesis 15, God reaffirms his promise, and Abraham believes God and in so doing clues us into how a sinful and broken people might be able to be made right with our creator. Genesis 15:6 says, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham believes that God will come through on his promise, and God counts Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This clues us into why people like Noah are considered righteous even though we see that man’s heart is broken. They believe the promise of the seed of the woman who will slay the serpent. And God is narrowing his promise when he covenants with Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring or seed. The serpent slayer will be a child of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations.

The OT’s definition of righteousness can be surprising to many. Many see the OT way to salvation as observance to the law of Moses, but this is not the case. It is by faith in the promises of God. Romans 4:1–3 assures us that this interpretation is correct, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’” Faith, not works, is and has always been the basis of justification. However, it is important to note that belief and obedience are closely related throughout Scripture. Belief is counted as righteousness, but that belief is always accompanied by a heart that is motivated towards obedience by the grace and mercy received. Thus obedience is the fruit (or result) of a life of faith. Faith, not works, is counted as righteousness. Obedience flows out of this faith. Obedience can be thought of as

living out the identity God gives us because of our faith. We will look at this more in our discussion of the New Testament.

Just as we would expect from our knowledge of humanity, Abraham and his descendants continue to exhibit evidence of heart problems. Throughout the rest of the OT, they lie, they cheat, they sleep around, they murder. They are thoroughly broken. They will never make themselves pure. Even the best choose themselves over God. It is important that we see salvation as something completely out of the reach of humanity. But more importantly, God steps in and provides salvation to those who are willing to repent. God is faithful despite failures. He continues to pursue his people. He continues to offer forgiveness and mercy to those who will respond in belief to his promises.

The Exodus and The Law

A few generations down the road from Abraham, we find that his family (the Hebrews or the people of Israel) has grown large, but they are enslaved to the Egyptians. It is important to note that this is predicted in Genesis 15:13, a fact that should only further confirm the sovereignty of God in our minds. Things are not good. Not only are they oppressed, but their numbers intimidate Pharaoh, and he decrees that every Hebrew male child born be killed by being cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). But one woman, in an effort to save her baby son, places him in a basket and floats him down the same river. The daughter of Pharaoh finds the child and raises him as her own. This man is Moses. He will lead Israel in the exodus, a climatic moment in history where God delivers Israel from Egypt and establishes them as a nation. This will be the moment by which OT believers remember the faithfulness of God and becomes the bedrock for their hope of future deliverance.

The story of Exodus shows the power of God. He uses the deliverance of Israel to tell a story that will be repeated over and over again. A man will bring a broken people out of the bonds of slavery and into a Promised Land. The story of Moses will set the trajectory for the greater redemption story where Christ comes to save his people from sin and death and restore them and the world to their intended place. Moses, through the power of God, pleads with Pharaoh to let his people go. God sends ten plagues, each proving his power over the gods of Egypt and the last of which costs the Egyptians that which they took from the Israelites: their firstborn sons. Israel is spared this fate through what becomes known as the Passover. God calls each house to sacrifice a lamb and paint its blood on the door posts. They are to then eat a special meal that becomes known as the Passover meal. That night as the angel of the Lord is putting the firstborn to death, he passes over the houses that believe God and act on his commandment to sacrifice the lamb, resulting in the sparing of their firstborn sons. This final plague convinces Pharaoh to release Israel.

Despite the miraculous ways God delivers them from Egypt, including the crossing of the Red Sea, they again choose fear rather than trust him. God leads them on the way to Promised Land in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He feeds them manna that miraculously appears on the ground. He gives them water from a rock when they have nothing to drink, and still they grumble against him.

Finally, they come to a place called Mount Sinai and something amazing happens. God makes a covenant (probably the best way to understand a covenant is a promise that is marked by loyal relationship) with Israel that they will be his people if they will obey what he calls them to do. That sounds good to them and so they say they will. Moses then goes up the mountain to meet with God and before he can come back down, they have already failed. They make an idol

and begin worshiping it. The only thing that keeps God from destroying them is his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Eventually, they move on. God leads them on towards the Promised Land (Canaan), and he continues to provide for them on the way. As they near the land, they send out twelve spies to investigate. It is a rich land but also one filled with powerful people. Ten of the twelve spies report that they do not believe they can take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagree and urge the people to trust God. Instead, they doubt his promise and try to stone Joshua and Caleb, rebelling against God. God intervenes and is again on the verge of destroying Israel. Only his promise stays his hand. The consequence for their actions? None of this unbelieving generation will get to enter the Promised Land. All but Joshua and Caleb will die in the wilderness as Israel is made to wander in it for the next 40 years.

This includes Moses. He is like Noah in that he appears to be the one who will bring about the promises of God, but despite his great faithfulness, he too sins in ways that show us he too is broken and in need of God's intervention. This is never more evident than when he strikes the rock at Meribah in disbelief and frustration, and God says to him, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Even the great prophet Moses falls short of God's perfect standard and is lost apart from God's intervention.

It is amazing that God continues to provide for Israel even as they wander through the desert. But the message is clear – disobedience displays a lack of belief in the promises of God, resulting in wandering through the desert rather than entering into the Promised Land (an image that will later represent entering into the rest of God). As the 40 years come to a close, Moses gives some last instructions to the Israelites before he dies, and they enter into the land without him.

In Deuteronomy 28–29, Moses reminds them of the covenant they have made with God. If they believe in him and his promises as demonstrated by their obedience, he will bless them in all kinds of ways. If they disobey, they will experience curses, most notably they will face exile at the hands of their enemies. Deuteronomy 30:15 sums it up this way, "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil." But Deuteronomy 30 also lets us know what is going to happen. They are going to disobey and go into exile. They are going to do exactly what everyone before them has done. They are going to choose to disobey God and die, and here we are clued in as to why: they have uncircumcised hearts. They can't love God how they are supposed to because their hearts are infected with sin and must be made new. This is also called a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26). But there is hope. There will be a day that God intervenes. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God is doing something on the behalf of his people that they cannot do for themselves: change their very hearts.

This echoes what we see in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:1–2. God is at work to bring about salvation for his people, and we are seeing his plan slowly unfold. It is something he must do on our behalf. God will send a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will be from the line of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations. Genesis 15:6 assures us that those who are considered righteous are those who believe the promises of God. These believers will be the ones whose hearts have been circumcised so they will love God with all their hearts and souls that they may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Despite the warning, the prediction of Deuteronomy 30 comes true. Upon entering the Promised Land, Israel's obedience quickly wavers. Numerous accounts like Joshua 7 show the Israelites disobeying God thinking they know better than him about what will make them happy. At times, they keep things for themselves they were told not to; other times, they are fearful. They do not completely conquer the land. Judges records in great detail a people who are quick to forget God. He intervenes to save them over and over again, sending judges to help, but they continue to fall into unbelief and disobedience. Judges is summed up with its last verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Kingdoms, Prophets, and Exile

At this point, God allows Israel an earthly king. A man of kingly stature named Saul receives the crown. However, despite his appearance, it quickly becomes apparent that his life does not match up. He becomes murderously jealous of a young man named David that God chooses to replace him as king (remember disobedience illustrates a lack of belief). David is a man specifically chosen by God. He is from the tribe of Judah. We didn't talk about this, but in Genesis 49:10, Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, declares that Judah, or more literally an offspring of Judah, will rule forever. All peoples will obey him, and the kingdom will be so wealthy he can tie his foal to the choice vine and wash his garments in wine. These are Messianic descriptors, meaning that these things describe the Messiah, the one God is sending to set things right, and the Messianic Kingdom he will usher in. This is important now because it hints to the meaning of the promises of God given here.

The serpent slayer will be a seed of the woman (a human), a seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and as we will see, a son of David (meaning in the lineage of David). David seems to be the next contender for the position of serpent slayer. God handpicks him. As a boy, he slays the giant Goliath when all of Israel trembles before him. He is patient and merciful to Saul despite Saul's murderous intentions towards him. He is even called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). But we will see that he too is broken, most notably in his sin with Bathsheba. He will sleep with her, a married woman, and then have her husband killed to cover his sin. Again, the Bible clearly illustrates even the best of men have hearts that are deeply flawed. David is not the Messiah. But he does receive a promise from God that focuses the expectations of deliverance. God promises David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). One from the line of David will rule forever as the Messianic King. This Kingdom will be described in further detail in the prophets, but the gist is that it will be an everlasting kingdom marked by righteousness and justice: the two major concerns of God's law.

After David dies, his son Solomon begins his rule. His rule, like his father's, starts out promising. He asks God for wisdom and receives it. He writes much of the wisdom literature in Scripture (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and much of Proverbs). He is successful in his reign. The nations come to meet him and pay tribute. In some ways, he is a picture of what the Messianic King might look like, but he is as fallen as the rest. He lets his numerous wives lead his heart after idols rather than stay true to God.

The rest of the accounts of the kings of Israel are much like this. Most are outright rebellious. Some make a call for renewed faithfulness, but the trend is towards disobedience. As a result, God does just what he said he was going to do. The people choose disobedience and in doing so, they choose the curse (Deut. 30:15-20).

This leads to disaster for Israel. Under Solomon's son, the kingdom of Israel is split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. The kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Assyrians and carried off into exile. The same happens to the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. At this point, the question is how one in the line of David will sit on the throne forever and set things right if there is no throne in Israel? But we must remember that during the periods of the kings and now in the exile, prophets are sent to tell the Jewish people they are about to be punished and then while in exile why they are being punished. They have disobeyed God and are experiencing the curse Moses discussed in Deuteronomy 29. But that is not the end of the story. They are also reminded of who God is, how he is faithful to his promises, how he is merciful, how he has redeemed them in the past, and how they can expect him to do so again. And he will do so in a way that will address the problem they have been unable to address themselves. He will give them new hearts.

There are many clarifications of the promises of God in the prophets. In our brief overview it is important to see that there will be a Messianic (anointed one, promised deliverer) King from the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-5) and yet greater than David (Psalm 110:1), who in some way is like a son of man and yet who seems to share in the divinity and authority of God (Daniel 7:13-14), who will suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and yet will rule forever in righteousness and justice over a world that has been freed from sin and its curse (Isaiah 11:1-9). This king will not only save Israel but will bring salvation to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). We see that the members of this new kingdom will have a new covenant with God in which he will write his law on their hearts and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34), meaning he will make them into the kind of people with hearts that are able to love follow him. There is more than we can discuss in this short overview, but it is important to see the expectation of redemption and salvation that exists because of the promises of God revolving around the seed of the woman as declared by the prophets throughout the exile.

This is where the OT ends, with the expectation of a Messiah, a serpent-slayer from the line of David who will be a blessing to the nations, who will provide forgiveness of sins, conquer death, and rule eternally with righteousness and justice. However, as they trickle back from exile and are allowed to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, no one thinks that this new kingdom has come. Israel languishes, waiting for its promised deliverer, and they will do so for 400 years. The question for Israel is, "When will this Messiah come?"

The Messiah

This is the context for the coming of Jesus—a once perfect world broken by an act of rebellion by the very ones created to be caretakers of it. This rebellion has led to broken fellowship with the creator, humanity's enslavement to sin, suffering caused by evil, and ultimately death. Hope seems distant, but deliverance is coming in a most unexpected way.

It is important to note that the NT writers see the coming of Jesus and his preaching of the dawning kingdom of God as the fulfillment of the OT Scripture and its promises. This is why Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus connecting him to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17), Luke records a genealogy connecting him all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38), and all of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) make frequent use of OT quotes and allusions to confirm Jesus as the promised Messianic King. They believe God's promises in the OT and see them fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Although there are plenty of examples of God choosing people of low station to fulfill his purposes, the typical Jewish expectation for the Messiah was one who would come in political

power. That is not how Jesus comes. He comes from humble beginnings. When he starts his ministry he chooses twelve men to invest in. He doesn't choose the best and brightest; he chooses fishermen and a tax collector. But as he begins to minister, it becomes clear that Jesus is different. He heals people; he casts out demons; he shows his authority over nature; and he miraculously provides sustenance. He amazes the crowds as he teaches as one with more authority than they have never seen. He forgives sins; he overturns the temple; he explains how they have misunderstood the teachings of the OT. He claims to be the fulfillment of OT, the way to the Father, the living water, the light of the world. But most amazing of all, he claims to be the Son of God: one with God the Father. That is what all his teachings and miracles are pointing towards. The Messiah (or Christ as he is called in the NT) has come and his miracles are showing the dawning of the new kingdom promised in the OT. But the Jewish leaders are skeptical, which is unsurprising as it threatens their positions of power, and they begin to plot to kill Jesus.

Jesus' teachings are surprising. He teaches an upside-down economy for the new kingdom he is ushering in. The meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). You must love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). You must store up your treasure in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). Those who want to follow him must expect to be hated and persecuted (Matt. 10:16-25). Those who are like children will be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:3-4). Those who desire to be great must serve (Matt. 23:11-12). Earthly riches make entering into the kingdom difficult (Matt. 19:23-24). Those who wish to keep their lives must lose it (Matt. 16:24-27). Then Jesus shows what he means by all of this by serving us in a way that we could never repay. He does something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He pays the penalty for our sins. The greatest among us, the very Son of God, serves a world that has been rebelling against him since the beginning of time and takes our sins upon his shoulders. He takes our penalty for our sins—death. The God of the universe becomes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, "...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." And because he is perfect, because he is sinless, because he is the Son of God, he rises again from the grave (Matt. 28:1-10). Jesus—the seed of the woman, the blessing to the nations, the Davidic king, the suffering servant, the Son of God—has fulfilled the promise of God. He crushes the head of the serpent. He defeats sin and death and inaugurates the new kingdom.

Our Place in the Story

This is where you and I find ourselves in the story. Sin and death have been defeated, and we are offered a choice. Will we trust Jesus and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins or will we trust in ourselves and our works? At first the answer seems easy. But Jesus calls us to count the cost of following him. He is coming back to set all things right, but until he does, we are to be sharing his story so that others might be saved. And what the Bible tells us is that many will reject him and in so doing reject and persecute us. Belief in him will mean hatred by the world. The call to follow Jesus is the call to forget about temporary, earthly gain and to pursue Jesus and his coming kingdom. It is the call to be willing, like Jesus, to suffer injustice. It is the call to share the gospel with those who are still dead in their sin so that they too can know God. We will find that we are exiles in this world, that we don't really belong, but we will also find that the temporary cost will be eternally worth it (Matt. 13:44-46). Luke 9:23-25 says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” We will all die. But Jesus tells us that a temporary life surrendered to him will result in salvation and eternal life with him in his new kingdom.

Revelation 21:1-4 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” This is just a small glimpse into what God has in store for those who accept what Jesus has done on their behalf, who believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. While we await his return, we are called to live in such a way that we demonstrate our belief, particularly in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to those who do not know him.

In short, we respond to the story of Scripture by knowing Jesus and making him known.

Questions to ask when reading Scripture:

1. What is the author’s main point in this section of Scripture?
2. Where does what I’m reading fit in the overall story of the Bible? (i.e. before or after the Exodus from Egypt; before or after Jesus; before or after the resurrection, etc.)
3. What does it mean for those who were the original audience?
4. What does it mean for me today?
5. How should I change in response to this Scripture?

A Few Resources for Understanding the Story of Scripture

For Small Children:

The Biggest Story by Kevin DeYoung

The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name by Sally Lloyd-Jones

The Big Picture Story Bible by David Helm

The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross by Carl Laferton

thebibleproject.com

New City Catechism (Available as a book or for free as an app on both iOS and Android)

For Youth and Adults

thebibleproject.com

The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses by Chris Bruno

Multiply by Francis Chan

For a More In-depth Look

The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah by T.D. Alexander

Old Testament Survey by Paul House and Eric Mitchell

God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology by James M. Hamilton, Jr.

Week 1

An Overview of Matthew

By Harvey Edwards, IV

When we began our study of the Gospel of Matthew, we said it was written so that we might see Jesus for who he is—the Christ, the promised Messiah—and that we might respond by believing in and following him with all of who we are.

Matthew is continuing a story that is as old as time. He intends his readers to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of God. Matthew begins, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). With this simple statement, he prepares us to understand Jesus as the inheritor of the promises to Abraham and David: both pivotal characters in the history of Israel and in the expectations for how God will deal with his people in the future. Matthew is showing us that God’s promises made in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants point to and are fulfilled in Jesus.

In the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-19), God promises Abraham that he will bless him, that he will multiply his offspring, that he will give him a land, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him and his lineage. This is in response to the problem sin introduced in Genesis 3—sin has brought the curse, but God intends to bless his people. As we read the Old Testament, God’s promises to Abraham have multiple levels of fulfillment. The first level comes to fruition as God raises up a deliverer in a man named Moses. God uses him to deliver his people out of slavery in Egypt, to receive the Mosaic Covenant regarding how Israel should interact with God as his chosen people, and to lead them to the Promised Land where they are to dwell in the vicinity of God. But as the Old Testament moves forward, we begin to understand that this is a physical picture of something greater that God will do in the future—deliver his people from sin and death. Matthew is positioning us to understand that Jesus is the one who will fulfill these expectations. As we study the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we will see how Jesus initiates the fulfillment of God’s promises in his death and resurrection.

In the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:1-17), God promises King David that one from his line would sit on the throne forever. Matthew identifies Jesus as this king. Matthew records signs and wonders performed by Jesus that show he has all authority in heaven and earth—in other words, he has the authority of God. He multiplies food; he heals people; he casts out demons; he calms storms; and he raises people from the dead. He forgives people of their sin. He teaches on the kingdom of God and what it looks like to be a part of that kingdom. There has never been anyone like him. Matthew is showing that he is the Messiah—God’s promised king for his people. And what we will see as we continue our study of Matthew is that Jesus not only has an authority unlike any other king—he uses that authority differently than any other king. As he says in Matthew 20:28, he came not to be served but to serve. He came to lay his life down so that any who believe in him might have eternal life.

This is what Matthew has been preparing us to understand. The beginning of Matthew has been showing us the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. Matthew shows us Jesus’ identity so that we understand the nature of his life, death, and resurrection. When we see his perfect obedience to the Father, even to the point of laying down his life, we see that he earns a righteousness we never could. When he lays his life down on the cross, we see that he is the perfect sacrifice and that he has paid the penalty for our sin once and for all. He is the one sent by God to redeem his people. God’s justice is satisfied through Jesus’

death on the cross so that the mercy of God can be applied to sinners like you and me. When Jesus rises from the grave, we see that he has the power to take his life back up again and the power to give eternal life.

Matthew identifies Jesus as the Messiah and prepares us to understand the cross so that we might see that he has initiated the kingdom of God and is now gathering all of his people to himself through the preaching of the gospel. The question we must all answer is, “Will I repent and believe?”

Study Questions

1. What does the passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Why do you think Matthew goes to such extremes to show us that Jesus is the Christ expected in the Old Testament?
 2. How do these Old Testament expectations prepare us to understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross?
 3. What does Matthew want us to do in response to his gospel? What does that mean for our lives?
 4. Does your life display a belief that Jesus is king? Are there areas of your life that you have not yet submitted? What is stopping you from doing so?
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The Main Point

Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the Son of God who fulfills the promises of the Old Testament. We should repent and believe, and then live our lives in such a way that we are accomplishing the mission he has given us: making disciples.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-19 – God makes a covenant with Abraham.
- 2 Samuel 7:1-17 – God makes a covenant with David.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The Lord promises a New Covenant through which his people will know and obey him as their God.
- Psalm 110:1-4 – Jesus uses this passage to show the Pharisees how David is looking for a descendant greater than him who will sit on the throne forever in Matthew 22:44. This is important because in Jewish thought, a person could never be greater than their father because their father gave rise to them. Jesus is greater than David because he is the Son of God.
- Daniel 7:13-14 – Daniel sees one like a Son of Man who is given an everlasting throne by the Ancient of Days.

Week 2

Matthew 19:1-30 – With Man This Is Impossible, But With God All Things Are Possible By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

I was nine years old when I began to follow the Lord. I didn't know everything about God that I know today. I began following him the best way that I knew how. What I do remember was hearing that I could not earn my forgiveness, and if I wanted to be forgiven, I had to trust in Jesus' sacrifice in my place. We went to church each week on Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesday nights. If there were special occasions, we were there for those as well. In our small community, the church building was the place where most of the goings-on took place.

Before I realized it, I had accumulated a great deal of knowledge about the Scriptures, memorized Bible verses, and I had a general knowledge of what I thought a Christian was supposed to do. I mean, from the outside looking in, I was a pretty good kid.

It wasn't until I was in my late teens and early twenties that, by God's grace, I was introduced to a few friends that came alongside me to help me in my Christian walk. They helped me understand that my relationship with God was a work of God in me for his glory and my good. A verse that comes to mind is Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." This was something that I felt like I already knew. I mean, I was already doing the best I could do to try and live better. That's what this verse means, right? He has already planned out some things for me to do...and I wanted to get busy doing them. The problem with that line of thinking is that, if we aren't careful to consider all of Scripture, we can think that we are somehow working to achieve some sort of spiritual status that would earn us salvation, or trying to perfect what God has started. That's simply impossible to do. If we back up a couple verses in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Here, we see that we cannot work to earn a salvation of our own; it is only by God's grace we can be forgiven. Unfortunately for me as a new believer, what I had been doing was trying to DO things for God to earn his favor instead of resting in his grace and who he had made me to be through Christ. In this handful of verses in Ephesians, we can see that being made new in Christ comes before doing things for God. What I was trying to do was impossible. Yet, in Christ, God had already done the impossible.

In this week's guide, Jesus and his disciples had three separate interactions. All three have different scenarios—divorce, children, and wealth and salvation—that share the same theme. That theme is that what can seem impossible by human means can only be achieved by God.

Read Matthew 19:1-30

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?

3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Have you ever considered the way Jesus interacts with children? What is it about children that he wants us to emulate in our own lives?
 2. What are the areas in our lives that we are tempted to try and hold on to instead of giving up in pursuit of Christ? What makes those areas so difficult to give up?
 3. Who are we praying for, by name, to be saved?
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Commentary

In this chapter, we are met with three different scenarios with seemingly unrelated topics of discussion—divorce, children, and wealth and salvation. However, as we get to the end of the chapter, we find out that what is impossible for us—attaining righteousness and salvation—is actually possible through God. We hear these words as Jesus responds to Peter's question about their reward for leaving everything behind in pursuit of him. "But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'" (Matthew 19:26). Let's look at them independently and we will begin to see that what Jesus is doing is flipping the proverbial script on who society deems worthy of redemption. And in that, we will understand that it is only through the work of God that anyone can be redeemed. Similar to the response of the disciples to Jesus, we too, sit and ask the question, "Who then can be saved?!" Without the saving work of God through the finished work of Jesus Christ and without the Holy Spirit's work of opening our hearts and minds to see our need for forgiveness, we are helplessly lost and without hope.

Matthew 19:3-12 – Divorce

The topic of divorce is not one that is new to us in 2023. Unfortunately, it is one that affects many families both directly or indirectly and both inside and outside of the church. Marriage has always been intended to point to the church's relationship with Christ. Paul makes this observation in Ephesians 5:31-32, "'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'"³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." However, because of sin in our lives and the brokenness that accompanies it, we miss this meaning.

Jesus had previously taught on this in Matthew 5:31, 32. When he is asked about this topic, he is being asked with an assumption being made by the questioner. The assumption is that the marriage will not go well and will more than likely end in divorce. So, when that happens, they ask if a man can divorce his wife for any reason of his choosing? There were two dominant schools of thought on this topic that were taught by different Rabbinical schools, Hillel and Shammai. The one presented by the Pharisees was more widely accepted by culture in that time. Rabbi Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for the slightest fault that he might find in her. He based this on his skewed view of what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,² and if she goes and becomes another man's wife,³ and the latter man hates her and writes her a

certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

The opposing viewpoint, the one that Jesus will soon highlight, was the one that was less popular. Rabbi Shammai held that divorce was only allowed if, and only if, infidelity was found to be true within the marriage, (RSB pg. 1705, note on verse 3). And even then, it was not to be approached lightly. Reconciliation could still take place, and was preferred. Divorce was not required, merely allowed.

In his response to the Pharisees, Jesus takes them back to a place in the Scriptures that they would have been more than acquainted with—Genesis 2. What he is drawing their attention to is that God’s intended order in creation by the institution of marriage supersedes any interpretation the Pharisees attempt to make from a later book. Their reference to Moses’ allowance in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and their interpretation of it is built on a faulty understanding of the passage. Jesus points out the only reason that God ever allowed divorce in the first place was the hardness of their hearts due to sin. By mandating the man to give a certificate of divorce to his wife before sending her way, God was protecting the woman against any circumstantial repercussions that may follow the divorce. According to the Hillel teaching, a husband could divorce his wife for the slightest offense. In doing so, it would leave her destitute and in desperate need for others to intervene on her behalf. The certificate would show others that the divorce was not for infidelity, meaning that she was not necessarily guilty of a punishable offense and would be deemed permissible to remarry. This shows that God cares for his people and wants to provide for them in every situation. He goes further, past the certificate, to make sure that the woman is not treated as property. He says that it is an abomination for a man to remarry the woman he has previously divorced. Simply put, in a situation where a husband might become tired of his wife or irritated with her and divorce her, he cannot “come to his senses” at a later date and think he can remarry her. That would assume that she is a type of personal property that he can purchase and put aside until a later time for his use. This was never the way and would not be allowed.

“God defined and created the covenant of marriage, and therefore he alone sets the grounds for divorce, which he hates; nevertheless, God continues to hold out hope in the gospel for all who have disobeyed him in this area,” (Platt pg. 249). Since God is the one that created the marriage relationship, he is the one that can rightly define it, and by doing so, he is the only one that determines the expectations for both parties. Even if, because of sin, our marriages end in divorce, that does not mean that there is no hope for forgiveness and restoration. God can and often will use our previous sinful mistakes in our life to shape who we are to become in Christ. He is not responsible for our sin, yet he does work in and through all things (including our sinful choices) to bring about his purposes.

As his people, we should come alongside those who have divorce in their past, who are considering divorce, or who might be walking through it currently. As his church, let’s seek out opportunities to comfort them in their time of need. Check in on the children. Maybe we can be a listening ear or just a friendly face from time to time, seeking to help them in practical ways. While being a comfort to those walking through divorce, we also need to offer the opportunity for repentance as well. While we may not always know why divorce takes place, we know that

marriage involves two sinful people seeking to become one through the power of a perfect God. Because of this, there is room for repentance on both sides of the discussion. This in no way should place all the blame on one party, release one party from all blame, or even encourage a person to remain in a harmful marriage. We should seek to love one another and guide one another to the Lord through prayer and other practical means without excusing sinful behavior.¹

The disciples respond to Jesus' declaration on divorce with, "*If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.*" Their response shows their lack of understanding in this matter and, possibly, it shows that they had been proponents of the Hillel teaching on divorce that was widely accepted in that day. Yet, as he often does, Jesus doesn't respond to them with sharp quips, but with grace and kindness. He uses the eunuch as a way to drive his point home. There are eunuchs that were born that way, had been made that way by others, and still others that had chosen that way of life for the sake of kingdom work. A eunuch was a man that would not be able to perform his duties to have children. It is possible to be born without the ability to have children. Other times, eunuchs were slaves of other people groups chosen to serve the queen of their reigning people group, and as such, they were made eunuchs so that they would not be able to reproduce. Lastly, Jesus says that there are some who were not physical eunuchs, but that had chosen not to pursue a life of marriage and children for the sake of the kingdom, of which he and the apostle Paul belonged. I think a couple of applications for us can be made here. There will be people who are devout followers of Christ, yet do not marry or choose not to be married, in order that they are able to leverage their entire lives for kingdom ministry. And there will be individuals that do not choose to divorce, yet their spouse leaves them with little room for another choice. If that is the case, then God can redeem that in their life as well. The point being made in this section of our text is that marriage is not something to be thought of lightly and meant to demonstrate Christ's faithfulness and our submission to him. Divorce clouds this picture, and while not always avoidable, it should not be approached flippantly. Because of our sin, if left to our own devices, we would be lost to ruin. It is only by God's grace that we marry or are not married, and it is his will that we would leverage that area of our lives for kingdom work.

Matthew 19:13-15 – Children

Children are once again brought to Jesus. I think it is important for us to remember that children are not to be thought of as "out of sight and out of mind," but as an important mission field in which we intentionally invest our time and efforts. Children were important to the mission of Jesus and we see that with his teaching in chapter 18 and again here in chapter 19. The parents/guardians of these little ones brought them to Jesus in order that he would bless them through prayer and laying his hands on them. This was something that was a custom in those days. So, when the children were brought to Jesus, and after being scolded by Jesus the last time, you would have thought that the disciples would have known that Jesus cared for the little children. But, like many of us, our memory only lasts about as far as from our seat at church to the door as we leave. It is short-lived. The disciples rebuke the parents for bringing their children, thinking that Jesus would have more important things to do and more important people to teach. Yet, it was in this moment that Jesus chose to focus his teaching toward the disciples.

¹ This paragraph was adapted from David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 249–60.

In those days, women and children were not seen as having much social importance. So, what the disciples have done in 18 and now are doing in 19, should have us think that this was probably how they typically treat children in this kind of situation. In Mark 10:13-16, we see Mark take it a step further in Jesus' response to the disciples rebuke.

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Not only does Jesus bless them by laying his hands on them and praying for them, but we see that he picked them up. This is such a sweet picture of the Lord's care and provision for even the little children, those that might have been seen as less important to the mission of God. Not only that, but Mark says that Jesus was indignant toward the disciples. He was not at all pleased with their behavior. It could have been that he had just talked to them about this specifically, or it could have been that he was becoming tired of the way his creation was being treated. In either case, and in both Matthew's and Mark's account, Jesus points out that the Kingdom of God belongs to those like children. Those that are totally dependent on him for forgiveness of sin and right standing with God. In chapter 18 we were told that those that would find forgiveness would become like children in their humility and know that it is only by God's grace that anyone can be redeemed.

Matthew 19:16-24 – Wealth and Salvation

This last encounter is where the teaching from the previous two comes into focus. A wealthy man comes to Jesus in hopes that Jesus would give him the answer that he has been seeking. What is it that he has yet to accomplish that will grant him eternal life? He, like the Pharisees earlier in this chapter, approaches Jesus with a faulty understanding of what it is to be found worthy of saving. Jesus says in response, "And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments"" (Matthew 19:17). It is at this point that the rich man, like us, probably felt like he was on the right track. If I can follow the right formula in life, then I'll be set. Unfortunately for him and for us, this is something that only God can do.

Not wanting to seem as though he was unaware, he asked which commandments in particular that Jesus was referring to. So, Jesus gave him the commandments that many would have referred to because they were the ones that were more readily visible. "And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 19:18-19). This seemed doable. It was almost as if he had already achieved his life's goal. He lets Jesus know that he has been able to keep all of these since he was a child. Then Jesus responds with the command that reveals his heart's condition. "²¹ Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Matthew 19:21-22). And just like that, Jesus was able to reveal what it was that was most important to this man. It wasn't that he was a bad guy or that he had evil in mind. To be honest, I think this guy may have been a good guy. Being the kind of person that

kept these commands, you couldn't be all that bad. Yet, in his response to Jesus' command, the man revealed that he had yet to understand what it is that God wants from us.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the difficulty that wealth of possessions and finances can pose to a person that is seeking to follow God. We read Matthew 6:19-24,

¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

It's not that someone should not have wealth, it is that many times the wealth has the person. You see, Jesus does not say that our treasure will follow our heart. He says that our hearts will follow our treasure. When our hearts are captured by something or someone other than God, we are in sin and will not be able to find fulfillment or salvation. Jesus makes it clear that we are not able to both serve ourselves and God simultaneously. We will love one more than the other. There is no middle road to walk in this situation. That is why Jesus encourages his hearers to “lay up treasures in heaven” because it is only there that our treasures are really safe. It is in heaven where we can truly find the treasure that can never be lost.

A point to make here is that Jesus let this man walk away. He doesn't try to talk him into a decision or attempt to persuade him otherwise. Being God the Son, could Jesus have done that and the man be changed at once? Of course! But that is not what we see taking place in Scripture. God is sovereign and works in and through us to will and work for his good pleasure. And it is in his sovereignty that he chooses to call us to choose him. Jesus letting this man walk away is not a chance for us to throw our hands up and say that we have no say in the matter or that what we do has no consequence since God can and will do as he pleases. God, in his grace and kindness for us, will draw us to himself and grant us faith that we might repent and choose him over ourselves. Friends, let us be diligent in praying for family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates that God might grant them faith to bring about forgiveness in their lives.

Turning his attention to the disciples, Jesus makes the famous statement dealing with a camel and a needle. Growing up, I have heard several people attempt to explain this as a small gate that was thought to have been a part of a larger gate. This gate was thought to have been available to smaller groups of people that did not need to open the larger gate as you might have to for larger groups of camels. However, this is not what Jesus was pointing out and it is not historically accurate. There isn't evidence to prove this gate even existed, (France pg 738). Aside from that fact, if we keep this verse in its context, we see that Jesus was concerned with the state of the rich man's soul and not with forcing livestock through a smaller pedestrian gate. Let's look at verses 23 and 24.

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

In cases where we are unsure as to what the Bible is teaching, let us practice good Bible study skills and let the Bible interpret the Bible. Look around the verse in question for hints or clarifying thoughts. If you have them, use your cross references. A lot of accurate, modern translations will have small letters nearby some words or after verses. Those letters correspond with other verses where that topic or theme has come up in other books of the Bible. In our case here, we have already alluded to Jesus’ feelings and teachings on wealth and the difficulty that some wealthy individuals might have with being humble and receiving Christ’s sacrifice for our sins in Matthew 6. So we can take what he taught there, and then check to see if the other gospel writers mention this same encounter or a similar one where Jesus teaches on the topic of wealth and salvation. Taking all of that into account, we can be confident in assuming what Jesus is saying has more to do with the man’s eternal state.

Watching this take place, and in response to what Jesus says about the wealthy, the Bible says that the disciples were “greatly astonished.” In the Old Testament, much of what was promised to the Israelites by God was often followed by financial and physical prosperity. In other words, those that were financially stable and/or had many children/property were seen as having been blessed by God, (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). The opposite was also true. Those that were not blessed by God were oftentimes, destitute and without any financial or physical means. So in the case of the rich young ruler, from the outside looking in, it would seem as though he was a perfect candidate for salvation.

In Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus shares a parable with the crowd. This parable is known to us as the parable of the sower. Later in the chapter (13:18-23), Jesus pulls his disciples aside and graciously teaches them the meaning behind each type of soil, the sower, and the actual seed being spread. In verse 22, Jesus says ²² *“As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”* What we see happening with the rich young ruler is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 13. It is possible for a person to hear the good news of Jesus and want to follow him, but when the cares of this world (namely, the deception of wealth) overshadow the desire of the person to follow Jesus, the seed proves to be unfruitful. In other words, a person can become so excited and worked up about following Jesus without ever counting the cost of actually following Jesus. When that step is absent, the seed of the gospel never takes root in the heart and mind of that individual. What is seen is merely “going through the motions” as we might say in church today. This “going through the motions” will not lead to life. It only leads to frustration and death. In the end, no one can serve themselves and God, (Matthew 6:24). We will either serve God wholeheartedly and carry out his purpose in our lives or we will serve ourselves and seek to fulfill our own ambitions. We all must choose.

Matthew 19:25-30 - With God, all things are possible

Once again, as the disciples have already stated, we echo... *“Who then can be saved?”* Whether we realize it or not, this is a great question. It comes from the realization that is becoming clearer with each encounter the disciples have with Jesus. In each of these three situations, the disciples have been pointed back to their misguided thoughts. And in the end, Jesus tells them the truth, ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but

with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). And there it is. What Jesus had been trying to get them to see was that in our own power, we are helpless and hopeless in fulfilling the calling of God on our lives. In the question of divorce, the disciples missed the point that what God had joined together, man was not supposed to attempt to separate. With the children, the ones that could have been seen as a nuisance and a distraction from the mission of God were pointed to as the ones who model the faith and humility that would allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven. And then the crescendo, the rich young man asking for his holy to-do list so that he might become perfect in order to have eternal life only to have Jesus quickly reveal to him that his priorities were not in order and that he would not have eternal life unless he would be willing to part with his current way of life. Is it wrong to accumulate wealth? No. Is it wrong to have wealth? No. What is wrong with wealth? Nothing...unless the wealth has become the driving force for why you operate the way that you do.

By the end of the chapter, Peter is seeking reassurance that their sacrifices have not been in vain. Leaving their jobs and their families, if only for a season, would mean something in the end. In reply, Jesus outlines a very specific role that the disciples will have in the new kingdom.

²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” ²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:27-28).

This does not apply to us, only to them in that specific context. However, Jesus does go on to say what will happen to everyone that leaves behind relationships, things, etc. in order to follow him. “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).

For many of us reading this today, this may not land on us squarely. But for others, this will hit home. For some, reading these words of Jesus ring true, in that, they have already had to leave their families, occupations, or their former religious beliefs in order that they might follow Jesus. For all of us, as Christ followers, we must bring ourselves to that point of choosing between what we want for our lives and what God would have for us. Choosing to follow Jesus may not seem like it has much of a payoff in our lives currently, but in the end, we will have gained eternal life. And as Jesus said in 6:21, if our treasure is in heaven, that’s where our hearts will be.

The Main Point

Who can be saved? The short answer is no one, apart from God’s saving work through Jesus. With man it is impossible to please God, but through him all things are possible.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 2:18, 21-24 – In his kindness and grace, God made woman as a complement for man and instituted a covenantal union we know as marriage, not intending that it should be broken.

- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 – Because of sin and the brokenness it brings, God allows for divorce (only in special circumstances) and makes provision for the woman that may find herself abandoned due to a wrongful divorce.
- Matthew 13:1-23 – This passage discusses the parable of the sower, the different types of soil, and the seed of the gospel.
- Mark 10:1-31 – This passage runs parallel to the teaching we see in Matthew 19:1-30.
- 1 Corinthians 7 – Paul discusses the responsibilities of the married parties to one another and to the Lord. In either case, married or not, Christians should live as to the Lord.

Week 3

Matthew 20:1-34 – The Son of Man Came to Serve

By Bruce Mullins

Introduction

We have a family tradition where we have a family movie night about once a week. We all sit on the couch, eat some popcorn, and watch a movie together. We pick a movie that we think the kids will enjoy, but usually also something we grew up watching. This summer, Sam mentioned that he wanted to watch the Indiana Jones movies. I jumped at the opportunity to rewatch some of my favorite movies. I was writing this section while watching those movies and something from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* really hit me while studying Matthew 20.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade follows Indy on the hunt for the Holy Grail. The fictional Holy Grail in this movie is supposed to be the cup that Jesus drank from during the Last Supper and now offers magical healing abilities and extended life. When Indy and the main villain finally reach the Holy Grail, they encounter a final test they must pass. Laid out in front of them are about 20 cups, but only one is the actual Holy Grail. However, drinking from the wrong cup will bring death. The villain picks first and chooses the finest, jeweled, and ornate golden cup. The villain declares this cup the cup of a king. *Spoiler Alert* The villain chooses wrong and dies. When Indy chooses, he looks past all the fanciest golden cups and picks a plain brown cup that he says is the cup of a carpenter. Indy chooses correctly because he chooses the cup that is most like Jesus himself—humble and modest.

In Matthew 20, Jesus tells the disciples that his kingdom will be different from the kingdoms of the world. The worldly kingdoms are ruled by authority and oppression, wanting the best only for themselves. This is why the villain in the movie fails, he chooses the cup of a worldly king who wants only the finest things for himself. However, Jesus was not a worldly king, but instead came as a servant to take on God's wrath for our sins and be the perfect sacrifice. Indiana Jones chooses the correct cup because he chooses the cup of a humble servant who knew the riches of this world are nothing compared to eternity with God.

Read Matthew 20:1-34 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promises/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. When reading the parable of the laborers and the vineyard, do you think that the first workers are treated fairly? Does your perspective change when the payment is eternal life for all who are believers in Christ whether it was from the beginning or within the final hours?

2. The sons of Zebedee try to secure a high rank in the kingdom Jesus will establish based on their status as his disciples. Have there been times in your life where you have felt you deserve more because you have been a Christian longer than others?
 3. How can we be more service-oriented as Christians? How does this change our view on our ministry to others?
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Commentary

Matthew 20:1-16

This passage of scripture starts with a parable that can challenge our perspective of fairness by highlighting just how merciful and gracious God truly is. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to the master of a vineyard going out to hire laborers for the day's work (Matt 20:1). The master goes out first thing and gets laborers to work the vineyard for the day for a denarius—a typical day's wage for a laborer (ESV Study Bible). The master goes back out to look for laborers four more times throughout the day, even coming the final time with one hour left in the work day (Matt 20:3-8). The master does not say what he will pay the laborers who came later only that "whatever is right I will give you" (Matt 20:4b).

When it is time for the laborers to be paid for their work, we see that our idea of fairness in the world is not the same as it is with God. When the laborers are paid for their work, the laborers who came last are paid first and every laborer is paid a denarius whether they worked for one hour or the entire day (Matt 20:9-10). The laborers who work all day are upset that the laborers who showed up later received the same wage as them even though they worked less. The master brings up both that he gave the laborers who worked all day exactly what he agreed to and that the master is allowed to do what he wants with his money and is choosing to be generous to those who worked less (Matt 20:11-15). The parable ends mirroring the final verse of Matthew 19 with, "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matt 20:16).

This parable can be challenging because it is easy to take the side of the first laborers. They worked longer than everyone else. Why should those who showed up and worked only 9, 6, 3, or only 1 hour be paid the same as those who worked all day? O'Donnell puts it best in his commentary *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and Earth*. He says, "parables are not designed to teach business ethics or principles... [they] are designed to get us to think (and act)."² When we look at the vineyard as the Kingdom of Heaven, we can see that this parable is showing us just how generous God is with the gift of salvation.

In this parable, the master of the vineyard represents God, and the denarius is the gift of salvation (O'Donnell pg. 556). This would make the laborers the believers who follow Christ to be part of God's eternal kingdom (Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary). Romans 3:23-24 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." The timing of when the laborers come to work in the vineyard shows that people do not all become believers at the same time, but God's gift of salvation is still equally given to all that follow him.

Each and every believer is receiving a windfall when it comes to God's salvation. We all have fallen short of the glory of God but for those who believe and follow Jesus Christ, we are

² Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 560.

still given salvation. The parable is a reminder to Christians not to think we are better or more deserving of this gift just because we came to faith earlier or under better circumstances than anyone else. On the contrary, we should rejoice that others have come to faith before it was too late and are now part of the kingdom of Christ.

Matthew 20:17-19

This passage begins with Jesus foretelling his death and his resurrection for the third time in Matthew. Jesus has already told his disciples that he would soon be put to death and be resurrected on the third day (see Matt 16:21 and Matt 17:22-23). In Matthew 20:17-19, Jesus not only foretells his death, but he also goes into more detail about how the chief priests and scribes will hand him over to the Gentiles for him to be mocked, flogged, and ultimately crucified.

Jesus knows that going to Jerusalem means he is heading for his death and that his death will involve pain and suffering. He is making a connection to his role as the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 53 which he will continue to make through the rest of this chapter. Isaiah says, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; and like a sheep before its shearers is silent...” (Isaiah 53:7).

Matthew 20:20-28

This passage starts with the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, (see Matthew 10:2) asking Jesus if her sons can sit at his right and left side in his kingdom (Matt 20:20-21). James and John (through their mother) are basically asking to be only second to Jesus in the kingdom. Instead of scolding the brothers, Jesus uses this as an opportunity to explain God’s plan for salvation through his death. Jesus asks James and John, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” (Matt 20:22b). The two brothers jump to say they are ready to drink from the cup, likely not realizing that when Jesus is speaking of the “cup” he will drink he is referring to God’s wrath and judgment that he will endure at the crucifixion (Brown, *Matthew*, Teach the Text Commentary Series).

James and John get an answer to their question but not what they were expecting. In Matthew 20:23, Jesus tells the brothers they will get to drink from the cup, but it is not for Jesus to choose who will sit at his right and left as that is left up to his Father. James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2), and John was persecuted and sent into exile on Patmos (Rev 1:9). Both of the brothers will suffer—this suffering is the “cup” they will drink. The second part where Jesus says it’s not his decision who will sit on the sides of him can seem confusing since Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. Blomberg explains as follows:

“During his incarnation, the Son of God remained functionally subordinate to the Father, despite their equality in essence. All authority will be delegated to Christ after his resurrection... but for now Jesus has voluntarily relinquished some of that authority”³

The fact that Jesus, who has all authority on earth and in heaven, was willing to take on flesh and come to earth and voluntarily suffer the wrath of God and ultimately die for us shows the depths of God’s love.

³ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 307.

Jesus then contrasts the worldly kingdoms to God's kingdom emphasizing how the disciples (and Christians as a whole) should not be like the world. Jesus starts by describing how Gentile rulers rule over their people by dominating and having complete control over them. The disciples would know this feeling firsthand as Israel at the time was under Roman occupation and ultimately controlled by Caesar all the way in Rome. Jesus is reminding the disciples how God intended Israel to be different from the world. When speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, God told Moses, "[Y]ou shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5b-6a). Israel is supposed to be a holy nation, not a worldly one, and Jesus is about to explain how that will look.

Jesus tells the disciples that to be great among the Kingdom of God, they must not rule over people but be as servants—to be first you must be like a slave. Jesus is comparing the lowest position in Gentile society to how Jesus' followers should be. "Jesus' disciples are to be characterized by service with no regard to position."⁴ Jesus has already shown the disciples this through his own actions on earth through healing the needy, feeding the multitudes, and even washing the disciples' feet. In the Kingdom of Christ, the sign of great leadership is to serve others, not requiring people to serve you.

In Matthew 20:28, Jesus explains his role as a servant to the world through his sacrifice and how that will lead to salvation when he says: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). This verse is connecting Jesus with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 where it says in verse 12, "he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors." During this time period, a ransom was the price required to buy a slave's freedom (Blomberg). Jesus is telling the disciples that he is Isaiah's suffering servant coming to serve his people by bearing the weight of God's wrath so that we may have salvation through him.

Matthew 20:29-34

Matthew Chapter 20 ends with Jesus' healing two blind men outside of Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus comes across two blind men begging him for mercy and calling him the "Son of David." Jesus touches the blind men's eyes, healing them. This passage may seem familiar because we have already read a similar account of Jesus healing two blind men in Matthew 9:27-31. One of the main differences between the two healings is that in Matthew 9, when they refer to Jesus as the Son of David, Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about what happened (Matt 9:30). This time Jesus does not rebuke the blind men for calling him the Son of David.

As Jesus' time on earth is growing short, he is announcing himself as the Son of David expected in the Old Testament. In 2 Samuel 7, God makes a covenant with David including the promise that one of David's offspring would establish an eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7:11-13). Jesus is that Son of David, and as he nears Jerusalem and his death on the cross, he is letting the blind men announce him as fulfillment of the prophesied Son of David.

The Main Point

⁴ Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 234.

Jesus came to serve his people, and through his perfect sacrifice he bore the weight of God's wrath that was meant for us, thereby opening the way to salvation for all who will believe. Jesus shows by example that we are meant to serve to further the Kingdom of Christ.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Isaiah 53 – The suffering servant who through his death will bear the sins of many.
- Jeremiah 25:15 – God's cup of wrath.
- 2 Samuel 7:11-14 – God's covenant to David that one of his offspring will establish an eternal kingdom.
- Exodus 19:5-6 – Israel is meant to be a holy nation of priests.

Week 4

Matthew 21:1-46 – The Judgment of the Temple

By Will Bomar

Introduction

When I was younger, I spent some time in Central Asia. I joined a local church gathering so that I might join them in the ministry that the Lord was already doing among them and through them. It was a wonderful gathering of local believers from an unreached people group. In this country, multiple languages are spoken due to the large variety of people groups represented—some of the languages being spoken there are Russian, Kazakh, Uyghur, and a few even speak English. I was always exceptionally impressed by my friends who could speak all of those languages.

Typically, a worship gathering would consist of prayer in multiple languages, singing in multiple languages, reading scripture in multiple languages, and even when there was preaching, translation would be provided to others who could not speak the language being spoken by the elder. It was a very special group of people, and Sundays were always incredible reminders of God's kingdom. I witnessed with my own eyes and ears a glimpse of what eternity would be like with all peoples praising our God.

In this country, it's important to know that racism is very prevalent. After some time, division began to form within the local church body. Specifically, the pastor and elders decided that it would be best for only Russian to be spoken within the church, and if a person could not speak Russian, then they would not be a part of this local church anymore.

This was a serious issue as half of the congregation could not speak Russian and were suddenly being told they were no longer able to gather with their brothers and sisters in Christ. I myself, who could not speak Russian, was being told I could no longer gather with them. Remember, too, that this was occurring within the context of an unreached people group and within a closed country. This means that believers were not gathering on every block to worship Jesus. Finding another local church body would be challenging—for some, even dangerous.

I, along with many of our brothers and sisters in Christ who were feeling excluded from a church body that we had grown to love and trust, was disheartened. Many of the younger believers were even feeling shame about the language that they spoke. Eventually, the church ended up disbanding and falling apart, which actually led to a new house church being planted where many lost people would end up coming to respond to the gospel and follow Jesus. That was, of course, encouraging to me, and I am still grateful for those believers who are faithfully proclaiming the gospel to the peoples there.

I can't help but be reminded of this story though, as I read Matthew 21. For example, in this chapter we read about Jesus overturning tables within the temple and declaring that our Father's house would be a house of prayer—specifically for all nations. I read about Jesus presenting to the Jewish leaders that they have truly missed it and that his Kingdom will be given to all peoples. It is these attributes of Christ's heart that I wish the leaders of my church gathering had held closer. While a church was planted later because of this division, and our Father truly did receive glory, it came at the cost of some people being drastically confused about what our God desires for his Church. Some did not return to worship, and I'm saddened that they may never return.

It is our Father's desire for all nations to be represented at the throne praising his name and declaring he is holy. He desires for us to not only go and make disciples of all nations, but to

worship alongside them for eternity—giving him the glory that only he deserves. He desires for our hearts to submit to his will and to see that we are living a story for his glory and not our own. We must be diligent to not serve ourselves, but instead deny ourselves and submit to God.

Read Matthew 21:1-46 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. In what ways do you think you struggle with distorting God's story or his Word into serving your own story and your own heart's desires?
 2. Christ's humility is exemplified when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. What are some other ways that Christ displays humility, and how does this encourage you?
 3. What does it mean for the Kingdom of God to be given to the Gentiles?
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Commentary

Matthew 21:1-11

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a marvelous passage of scripture that truly embodies the long-awaited moment of the Jewish people for thousands of years. Their awaited King and Messiah is finally here, and the recording of this story can be found in all 4 gospels (Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-19).

As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, Matthew tells us that they came to Bethphage, a name that means "house of unripe figs."⁵ And upon arriving to Bethphage, Jesus instructs two of his disciples to enter the village and at once they will find a donkey tied there with her foal. He tells them to untie both so that they may be brought to Jesus. And he instructs them that if anyone should say anything to them, their response should be "the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once."

Matthew then explains that this was to fulfill what the prophet Zechariah spoke when Zechariah said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). Matthew also combines Zechariah's prophecy with one recorded in the book of Isaiah, who foretold Christ by saying "Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold,

⁵ Stephen Leston, Peter Barnes, Tremper Longman, Hampton Keathley, Robert Rayburn, and Jeffrey Miller, *Layman's Bible Commentary* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2008), 4:91.

your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” (Isaiah 62:11). The two disciples did as they were told, and when they returned with the donkey and foal, the disciples placed their garments on the animals’ backs, and he sat on them.

This is a beautiful and humble picture of our Lord as it embodies Christ’s humility and power. Here, Jesus closes his Galilean ministry and now presents himself as King, yet in his kingship he arrives on a donkey instead of a horse. In this way, Jesus communicates that he has not come to overthrow the Romans in a victorious and conquering manner, as many Jews expected or even hoped He would; rather our Lord exhibits peace and meekness on the back of a lowly animal.

One of the greatest details in this story is the response of the crowds—Matthew says a very large crowd formed and they began throwing their clothes on the road for Jesus to pass over. Both the crowd following Jesus into the city and the crowd going before him were all shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9). *Hosanna* means “O save” or “God save” in Aramaic, and it had become a simple term of praise as well.⁶ The crowds are praising Jesus for being the one who saves.

What a truly glorious moment! The glory of God being revealed to the crowds in such humility. It’s important to remember that it had been mistakenly taught by religious leaders that the Messiah’s arrival would bring a victorious conqueror and he would be a political leader who would overthrow Rome. Here, in this moment, the evident change in people’s hearts is exuberating with the worship of Jesus for who he truly is and not for who the religious leaders had mistaught him to be. Right now, the crowds are worshipping Jesus because He saves!

This large uproar in praise also prompted a large uproar throughout the whole city of Jerusalem with everyone asking, “who is this?” And here, it’s amazing to read how the glory of God and the praise from people prompts the hearts of the lost to seek out the truth of the gospel. In their worship, the crowds respond to the lost by proclaiming who Jesus is—they say, “this is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee” (Matthew 21:11b).

Matthew 21:12-17

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).

After overturning the tables and driving out the merchants, Jesus quotes scripture as His authority for His actions. He quotes Isaiah, specifically Isaiah 56:7, and the context of this verse is noteworthy as Isaiah 56 refers to the inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom of God. This place established for foreigners to congregate so that the nations might seek the Lord was wrongly being overrun by people trying to profit off God’s desire to be worshiped—worshiped by all nations. This rightly angered Jesus, and it was a horrible act of greed. In this story we see our God exuberate a holy and righteous anger to rid the temple of wickedness so that it might be restored to being a house of prayer for all nations.

⁶ Leston, Barnes, Longman, Keathley, Rayburn, and Miller, *Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 4:91.

Cleansing the temple was momentous as it “sets Jesus in open conflict with the Jewish leaders and is the first of a series of confrontations which culminates in His condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23) and judgment on the temple and Jerusalem (Matthew 24).”⁷

Without interruption, Jesus continued his ministry when the blind and lame approached him inside the temple, and Matthew says he healed them. It’s beautiful and glorious how people of faith entered the temple to meet with God and be healed. The children began praising Jesus, but of course the chief priests and scribes responded in anger. It’s interesting how their anger is not directed at Jesus’ outburst or his flipping of tables; rather, their anger is at his miracles and the worship he’s receiving from children. Jesus references Psalm 8:2 in response to the chief priests and scribes as if the Jewish people should not be surprised by the praise of children.

Matthew 21:18-22

Notice how Matthew follows the cleansing of the temple with telling of the barren fig tree. This story is a lesson about faith, and Christ is disheartened by the lack of faith in the Jewish leaders. This story takes place on the following morning as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, and because we may not be the most familiar with fig trees, this may be a bit of a confusing of a story.

Fig trees often bear two crops. One comes early, and the other comes later in the year. When Jesus sees that the fig tree is bearing leaves, He expects for the tree to also be bearing the early fruit. Instead, however, the tree is barren and empty, so Jesus, being hungry and longing for the early fruit, responds harshly. The tree had the appearance of bearing fruit, yet when Jesus peered behind the leaves, it had nothing to bear.

This early fruit, or lack thereof, represents the faith of the Jewish leaders—it’s nonexistent, yet Jesus is hungry for it. The Jewish leaders, of all people, should have the most faith. They certainly act and craft their appearance in a way that makes one perceive them to have something to be sought after, much like Jesus sought after the fig tree’s fruit. Only, they have none. The early fruit could have easily come from those who have studied the scriptures and performed the sacrifices. It could have easily come from the ones who were raised reading Torah and visiting the temple. His response to the lack of fruit (faith) is again, anger. God’s chosen people, specifically the leaders, are the very ones with the least amount of faith in the Messiah.

Jesus, pondering this, cursed the fig tree and in his power the fig tree withered. The disciples marveled at this act, and they asked Jesus how he did this. He tells them that if they have faith without doubting, they will do even more than wither fig trees. They would be able to throw mountains into the sea by just telling the mountain to do so. He tells them, “whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” This is not to say that literally, if they have enough faith, then they can move mountains. It’s to say that with faith, great things can take place.

Matthew 21:23-32

Yet again, Matthew tells of the growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. They confront him by asking what authority he is doing things such as healing, teaching, overturning tables, and performing miracles. Jesus, responding in his normal fashion, answers their question by asking a different question—where does the baptism of John come from? From

⁷ Leston, Barnes, Longman, Keathley, Rayburn, and Miller, *Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 4:92.

heaven or from man? Being challenged by the consequences of two different answers, the Jewish leaders were unsure of how to answer him.

If they say that John's baptism came from heaven, they will be met with another question, "why then did you not believe him?" and this would require the Jewish leaders to admit they have been wrong. Often, when the lost are met with similar circumstances and they are challenged to face the truth of the gospel, people will feel a similar tension. This is partially why the gospel is offensive. The gospel requires one to lay down his/her pride, beliefs, opinions, desires, etc. and in return believe in a God who is far greater than what they once believed in.

The alternative to answering Jesus' question is by saying John's baptism was from man, but then the crowds will be deeply offended. They could respond uncontrollably because the crowd believed that John was a prophet. This was not a more favorable solution for the Jewish leaders, so they resorted to answering, "we don't know." This answer was safe. This answer was neutral. This answer was lukewarm, and therefore did not answer Jesus' question. Both Jesus and the Jewish leaders are left with their questions unanswered.

Then Jesus presents another parable. In the parable, there are two sons. The first son who initially refuses to do the work in the vineyard but then changes his mind to be obedient represents the tax collectors, prostitutes, and common sinners. They live in disobedience to God but then repent. The second son who says to the father, "I go, sir," but then did not go represents the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders claim to be righteous but do not repent. Do you sense the tension rising, yet? If not, well, you definitely should when in verse 32, Jesus speaks directly to the Jewish leaders making it extremely clear that this parable is about them and their refusal to repent.

Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus shares another parable with the Jewish leaders. This parable, again, is about the Jewish leaders. In this parable, Jesus tells a story of a master who has entrusted a vineyard to his tenants. Later, the master sends his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. The tenants beat, killed, and stoned the master's servants instead of giving them the master's fruit. The master then sends more servants, but the tenants do the same thing. Finally, he sends his own son with hopes of the tenants honoring his son. Instead, they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him with hopes of receiving the master's inheritance.

This parable draws a clear picture of how the Jewish leaders have rejected their prophets and their teachings for their own gain. Instead of receiving their Master's son, they are rejecting him as well. In fact, they would soon kill him. This parable not only looks back at the Jewish leaders' arrogant rejection of the Son, it also looks ahead to the Jewish leaders' plot to kill him.

When Jesus asks the Jewish leaders what they think should happen to the tenants, they answer Jesus by saying the tenants should be put to death by the master and the vineyard should be let out to other tenants who will give the master the fruits. *Still*, the Jewish leaders do not understand that this very parable is about them and how they have handled the ministry entrusted to them by God.

Christ responds to their answer by quoting Psalm 118:22-23 and accuses them of rejecting the Cornerstone. He follows up that statement by declaring that the kingdom of God will be taken away from the Jewish leaders and given to a people producing its fruits. Christ, in this moment, is declaring that the kingdom of God will be given to the Gentiles—to the nations!

The Main Point

If we are not careful to be led by the Holy Spirit and align our hearts with his Word, then we are at an exponentially high risk of trying to prioritize our story over the story of God. To do such a thing would be worshiping on ourselves instead of God and therefore missing the treasure that is Christ.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19 – Jesus cleanses the temple.
- Zechariah 9:9 – Prophecy describing Jesus riding a donkey.
- Isaiah 56:6-7 – The Gentiles are included in the Kingdom of God.
- Psalm 8:2 – Children singing praises to God.

Week 5

Matthew 22:1-45 – The Identity and Character of Israel’s King

By Will DeBell

Introduction

Weddings are clearly one of the most monumental events of a person’s life and, as a result, much time, energy, and money are invested in these events. When I think back on my wedding I am flooded with many thoughts and emotions. I, of course, am reminded of my wife, the love I have for her, and how special that day was for us; but I am also reminded of all the planning and preparation that went into the actual event itself. I have incredibly fond memories of that day, and I am very thankful to have had many friends and family in attendance to celebrate with us. A big part of the preparation involved creating a guest list and sending out invitations. This was an essential step to ensure that we had people there to celebrate with us. Our passage this week begins with a parable involving a wedding feast and the unusual response of those who were invited.

Read Matthew 22:1-45 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What does it look like in our current context to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s?”
 2. In these passages we have seen Jesus come up against those that stood against Him and would ultimately sentence Him to death. What insight/lesson can we take from His handling of opposition and use of Scripture?
 3. Describe a time when you have been “astonished” by Jesus?
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Commentary

Matthew 22:1-14

Matthew 22 continues the discussion between Jesus and the religious leaders in the temple with a third parable addressing their question from 21:23: “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” It helps me to remember that this conversation occurred in the wake of Jesus entering Jerusalem (the triumphal entry) as the proclaimed Messiah and after he had cleansed the temple. It is easy to see that Jesus’ mere presence in Jerusalem had changed the status quo, particularly for the religious leaders. His presence was a threat to their established order, and he was therefore treated as an enemy of these religious leaders.

As we read this parable, we are given the image of a king who was hosting a wedding feast for his son. I'm sure we all can relate to the idea of a wedding and specifically in this parable the invitation to attend the wedding. Here we have two distinct parts of the parable. In the first, an invitation is sent out but ultimately rejected. With Jesus speaking to the religious leaders and Pharisees, along with the information from verse 45 that states, "they perceived that he was speaking about them," we can conclude that this group that rejected the invitation is the Jewish people—specifically the religious leaders. Some responded with indifference as they went on with their lives, while the rest escalated the situation by treating the servants poorly, ultimately killing them. This part of the story culminates in verse 7 as "the king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." This part is likely a depiction of the spread of the gospel during the early part of Jesus ministry leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Most Israelites at the time were resistant to the gospel and responded with indifference or with hostility toward early missionaries, but either way they rejected the gospel invitation.

The second part tells the story of the global church with a broader invitation as stated in verses 9 and 10—"go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find. And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests." From there we have a more zoomed-in picture of a specific guest who was there without the proper wedding attire. "And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (vs 12-13). The term friend used to describe the guest is the same word used to describe Judas later in Matthew 26:50 when he betrayed Jesus (TGC). In addition, the wedding garment is likely referencing good works, a natural result of genuine faith in Christ. This is perfectly summed up in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." While Christ is the one who does the saving, we clearly have a responsibility to live out our faith through good works.

Matthew 22:15-22

Jesus has just concluded his third parable and has made it clear that the religious leaders are the subject of his teaching (21:45). The Pharisees' response to the parables further reveals their mindset and position in opposition to Jesus as they "plotted how to entangle him in his words" (vs 15). They sent two groups to question him, some of their disciples and the Herodians. These were two opposing groups: the Pharisees, who were a Jewish religious sect in opposition to Roman rule; and the Herodians, who were another political group in favor of Roman rule. While these groups held differing views from each other, they had a common enemy in Jesus. They are calculated in their approach. They compliment him before asking the question "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus is aware of their intent and calls them out, responding to their question with questions of his own. "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax" (vs 18-19). In showing him the coin, they reveal their hypocrisy as they are carrying the Roman (pagan) coin in the temple. He then provides his answer, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (vs 21). His response satisfies both sides and avoids the trap, leaving them stunned as the text states, "when they heard it, they marveled." Jesus was not coming to oppose the Roman rule but to establish His heavenly

kingdom on earth. O'Donnell states it like this "Jesus is not anti-government, and he has not come to overthrow Roman rule. Moreover, Jesus is pro-God, and he is establishing through his words and works the kingdom of heaven on earth" (TGC Commentary on Matthew). As followers of Christ our focus should be on the great commission with actions that reflect His character (Galatians 5:22-23).

Matthew 22:23-33

Now the Sadducees, an upper-class Jewish party thought to hold more conservative views and who only acknowledged the Torah (first five books of the Bible), approach Jesus with a different question regarding the law. Their question is calculated and, like the Pharisees, aiming to trick Jesus. It involved a hypothetical scenario concerning levirate marriage and resurrection. The details regarding levirate marriage can be found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6:

"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel."

In this scenario, a woman is married to a man with seven brothers, but the husband dies without an heir, so the second brother then marries the wife to provide an offspring for his brother's line. The same happens with the second brother and again and again, all the way to the seventh brother with the question then being, "in the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be?" One of the Sadducees' conservative views is mentioned in verse 23, "They did not believe that there was a resurrection" and is again mentioned in Acts 23:8. Jesus' response to their question is direct as he point-blank tells them, "You are wrong" (vs. 29). He then addresses their thoughts on marriage and heaven in verse 30, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven." For me, this brings up and provides a clear answer to a question that I have often heard regarding whether we will know our spouse or family in heaven. This is an example of how we must put aside our emotions and feelings to allow Scripture to shape our thoughts and beliefs. O'Donnell sums it up nicely stating "For singleness will be the social structure of Heaven and single-minded devotion its everyday reality" (TGC Commentary O'Donnell). While I lack all the answers regarding heaven and what we will and won't know from our time on earth, it is clear that "our hearts' affection and minds' attention" (as said so often by Michael Green) will be on the Lord.

Jesus then addresses their views on the resurrection of the dead by referencing Exodus 3:6. This was important because of the Sadducees' acknowledgement of only the Torah. While he could have used many different Old Testament passages, Jesus chose a simple passage that they would have clearly known and acknowledged—"Have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" (vs. 31). In referencing this, he highlights that God has established relationship with his people, and though these early biblical characters of the faith have passed on, He remains their God. O'Donnell states,

Jesus demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt how resurrection faith is attached in a profound way to the central concept of Biblical revelation (the covenant) and how the

salvation promised by God to the patriarchs and their descendants, in virtue of the covenant, contains implicitly the assurance of the resurrection.⁸

The response to Jesus' answer sums up the overall interaction: "And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching" (vs. 33). There is no mention of the Sadducees having a response other than silence, (vs. 34) but I like to picture it like the scene from one of my favorite movies in *Gladiator*, when Maximus the gladiator reveals his true identity to the emperor Commodus, and the emperor is left speechless. Jesus had provided the perfect response and in doing so, left the onlookers astonished and his opponents silent.

Matthew 22:34-40

Now we again see the Pharisees coming forward, but this time it is not their disciples, but "one of them, a lawyer" (vs. 35). Mark's account describes him as a scribe (Mark 12:28), but again the purpose of the question is to test Jesus. He asks Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus' response is in two parts, but the ultimate answer is love. He responds with reference to Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and Leviticus 19:18 "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". While these commands are separate, they go hand in hand and all other law is dependent upon these.

Matthew 22:41-46

Now Jesus took his turn to ask the Pharisees a question in verse 42, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" By asking this question, Jesus is providing the answer to the original question posed in Matthew 21:23 "by what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" The Pharisees then respond with the textbook answer at the end of verse 42, stating "the son of David." Jesus responds in verse 43, stating "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord" referencing Psalm 110:1 as He states, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.'" While the Pharisees' answer is not incorrect, it is not fully accurate. Although Jesus is of the line of David (Matthew 1:1) he is also the son of God (Matthew 3:17). Therefore, Jesus is both son and Lord of David. Through His responses to their questions and then his own question, Jesus has silenced all critics and left them all speechless and unwilling to approach him with any other questions (vs 46).

The Main Point

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures and has provided a way for us to partake in the "wedding feast." We must respond in faith. Jesus knew and understood Scripture and was able to apply it when tested to defend the faith and correctly apply Scripture in the specific context and scenarios in which he found himself. We as believers have access to the Bible and the Holy Spirit and should work diligently to "rightly handle the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Mark 11:27-12:37- passage parallels

⁸ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 649–50.

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9- the Shemah
- Galatians 5:22- Fruits of the Spirit

Week 6

Matthew 23:1-39 – Seven Woes and a Lament over Jerusalem

By Brandon Wingler

Introduction

Have you ever seen something that looked pleasant on the outside only to find that it was anything but pleasant on the inside? Maybe you've seen a house that looked beautiful on the outside only to find the inside looked dreadful. Maybe you've seen a gigantic tree only to find out it was rotting inside. You might even have had the misfortune of biting into a gorgeous piece of fruit only to find that it had spoiled and gone bad. The point of these examples is that appearances are often deceptive. Something can look right on the outside but be all kinds of wrong on the inside.

In this passage, Jesus pronounces judgment upon the Pharisees and the scribes of Israel. These individuals, in many respects, looked righteous and holy. They were seen by many Israelites as the example to be followed. Yet Jesus condemns the Pharisees and scribes as being rotten to the core. His comments should warn us against following their example, and prompt us to reflect on our own motives, thoughts, and actions.

Read Matthew 23:1-39 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What is the relationship between faith and works, particularly as it relates to salvation?
2. Do you think Jesus would have similar woes to say to us today?
3. Many people think of Christianity primarily as a set of rules to follow. How do you think of Christianity? How would you respond to people who think of Christianity as primarily a set of rules?
4. How would you witness to someone who accuses Christians and the church of being hypocrites?

Commentary

Matthew 23:1-12

In the temple courtyard, Jesus speaks to his disciples and to the surrounding crowd. He singles out the Pharisees and the scribes who were the religious leadership of Israel. These individuals were looked up to by many with respect and considered to have religious authority and knowledge on the will of God. As such, the Pharisees and scribes were considered experts in understanding and applying God's law. Jesus initially recognized their societal status and reputation by saying that they "sit on Moses' seat" and telling the crowd and his disciples to "do and observe whatever they tell you" (vv. 2-3).

Some scholars suggest Moses' seat may have been an actual seat for a teacher in the synagogue, similar to our modern-day pulpit for a pastor. There is some evidence to suggest this is true, but there is no consensus on this matter. Others suggest that the phrase Moses' seat is figurative and simply indicates that the teacher taught with the authority derived from Moses who was given the law from God and charged with teaching Israel the law. Regardless of if a literal seat of Moses existed or not, the point is that Jesus seems to acknowledge the Pharisees and their role as religious leaders in Israelite society.

However, Jesus immediately clarifies this acknowledgment of the Pharisees and the scribes by warning the crowds to not do the works they do, "for they preach, but do not practice" (v. 3). It is true, in some sense, that Jesus acknowledged the responsibility and authority of the Pharisees and the scribes. But we also know that Jesus specifically called into question many of their teachings on the Sabbath, purity laws, divorce, and so forth. Therefore, Jesus' remarks about following their teaching is almost certainly not meant to be taken at face value. Instead, Jesus is using irony to highlight how these men who are so concerned about adhering to the law so spectacularly fail to do so themselves. In effect, their lives are marked with the appearance of righteousness but are devoid of its substance. This is ultimately because they fail to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and as the only one who is truly righteous. Instead, they attempt to earn righteousness and look to their own works rather than Christ and his perfect work. In doing so, they have also added to the burden of the people by imposing additional rules and laws that were not directly given by God to Israel. Instead of liberating, these additional laws of the Pharisees and scribes further enslave the people.

Jesus additionally accuses the Pharisees and scribes of carrying out their religious practices for the applause of others and not out of genuine devotion and love for God. He first points out how they "make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long" (v. 5). Phylacteries referred to the small leather boxes which contained important texts from the law such as those found in Exodus and Deuteronomy. These small boxes would be worn on the arm or tied to the forehead. This practice resulted from following the instructions in Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18 literally (although the initial instructions were almost certainly meant to be taken metaphorically). The fringes referred to tassels on the corners of a cloak or outer garment which were required to be worn (Numbers 15:38-39; Deuteronomy 22:12). Jesus himself wore these fringes (Matthew 9:20; 14:36). Both the fringes and the phylacteries could legitimately be used as a spiritual aid to remind the wearer to meditate upon God's word and to be active in prayer and spiritual discipline. However, the practice of broadening and lengthening the phylacteries and fringes only served to bring attention to the wearer. In effect, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of pride and self-exaltation by attempting to draw attention to their own self-proclaimed piety.⁹

Jesus further accuses the Pharisees and scribes of pride and self-exaltation by noting how they love public recognition and securing the best seats in the synagogues. Humility, it seems, was not a trait that would be used to describe many of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus instructs his listeners that they are not to be called rabbi, father, or instructor because they have one teacher, one Father in heaven, and one instructor, Jesus. The point here is not that we cannot call our biological (or adoptive) fathers "father" or acknowledge our pastors as teachers and instructors. The reason Jesus warns against these titles is because the Pharisees and scribes were

⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 861-862; D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* 9, *Matthew-Mark*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David Garland, 25-670 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 533.

looked up to as if they were essentially super-religious individuals who deserved to be recognized as being in a higher tier than their neighbors. The point Jesus is making is that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ as part of his church, and Christ is the head of his church. There are no “super-Christians” or infallible teachers and instructors. God certainly calls qualified men to be elders in his church and to be responsible for teaching and shepherding the people in the church. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging our elders as teachers, and Paul even states, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). However, we should be careful that we do not fall into either ditch here: swelling up with pride and exalting ourselves on one side, or elevating others to a higher tier in the church on the other side. Jesus concludes this section with the simple but difficult teaching: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

The religious leaders of Israel, the Pharisees and the scribes, have failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of David. They have failed to honor his rightful authority and to acknowledge him as Lord and Savior. In doing so, they have led themselves and many in Israel astray. Rather than being the heroic and righteous shepherds that they think themselves to be, the Pharisees and scribes have actually failed to obey God and to carry out their responsibility. The result is tragic: the Pharisees, scribes, and those who follow them have shut themselves out of the kingdom of God through their own willful self-deceit and rejection of Christ.

Matthew 23:13-36

Jesus transitions from speaking to the crowd and his disciples to addressing the Pharisees and scribes directly. He pronounces seven woes upon them. The language Jesus uses here is intense, perhaps more so than anywhere else in Scripture. He refers to the Pharisees and scribes as “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” “blind fools,” “blind men,” “serpents,” and a “brood of vipers.” He accuses them of greed, self-indulgence, moral rot, murder, hypocrisy, and lawlessness.

In the first woe, Jesus condemns the Pharisees and scribes, those individuals who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders and guides of the people, of not only failing to lead rightly, but of actually opposing God. The shepherds of Israel have not only led the sheep astray; they have also shut them out of the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees and scribes have failed to recognize who Jesus is, and so they have shut themselves, and anyone who follows them, out of the kingdom of God. Their ultimate opposition is seen in how they reject Christ and call for him to be crucified.

In the second woe, Jesus denounces the misguided religious zeal of the Pharisees and scribes. There is some debate on how successful and how active the Pharisees and scribes were when it came to actively trying to make new converts. However, it is clear that they encouraged others to follow their interpretation of God’s instruction and of the scriptures. Jesus’ judgment on the Pharisees and scribes was not because they were trying to make new converts. Instead, Jesus was concerned with the fact that the religion the Pharisees and scribes were converting people to was false. The Pharisees and scribes taught, in varying degrees, forms of legalism, works-righteousness, and merit theology. Essentially, they believed that people could earn their way into heaven and into God’s good favor. Jesus condemns the Pharisees and scribes because their efforts to convert others have only led to creating converts to a false religion. Furthermore, these converts often surpassed their mentors in their zeal and fervor, which only led to this process repeating itself more intensely over time.

In the third woe, Jesus calls out how the Pharisees and scribes made foolish distinctions between the temple and its gold, the altar and its gift or its sacrifice, and between heaven and God. Apparently, some of the Pharisees and scribes had reasoned that oaths made on the basis of the temple or altar were not binding because these things could not have a claim made upon them. However, the gold of the temple and the gift or sacrifice of the altar were fair game for making an oath. In effect, their reasoning made the temple and altar out to be meaningless but made the gold, gifts, and sacrifices out to be meaningful. But all of these things—the temple, its gold, its gifts, its sacrifices—all point to God and are all equally sacred. Jesus points out their backwards thinking even further by showing how their thinking, if followed to its logical end, essentially makes heaven more meaningful than God himself.

In the fourth woe, Jesus convicts the Pharisees and scribes of intently focusing on one issue and neglecting others. They had placed major emphasis on tithing but neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Notice that Jesus does not condemn or call into question the act of tithing. Tithing, justice, mercy, and faithfulness are all important. However, to neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness while being concerned with tithing is to completely miss the point of God's instruction and to place the minor issue above the major issue. Jesus illustrates this problem by comparing the actions of the Pharisees and scribes to trying to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. Since a gnat would be considered unclean, eating one would have broken the command to avoid eating them (Leviticus 11:20-23). Jews who were intensely devoted to following the law would often strain out their soup and drinks to ensure that there were no gnats they might accidentally eat. By using this example, Jesus shows how the Pharisees and scribes are careful to ensure they do not swallow a gnat but they neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Their neglect of these things is like swallowing a camel. The Pharisees and scribes failed to be concerned with the major issue—acting justly, mercifully, and faithfully—and instead remained concerned with minor issues like tithing. The point Jesus makes is that they should be concerned about both, but to this point they have only been concerned about the minor issues.

The Pharisees and scribes are more concerned with external practices than they are with the actual substance and content of what it means to love and obey God. Two particular verses come to mind with this fourth woe. In Micah 6:8 we read, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" If we miss this instruction, then we miss what is at the heart of God's character and his instruction to us. In Hosea 6:6 we read, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." We can try all we want to look the part, to do all the "right" actions, and say all the "right" things. But God sees through all of this to the heart of the matter. Either we trust in him and genuinely wish to love him and obey him, or we trust in ourselves and our man-made religion in order to exalt ourselves.

In the fifth woe, Jesus makes this problem of spiritual rot even more apparent. He accuses the Pharisees and scribes of being concerned with the outside appearance and cleanliness of the cup and the plate while inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. The point Jesus is making is not so much about the plate and the cup (even though there were ritual purity laws concerned with cleanliness at this time). Instead, Jesus uses the metaphor to illustrate how the Pharisees and scribes would rather look clean than actually be clean.

In the sixth woe, Jesus goes for the jugular and tells the Pharisees and scribes that they are like whitewashed tombs. They appear beautiful on the outside, yet they are full of death, uncleanness, and rot. Touching a dead body or grave was a serious issue in the Mosaic law because of its association with uncleanness. By comparing the Pharisees and scribes to

whitewashed tombs, Jesus declares that they are utterly unclean. Furthermore, as sources of uncleanness, the Pharisees and scribes were contaminating the people with their rotten theology and example.

In the seventh and final woe, Jesus condemns the Pharisees and scribes for following the example of their ancestors in murdering the prophets that God sent to Israel. He prophesies that the Pharisees and scribes will persecute, kill, and crucify some of God's messengers, which we know eventually happens to Jesus and some of his disciples. As a result, the Lord will act to avenge the innocent blood spilled. Jesus declares, "On you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah" (v. 35). Abel, the son of Adam and Eve who was murdered by his brother Cain, was the first human death recorded in Scripture. The specific identity of Zechariah the son of Barachiah is less certain, but some scholars identify the Zechariah at the end of 2 Chronicles in 24:20-22 as a likely candidate. This interpretation has the advantage of suggesting that all of God's martyrs from the beginning to the end of the Hebrew scriptures, will be avenged. However, even if a different Zechariah is in mind, the major point still remains the same: God will avenge those who have killed his loyal messengers.

All throughout these woes, the message is clear: The Pharisees and scribes oppose God and stand outside of his kingdom because they reject Christ and attempt to earn their righteousness. Elements of legalism, works-righteousness, and merit theology are all over their teaching. A critical problem with the Pharisees and the scribes is that they fail to recognize that aside from Christ, no one is good and righteous because all have been enslaved to sin and the desires of the flesh. Only God can save people from sin. Only God can clothe people in his righteousness. No amount of works or proper adherence to the law can enable a person to be saved.

Matthew 23:37-39

In these final verses, Jesus transitions from directly addressing the Pharisees and scribes to addressing Jerusalem, representative of Israel as a whole. Despite the harsh condemnations Jesus levied against the Pharisees and scribes, he makes it clear that his desire has always been to rescue and redeem a people for himself. However, Jesus also makes painfully clear that the people of "this generation" in Israel were not willing. Just as the Pharisees and scribes have been complicit in murdering God's messengers, Jesus also pronounces judgment on Jerusalem since it is a "city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (v. 37). As a result, Jesus tells the people of Israel, "Your house is left to you desolate" (v. 38). In just a few short decades after Christ's crucifixion, we know that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Furthermore, the temple no longer played a role in God's plan of salvation for his people after Christ's death and resurrection. In the following chapter, Jesus will predict the destruction of the temple, but he has already hinted at its fate here.

Note on v. 14

You may have noticed in your Bible that v. 14 is missing from the text. This need not cause you worry or concern about the reliability and truthfulness of Scripture. To further explain why this specific verse is absent from our copies of Scripture, I want to include one note from a biblical scholar as well as a couple of excerpts from one of Anchor's earlier community group guides when we studied the first part of the gospel of John.

Biblical scholar R. T. France writes,

“Many later MSS [manuscripts] and some early versions add an eighth woe (traditionally numbered v. 14) which reproduces the accusation against the scribes in Mark 12:40 (=Luke 11:47) but with an introduction to fit the pattern of this discourse: ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you eat up widows’ houses and for a pretext utter long prayers; therefore you will receive a greater condemnation.’ This woe is more commonly added before v. 13, but sometimes after it. Its absence from all the earliest MSS [manuscripts] and some of the earliest versions convinces most critics that it was not part of Matthew’s scheme, with its distinctive group of seven woes.”¹⁰

The following excerpts in between weeks 12 and 13 of the Anchor community group guide for the Gospel of John explain more about our beliefs on the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture:

“We believe that the Scriptures, in their original autographs, are inerrant. However, we do not have these original autographs. What we do have are thousands of ancient texts and early citations of these texts that enable us to determine with a very high degree of certainty what the original autographs contained. Obviously there were no printing presses available in the ancient world. The Scriptures were hand-copied by scribes, often with fastidious notes that accompanied their copies. However, copyist errors do occur. Where these occur, we are able to look at the various copies of the texts and determine with certainty what nearly every variant should actually say...

...none of the variants of the texts call into question any important doctrines of Scripture. This is an incredible level of certainty about an ancient text. If this continues to give you pause, please let us know. We want to help you see that we can have confidence in the Word of God. If you would like to read more about this, a good resource would be *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe.”¹¹

The Main Point

We cannot earn righteousness or secure salvation through our works. Only Christ can make us into new creations and clothe us in his perfect righteousness. As redeemed followers of Christ, we should desire to grow spiritually and obey God with sincere and genuine hearts.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Micah 6:8 – God desires his people to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly.
- Matthew 12:33-37 – Jesus’ parable on how a tree is known by its fruit.

¹⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 865, footnote 1.

¹¹ John 1:1-9:41, *Anchor Church Community Group Guide* (Fall 2018), 36–37.
<https://anchorchurch.us/resources/study-guides>.

- James 1:19-27 & 2:14-26 – Be doers of the word and not hearers only. Faith without works is dead.

Week 7

Matthew 24:1-51 – The End of the Age

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

I'm not what you would call a daredevil. I admire people (I guess) who are willing to shoot themselves out of cannons, jump 18 school buses on a motorcycle, or tightrope walk across Niagara Falls while jumping rope—but it's not for me. Any impulse I had for that lifestyle died on a playground back in 1997. Back then, I was the only person on the playground who could jump from the base of the jungle gym and—after skipping 3 monkey bars—catch the 4th rung safely. Not content with merely being the best on the playground, I wanted to extend my record to the 5th rung. I finally mustered up the courage and went for it, but I had flown too close to the sun. I hit my head on the 3rd or 4th rung and fell to the ground like Humpty Dumpty on his worst day.

Moments later, I was in the main office of my elementary school surrounded by firemen trained in first aid response—though any one of the lunch ladies could have told you I had a broken arm. I remember telling them that they could remove my WWJD bracelet if they needed to—no sense in that getting in the way of their medical examination. Then my mind started to wander: What if my arm was permanently mangled? What if I had to learn how to write with my left hand? What if I needed a hook or series of attachments to screw onto the end? What if they needed to amputate it? At this point in my reeling, third grade thoughts, my ears picked up the firefighters' conversation again, "Yeah, we're going to need to cut that off."

"What? Don't cut off my arm!" I pleaded.

The firefighters took a moment to show confusion before erupting into laughter. Moments before, I had just given them permission to remove the WWJD bracelet. So, why had I assumed they were talking about my arm?

Matthew 24 is a passage where Jesus talks to his disciples about the end of the age. Despite its immediate context and limited scope, many people have let their minds wander, assuming that Jesus is talking about things he's probably not. While there is surely mystery in some of what Jesus says here, if we follow his teaching closely and keep ourselves from reading things into the text, we can walk away with the Lord's intended understanding of Matthew 24.

Read Matthew 24:1-51 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promises/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What do you typically think about when someone brings up the "End Times?"
2. How does Jesus' conversation with the disciples about coming tribulation make you feel?

- What comfort can we walk away with from this passage?
3. What does it look like in your life to faithfully await the return of Christ?
-

Commentary

Matthew 24:1-2

It is important to make sure that we understand the context of what has just occurred. Jesus spends all of the previous chapter calling out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, blindness, and self-righteousness. In his righteous anger, he is not gentle or nuanced; he calls them names and laments over the city of Jerusalem's unwillingness to listen to God's prophets. In a sense, this is Jesus saying, "I'm done with you guys" to the scribes and Pharisees.

Walking out of the temple where he just pronounced this judgment on the Pharisees, the disciples are struck by the beauty of the temple's stones (we know this detail from Mark 13 and Luke 21's parallel account). This is not a stupid observation of the disciples or their attempts to ease the tension of the moment. Truly the Herodian Temple was a spectacle to behold, occupying one-sixth of the entire city's area (1.5 million square feet) and was constructed with massive stones—the largest one found being 45 feet long, 11.5 feet high, and 12 feet thick (Wilkins, 1924). Jesus informs the disciples that, as marvelous as it is, the entire temple will be destroyed. Not one stone will remain upon another. The idea that this building could physically fall is something the disciples would not have imagined.

On top of that, the temple was the epicenter of Jewish worship. "The daily sacrifice, the yearly feasts, the altar, the holy of holies and the priesthood were all essential parts of revealed religion, till Christ came—but no longer" (Ryle, 228). Overthrowing the physical temple would be, in and of itself, quite a feat. But what it would mean for the Jewish people in their daily lives would be even more devastating in practice than the loss of their temple. So, it's understandable that the disciples would have been taken aback by these statements from Jesus. And naturally, they have questions.

Matthew 24:3

The disciples approach Jesus privately on the Mount of Olives and ask him questions. They want to know when "these things" will come to pass (presumably the fall of Jerusalem and the temple), and what will be the signs to watch for at the return of Christ and the end of the age. It naturally follows that most of Matthew 24 is Jesus' answer to these questions.

This is an incredibly difficult passage of scripture to interpret for several reasons. First, it's prophetic. Jesus is telling the disciples about something that is going to happen that does not come to pass in recorded scripture. And so, we can speculate with some degree of certainty what exactly he's talking about, but inevitably some of it will be mysterious and uncertain. Second, the order of how Jesus answers the questions and general phrases that can be interpreted differently adds a bit to the confusion. And third, opinions vary wildly on Christian eschatology (the doctrine of last things). So, depending on who you ask, some of these verses may or may not foretell the Rapture, promise a futuristic period called the Great Tribulation, and/or give you the clues you need to figure out when "the Antichrist" will come into power.

Because of all these reasons, we must be very careful how we read these verses. If we approach a prophetic passage with our minds made up about how things will play out because of

what our favorite podcast or best-selling book tells us, we may read the words of Jesus through that interpretation instead of seeking to determine what he meant when he said what he said to the disciples on that day. And because they are clearly asking about 1) when the destruction of the temple will take place and 2) what the signs of Jesus coming/the end of the age will be, these are the answers we should be looking for—alongside Jesus’ warnings, instructions, etc. concerning these things.

Matthew 24:4-14

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and he takes care to answer his disciples’ questions about what is to come. In the first verses of his answer to them, he urges them to be neither troubled nor deceived. In the period before the fall of Jerusalem, there will be many false Christs who will lead many astray. To make matters worse, the general state of the world will be hard to cope with—war, famine, earthquakes, etc., but these, Jesus says, are but the beginnings of the birth pains. Next, he mentions tribulation and being hated by many—even to the point of martyrdom. He tells them that the state of the lawless world and the deception of false prophets will lead many astray and/or cause their love to grow cold.

One of the issues we run into when we read these words of Christ is that we tend to interpretively assign their fulfillment wherever we want to, based on bits and pieces of end times theology we’ve picked up from different places. For example “wars and rumors of wars... nation rising against nation... [and] famines and earthquakes in various places” (v.6-7) are often attributed to the period of growing tribulation leading to the rise of the antichrist in a school of thought known as Dispensational Premillennialism (think *Left Behind*). However, Jesus seems to be talking about something that will take place during the lives of the disciples, and history tells us about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD—the events to which Jesus (at least immediately) refers. One way to reconcile this issue is suggested by Daniel Doriani:

In this passage, Jesus predicts specific events that will occur between his resurrection and Rome’s sack of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. But the same predictions appear to point beyond that period and to describe the days before Christ returns. This makes sense if the fall of Jerusalem foreshadows or prefigures the last day. Or we could call the fall of Jerusalem a prototype of the last day. A dress rehearsal resembles a play yet it is not quite the play. With costumes complete, lines memorized, and the director almost silent, the dress rehearsal is much like the play. The fall of Jerusalem was a major event in itself, yet it also rehearses for and foreshadows another event, the last day.¹²

The words Jesus here speaks definitely apply directly to the context of the disciples. During the Passover of 70 AD, Roman forces allowed thousands of pilgrims to enter Jerusalem but allowed no one to leave. The city was grossly overcrowded and cut off by the Romans from receiving any outside resources. Jews left inside the city began to fight and refused to cooperate with the Roman negotiators. Many would die from starvation, and those who remained were—for the most part—massacred by Roman forces in the final siege of the city (Lohnes).

¹² Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew Volumes 1 & 2, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008).

If we take Doriani's approach to this passage (and I think we should), we can then understand that—while these words were spoken directly to the disciples for their context—they also have meaning and value to us in our context. The warnings and instructions Jesus gives them apply directly to the period of time in which they lived (undergoing persecution, calling out false prophets, waiting patiently for the “end” to come) before the destruction of Jerusalem. As the destruction of Jerusalem is a prototype of the return of Christ and the Day of the Lord, the warnings and instructions likewise apply directly to our lives as well as we undergo persecution, deal with false prophets, and wait patiently for the end to come.

In dealing with false prophets and false Christs, the Church is to examine the fruit of the men and their claims (Matthew 7:15-20). It will be obvious when Christ returns and therefore easy to illustrate that men claiming to be Christ are not Christ, but discerning who is and is not a false prophet is not as easy. We are to examine the lives, ministry, and message of preachers and teachers who claim Christ. When their doctrine is out of step with the gospel, they should be called out, and the Church warned from following them.

When we consider the state of the world in which we live, we should not be plunged into despair. Wars, famines, natural disasters, and the like are actually common markers of living in a world stained by the effects of sin. Also, our perspective tends to shift from day to day, and year to year depending on our geographic location, choice in news providers, stage of life, etc. Finite human beings are simply not good judges of how quickly the world is deteriorating. People who claim that Jesus' return is just around the corner because of how bad X, Y, or Z is in the world right now could absolutely be correct, but they could also be just another voice among the myriads who have said the same thing across all previous generations.

Verse 14 is tricky for some because it communicates that the end (in this context, the fall of Jerusalem) will only come to pass once the “gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony for all nations.” Most read this verse to mean that everyone in the world will hear the gospel before the end, and because that has clearly not taken place, the end cannot have already come. One insight that could be helpful is that the Greek word here used for “world” has a more specific meaning of “known world” or “inhabited world” (Doriani, 358). In their context, this could have meant the Roman Empire. And we read from the New Testament, that this is very much what had taken place by the end of the disciples' lives:

“Men from every nation under heaven heard the apostles' speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:5). When Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, he addressed a man from a land that Homer and Herodotus called “the end of the earth” (Acts 8). Paul says the faith of the Romans was reported all over the world (Rom. 1:8), and he told the Colossians the gospel “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (Col. 1:6, 23).” (Ibid.)

Matthew 24:15-28

Having prepped the disciples for the coming tribulation and fall of Jerusalem, he now warns them directly of how to act when these things come to pass. Matthew's gospel uses the words “the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (v.15). Much ink has

been spilled trying to argue the exact significance of this connection from Daniel. Whatever it is, it is meant to be the anchor point of a visible sign that warns the occupants of Jerusalem to flee. If we take the parallel passage in Luke 21 as a helper here, it identifies the sign as armies surrounding Jerusalem. So, as Roman armies surround Jerusalem, the time to flee to the mountains with great haste is upon God's people.

Note that Jesus instructs his followers to flee. There's no shame in their running away from the conflict. There's no command for them to stick it out. Being pregnant or in the stage of nursing infants would make this flight much harder, as would rough winter conditions. Jesus encourages them to pray for better conditions. This tribulation is the worst the world has ever seen or will ever see according to Christ (commentators obviously disagree about whether or not this includes a coming age of tribulation, which could be the prophetic continuation of this event).

Despite the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, God's people were not destroyed. The conflict between the Jews and the Romans didn't start in 70 AD; it had been going on for years. The armies encircling the city were there longer than the few months they attacked it. This provided ample warning time for God's people to flee, which they did. For the sake of those of God's people who remained, the days were mercifully cut short.

Jesus next tells his disciples that they're not going to miss his arrival. They are not to be deceived by the false Christs who claim Jesus' identity—even if they are able to perform great signs and wonders. These wicked men will pursue and try to deceive even the elect of God, but their efforts there will fail. Jesus makes it clear that they will recognize him at his arrival, and this is because it will be gloriously obvious. Just like the lightning striking in the eastern sky clearly makes itself known in the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Just as you can tell where the dead corpse of an animal is from very far away by the vultures circling in the sky, Christ's return will be visible and predictable (Wilkins, 1874).

Matthew 24:29-35

What Jesus is talking about in verses 29-31 has rightly been identified by most Bible translations as "The Coming of the Son of Man." This is a reference to his arrival at the end of time when he will fly in on the clouds and gather up all of his people from among the living and the dead. This is the event that the disciples won't miss because of the grandeur of it. In this chapter, Christ's return is described as the conclusive, final event of the age.

One of the things that makes this passage confusing is that people disagree about where Jesus stops talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and begins talking about his return. To be fair, that's because it's kind of confusing. Certainly by verse 23, Jesus is leading into a brief discussion about his return—a discussion that he is definitely having with the disciples in verses 27-31. The challenge really comes in verse 34, where Jesus promises that this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. As Jesus has just discussed his final, triumphant return, there's disagreement here over what Jesus means by "all these things." Did he mean that his return will take place before this generation passes away? Likely not. If you follow the words of Christ carefully, it seems best to conclude that in verses 21-26, Jesus is telling the disciples not to be deceived by cheap imitations. In verses 27-31, he's telling the disciples how big of a deal his return is going to be (they won't miss it) to emphasize that the fall of Jerusalem is not the return of Christ. In verses 32-33, Jesus is answering their original question, "When will these things be?" (referring to the destruction of the temple). Jesus does not answer the question by giving them a color-coded chart with a specific date and time; he tells them that they will know

that the judgment he's prophesied is near when they see the signs he has foretold. In verse 34, Jesus is saying that the current generation will not pass away until the judgment of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple comes to pass.

Before moving on, it must be stated that this single passage has been the cause many have listed as to why they cannot believe the New Testament or honor Jesus as God. They point to verse 34, wrongly interpret Christ's words to mean that his return will take place before the disciples' generation passes away, and then charge Jesus with being a false prophet because his prophecy did not ring true. Rightly understood, there's really no issue with what Jesus says here. Starting in verse 36, he does move on to speaking more about his return. But most of what has been said so far is about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Matthew 24:36-51

Immediately in verse 36, we have a theological question. Jesus states that only the Father in heaven knows when the Son will return—that not even he knows when he will return. This is puzzling indeed. Is there not perfect harmony and shared knowledge within the Godhead? Does the Father keep secrets from the Son and the Holy Spirit? Is Jesus less God than the Father? That's not what is being described here. The New Testament is adamant that Jesus is God and that Jesus in his humanity is also dependent upon God (Carson, 508). Because to ascribe any ignorance at all to Jesus (an omniscient being) is blasphemous, it is better to understand this passage as showcasing that, in his humanity, Jesus lived in dependence on the Father and the Spirit. This does not mean that Jesus never acted in his divine nature while living upon the earth during the days of his ministry. In this case, in his humanity, Jesus did not know the time of his return.

Jesus didn't speak verse 36 to puzzle his disciples with a theological quandary. He said what he said to make this simple point: Be ready. In other words, "You don't know when the return of the Son of Man is. I don't know either. Be ready." He drives this point home by saying that the coming of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah. What he means by this he clearly tells us. There were people alive in Noah's day that gave very little attention to Noah's belief in the coming flood. Giving little care to any warnings, they ate and drank and married. The flood came at a time they were not expecting and swept them all away (in death). Commentators differ over verses 40-41, whether it is better to be taken or to remain because the text is unclear if being taken is in death or in salvation (being gathered up from the four winds). However, in the days of Noah, those who remained were saved and those who were taken faced judgment.

I would caution anyone from reading an event known as the Rapture into this passage. When people typically refer to the Rapture, they are talking about a very recent theological idea where Jesus returns and removes all of the believers from the earth before a 7-year period of tribulation. This idea has anemic biblical support, seems to contradict the character of God throughout the Bible, and—as this text is speaking specifically of the final, triumphant return of Christ—reads into the text unnatural conclusions. It also fails to draw out the main point of this text which is to encourage the disciples to be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that they will not expect.

Verses 45-51 begin a transition that will continue into chapter 25. Jesus is beginning to move from the teaching in response to the disciples' questions to the application of what he's taught them. The big idea here is what it means to be watchful and ready, and Jesus explains that clearly. Being watchful and ready does not mean that we constantly look to the sky, awaiting his

return. It means that we are faithful servants with whatever time we have left. If the Lord should tarry, let him see that we will faithfully work to do the work he has called us to (building the kingdom). Let him not find us asleep—caring more about this world and its treasures than we do about the glory of God. Jesus finishes by suggesting that faithful servants will prove their faithfulness through their obedience and wicked servants will prove their wickedness through their hypocrisy and laziness.

The Main Point

Jesus will return to judge the wicked and glorify the faithful. Believers in Christ should be watchful and ready, living lives of faithfulness until he returns.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Parallel passages - Mark 13, Luke 21
- Judging false prophets - Matthew 7:15-20
- The Day of the Lord - Isaiah 2:6-22, Zephaniah 1:7-18, 2Thessalonians 1:9-10, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 19:11-21, and many more.

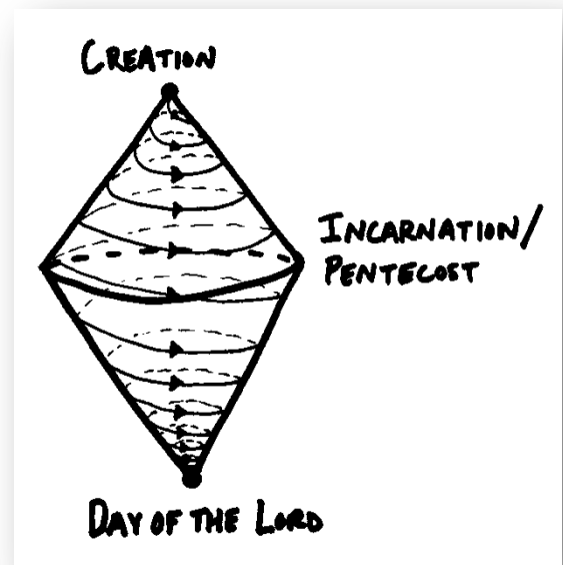
Week 8

Matthew 25:1-46 – The Final Judgment

By Michael Green

Introduction

I have read before that the ancient Jewish concept of time is cyclical, an extending spiral that moves forward but with patterns and rhythms. This contrasts with Western ideas of time, which are primarily linear in nature. For example, a large percentage of documentaries that I watch on Netflix will display a number line that moves from left to right with successive points representing years of significance, clearly beholden to the idea that time marches linearly. I have never researched this in depth, but the Jewish idea of time seems to resonate more with Scripture in my mind. A spiral is cyclical, and yet it progresses forward. Seasons, for example, repeat as time progresses. Day to day, the sun rises, and it sets. Year to year, the earth orbits the sun. As time marches on, patterns of human behavior repeat as well. As Solomon says, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Throughout the history of God's chosen people, festivals, celebrations, rituals, and holy days were embedded to remind the people that the Lord is their creator, provider, redeemer, and deliverer. Time progressed, but patterns repeated annually. And all of it was meant to point to Christ. All of it was progressing forward toward its ultimate realization. The Passover Lamb, the sacrificial system, the promised eternal reign from King David's lineage, the prophecies, the types of Christ, etc. all pointed to the need for the arrival of the Son of God to initiate his kingdom through offering himself for the sins of mankind and his subsequent return for the full realization of the kingdom.



Everything in Scripture is progressing toward the Day of the Lord, the return of Christ and the reclamation of the very good creation that we find in Genesis. I've drawn a super-nerdy picture to illustrate the concept. It all began in the garden, and it was very good. Sin entered creation, and ever since then, in the words of Romans 8:22, creation has been in the groanings of childbirth, waiting for its redemption, awaiting the time when all things will be set straight, awaiting the restoration of Shalom. All time, space, matter, and reality as we know it, is headed for the Day of the Lord. This is when the king returns to his kingdom and sets all things right, perfectly administering justice, gathering his sheep to be with him for all eternity and expelling the goats to be apart from him for all eternity. All accounts are reconciled, and the crooked is made straight. All that we know is spiraling toward the Day of the Lord.

Read Matthew 25:1-46 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What does it look like to live in light of the kingdom now? What factors challenge maintaining a kingdom perspective?
 2. Do our “works” matter? What is the proper biblical perspective on the relationship between faith and works?
 3. How should the concept of Hell inform the believer's actions now? How should the concept of Heaven inform the believer's actions now?
 4. What challenges your heart in Jesus' parables and metaphors?
-

Commentary

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus hammers home some key points over and over again. This discussion is in response to his disciples asking him a question about the destruction of the temple and the end of all things. It's a private discussion that he is having with his disciples, and it has layers to it. There are points where he is addressing both the forthcoming destruction of the temple in the immediate future and the end times when the Son of Man will return and the kingdom will be fully realized at an unknown point in the future. To drive home his points, Jesus communicates using parables—bridesmaids going out to meet a groom (25:1-13) and a master entrusting large sums of money to his servants (25:14-30)—and metaphors—a master putting servants in charge of his household (24:45-51) and sheep and goats (25:31-46). Throughout the parables and metaphors, there are consistent themes that Jesus communicates. Given that the themes repeat, Jesus seems to be making points that he knows to be incredibly important, so much so that he weaves the key points through all the parables and the metaphors. In light of that, we will talk about the major themes of his discussion. I won't be doing this in any particular order of priority.

First, in all the parables and metaphors listed above, there is a person of authority that goes away. This person of authority is the one that is in charge. He is the one to whom every person in the stories is accountable, whether that be the servants, the bridesmaids going to the groom, those in whom the talents were invested, or the sheep and the goats. Within every parable and metaphor there is the idea that we are accountable to the one who is in charge. And in every illustration, the one with authority will demand an account upon his return. The person of authority represents Jesus in each analogy. Jesus is in the last week of his life, and he is coaching his disciples prior to his death, teaching and shepherding them well. He has already explicitly been preparing them for his death (e.g. Matthew 17:22-23), and in the current discussion, he is prepping them for the time between his post-resurrection departure to be with the Father and

when he returns in all his glory on the Day of the Lord. We are currently living in that period of redemptive history. Jesus has gone to the right hand of the Father where he intercedes for the saints (Acts 2:32-33 & Romans 8:34). In the meantime, he has left us a Helper, the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer when they turn to Christ.

Second, every parable and metaphor in this discussion communicates that the ones that are accountable will be judged by their work during the master's absence. The repetitive theme is that their love for their master should issue in a respect for their master that plays out in their actions during his absence. This takes varied forms in each of the parables and metaphors. However, each servant/bridesmaid/sheep or goat is ultimately judged by his or her actions during the master/groom/shepherd's absence. At the end of chapter 24, it is whether the manager is faithful in managing the master's possessions. If he is, the master is pleased. If he isn't, a terrible punishment is administered. Regarding the bridesmaids, the wise ones that are living in anticipation of the groom's arrival make decisions and carry out actions that are informed by that anticipation. Their anticipation of the groom's arrival *then* is evident in their decisions *now*. The wise ones bring more oil for their lamps, and the foolish ones don't. In the parable of the talents, the first two servants seem to have a good view of their master, invest what is entrusted to them, and are happy to show the master the return on his investment upon his arrival. The last servant has a skewed view of the master, thinking of him as a "hard man" (25:24), does nothing with the master's investment, and has nothing to offer the master other than what he has been given. The master is equally pleased with the first two, and a terrible punishment ensues for the third. With the sheep and goats metaphor at the end of chapter 25, it's their actions towards Jesus' brothers that indicate their love for the master. And those actions are judged, resulting in eternal life or eternal punishment. The very clear truth that is being communicated is that we are accountable to the Son of God for what we do in his absence, and he will return to get an account. We will be judged by our actions in his absence.

However, it is important to note that scripture clearly communicates that those actions are a fruit. We're not judged by our works in the sense that we are justified by our works before God who is completely holy, as if the merit is found within us, and God is a respecter of that merit. We are justified completely and totally by the works of the Son of God on our behalf. When we trust in Christ, we're clothed in his righteousness. However, we are also transformed by the Spirit of God indwelling us. And the Spirit of God bears spiritual fruit within us. Thus, the fruit by which we are judged is the result of the Spirit of God who sealed us and is at work in us to make us more like Christ. Like the servants that are given five talents and two talents, we now have a good view of our master. We love our master. We want to live for our master, and that is evident in the lives of believers that have been regenerated. Like the manager that was given one talent, if a person's heart has not been transformed by the Holy Spirit, real spiritual fruit is not possible. As a result, they live foolishly like the bridesmaids that don't bring extra oil, they have a skewed view of the master like the servant that buried his talent, and they live lives that don't respect the master like the manager at the end of chapter 24. Thus, to be clear, being judged by works does not mean that we must do works in order to be justified. We are justified by the finished work of Jesus Christ who is perfect and perfectly obeyed the law. If we had to stand before the Lord based on our own merit, we would completely agree with the sentiment of the psalmist in Psalm 130:3, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" But, because our hope is in Christ, we can rejoice in verse 4 of that same psalm, "But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared."

However, regeneration yields fruit. Thus, in the life of a believer, the works by which we are judged are the fruits of the work of the Spirit of God within us, rather than our own merit. That's why the two passages below don't contradict each other. When they are read in context, they are communicating the realities about the nature of salvation discussed above.

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:16

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

James 2:24-26

In Galatians, Paul is talking about the nature of salvation at the root level, and James is discussing the fact that true salvation will manifest itself at the fruit level. Works don't precede faith, and they can't be artificially divorced from faith. The faith of a believer is necessarily evidenced in the actions that follow re-birth, always in that order. In the parables and the metaphors of Matthew 24 & 25, the actions of the servants/bridesmaids/sheep or goats indicate their love, or lack thereof, for the master/groom/shepherd in his absence.

Third, in every parable and metaphor there is a time of reckoning. There is a definitive time of giving an account. The servants/bridesmaids/sheep or goats will see their master/groom/shepherd face-to-face to answer for what has transpired in his absence. And at that point, the conclusion is final. With regard to the bridesmaids, the door to the marriage feast is shut, and once it is shut, it is shut forever. With regard to the parable of the talents, when the master returns, the servants must communicate the return on the investments that they were given. Upon that accounting, a judgment is rendered, and the fates are final. With the sheep and the goats metaphor, their actions toward the family of God, the King's "brothers" (25:40), are considered, and a final, unalterable decision is rendered. The truth that Jesus is communicating repeatedly is that the Day of the Lord is the final judgment. At this judgment, all accounts are settled, all rewards and punishments are administered, and all the books are closed. In terms of eternity, there are no appellate courts. There is one judge, and his judgment is perfectly true with no avenue or need for appeals.

Fourth, in every parable and metaphor, there is an eternal reward and there's an eternal punishment. The eternal reward is glorious bliss, where the loyal servant/prepared bridesmaid/faithful investor/sheep gets to be with the master/groom/shepherd whom they love for all eternity. He takes pleasure in them, and they will be with him forever. They love him, and he loves them. To put a fine point on it, with Jesus being the authority figure in all the situations, the "bliss" is getting to be with the Lord forever, no separation, no distance, just unadulterated reveling in the presence of the Lord. Diametrically opposed to that verdict, every parable and metaphor communicates the reality of an eternal punishment for those in whom the master/groom/shepherd does not take pleasure. The punishment is described in unimaginably severe language. The disloyal servant/unprepared bridesmaid/untrusting investor/goat is

- “cut ... in pieces and put ... with the hypocrites” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (24:51)/
- locked out of the marriage feast, being told by the groom, “I do not know you” (25:12)/
- rebuked by the master, losing his talent he tried to hold on to in fear and disobedience, and is “cast ... into the outer darkness” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (25:30)/
- cast “into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (25:41), going away “into eternal punishment” (25:46).

It’s abundantly clear what Jesus is emphatically communicating, even if it is hard for our minds to understand or accept. Those that live in light of the Kingdom now, do so because they have hearts that love the Lord. They have hearts that love the Lord because the Lord has made them new. Thus, when their lives are examined, they have fruit that indicate their love for the Lord, a love that was implanted by him and has grown in him. They are born again children of God. As such, they live in light of the kingdom now, and long to see the full realization of the kingdom then, at which point, they will get to be with their Lord for all eternity. But for those that have not been born again, who don’t know the Lord, their actions indicate that they don’t have a love for the Lord and remain in opposition against him. The terribly holy conclusion is that those who don’t live in light of the Kingdom now, will not be part of the Kingdom then. And, stronger than that, they will be actively punished for all eternity, separated from the source of all love, grace, mercy and truth.

In conclusion, the truths that Jesus communicates are sobering. But we do well to live in truth, not our opinions or manipulations of the truth. Jesus is good to the core. He doesn’t lie. There is no darkness in him. So, if Jesus felt it important to communicate these truths over and over again so poignantly as he was preparing to leave his disciples, we do well to take them to heart. It is essential that we live in light of them, anticipating the return of our master/our groom/our shepherd, the King of Kings and the Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. Let us live in light of the kingdom now as we await its full realization then.

The Main Point

Those that live in light of the kingdom now, having been born again, will be a part of the kingdom for all eternity, fully realized when the King, Jesus Christ, returns. Those that have not been born again and thus don’t live in light of the kingdom, won’t be a part of the kingdom. Instead, they will face never-ending punishment.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Galatians 2:15 - 4:7 – We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law.
- James 2:14-26 – A true, living faith produces works. A faith without works is dead.
- John 3:1-21 – A man must be born again of the Spirit to inherit eternal life. This is based on faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- John 14:15 - 15:27 – Jesus talks with his disciples about his upcoming departure, promising to send a helper, the Holy Spirit.
- Matthew 12:33-37 – Jesus has a specific conversation regarding the relationship of the

heart and the works it manifests, packaged in terms of “root” and “fruit,” as it pertains to the final judgment.

Week 9

Matthew 26:1-75 – Preparing for the Crucifixion

By William Morrison

Introduction

Driving back from Texas 2 years ago, I was listening to Tim Mackie from the BibleProject. This was a podcast series about who Jesus said he is in Scripture, specifically the “Son of Man” because that is often a confusing title of Jesus for believers. I remember the exact moment I felt the truth of God’s word, delivered by Tim Mackie, hit me. I immediately got chills because he explained the parallel to Daniel 7 and the reactions of the high priest and council being so visceral in such a clear way. It might have not been the first time I had heard it, but it was the first time I truly understood the significance of Jesus being the Son of Man.

This week’s lesson contains the story of Jesus’ claim to be the Son of Man and its significance, and it is the point that Matthew has been leading us to see. By this point we have studied some of who the Son of Man is, but this week I encourage you to look into it on your own and marvel at the prophecy fulfilled and the same Jesus that holds power as the Son of Man invites us to himself to save us from our sins.

Read Matthew 26:1-75 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Have you ever felt a time where you thought you would do anything for Christ, but then when put to the test you wavered?
 2. What can we learn through Jesus’s submission to the Father’s will in how we should submit? Remember, as part of the Trinity Jesus is God incarnate.
 3. Has there been a moment where you have felt immense sorrow for a burden or a trial that God gave you that you must carry?
 4. How should our lives reflect the truth of Jesus being the Messiah and the Son of Man? What can you give over to Jesus as Lord and repent of?
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Commentary

Matthew 26:1-5

Jesus again tells the disciples that he will be crucified as another reminder and foretelling of what will happen to him. Like other places in Matthew, Jesus refers to himself as the “Son of Man,” and later we will look at the meaning and significance of this title. The “chief priests and the elders of the people” (Matthew 26:3 ESV) refers to the representatives of the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish ruling body in Jerusalem. They know not to arrest Jesus during the upcoming Passover feast, which is celebrated every year in remembrance of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, because Jesus is highly popular with the people from many miracles and teachings.

Matthew 26:6-13

Chronologically, this account takes place on Saturday the day before Jesus’s triumphal entry to Jerusalem (Palm Sunday). Matthew structures this story thematically to emphasize how Mary (identified in John’s Gospel) unknowingly prepared Jesus’s body for burial. In doing this, she has done a beautiful thing, but the disciples question why she “wasted” this expensive ointment when it could have been given to the poor. Jesus tells them they will not have him forever, and that she has done a great thing. This account emphasizes the importance and sometimes nuance of doing things for the Lord. Jesus does not admonish Mary for using ointment that costs a whole year’s wage (ESV Study Bible) because she has done a beautiful thing for Jesus, her Lord. Also, in John’s account we see that the critic was Judas, who stole money and pocketed it from the moneybag. He was not motivated by care for the poor, and this sounds like a similar complaint to one that the Pharisees would make.

Matthew 26:14-25

Judas agrees to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, which is only around 4 months wages. He seeks out the chief priests to betray Jesus then accepts a small sum, which shows the low esteem that Judas and the priests thought of Christ. This treachery reveals he was not a true believer or follower, and from now on he will look for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

The First Day of Unleavened Bread is the first day of the week-long festival that celebrates Passover. Jesus tells his disciples to go find a “certain man” and tell him that he will keep the Passover at his house with his disciples. As the disciples begin to share the meal, Jesus reveals that one of them will betray him. We know that it is Judas, and Jesus gives strong warning to the man that will betray the “Son of Man.” His statement refers to the suffering servant figure in Isaiah 42-53, who we know through the Scripture is Jesus. The point to focus on here is how Judas addresses Jesus. While all the disciples say “Lord,” Judas continues to say “Rabbi,” and in all the Gospels he never calls Jesus Lord. When Jesus answers Judas with “You have said so,” this is a Greek expression that deflects responsibility back onto the person asking the question. Jesus was giving Judas a last chance to repent because this is not news to Judas that he will betray Him. Judas already agreed to a sum for betrayal, so he assumes that Jesus knows of his treachery, but he will continue regardless because he does not see Jesus as his Lord.

Matthew 26:26-29

Jesus breaks the bread and says, “this is my body.” His broken body will be the final fulfillment of the Passover ceremonies because he is the final and ultimate sacrifice for our sins. This is planned to happen with the disciples on Passover because it signifies how the Old Testament laws and traditions will be fulfilled by Christ’s sacrifice. He will become the atonement for sins, and the cup seals this promise by representing the blood of the covenant that will be shed. Christ atoned for our sins through the crucifixion, and his blood turns God’s wrath away from those who believe in Him. As Jesus institutes the Lord’s supper here, he also shows how we should take it. The bread we take in communion represents his body, beaten and broken on the cross, and the wine (grape juice for us) represents the blood he shed on the cross for our sins. When we partake of the Lord’s supper, we remember these things and reflect on the sacrifice of our Lord. We rejoice in the forgiveness he grants us for our sins and the salvation we receive from his death and resurrection.

Matthew 26:30-35

Jesus tells all the disciples that they will fall away because of him after that night. This is important to note because all of the disciples are told that they will fall away and scatter like sheep without a shepherd, not just Peter. Although they fail him, in his grace, Jesus promises to restore them back to fellowship with him after their failure to stand with him. Peter argues with Jesus and says that everyone else may fall away, but he never will. Peter speaks passionately, and the rest of the disciples follow his lead, agreeing that they will never fall away or deny Jesus. This is important because often Peter squarely gets the blame, but Jesus promises that all of them will scatter. However, Peter is the one who Jesus says will deny him three times. This hurts Peter, and he responds that he will die before denying Christ.

Matthew 26:36-46

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus withdrew to pray to the Father (Matthew 4, Luke 9:28, Luke 6:12, Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, and John 17 to name a few). Here he withdrew to Gethsemane, which means “oil press,” a garden area among the olive groves Mount Olives. Jesus withdrew with his core disciples—Peter, James, and John—who were also there with him on the mountain during the Transfiguration. In humility and complete submission to the Father, Jesus “fell on his face” to pour out his feelings and burdens to the Lord. He asks if the cup can be taken from him, meaning the crucifixion he is about to endure, but also says not his will but the Father’s be done. We can learn much from this. First, Christ himself felt human emotions because he was human himself. Also, in admission to God he recognizes the sorrow and trouble he felt in his soul and begged the Lord to take his burden away if possible. We can learn a lot

from how he prays here. Too often, we deny our emotions to God rather than bringing them to Him. We are not honest in our feelings, so our prayers feel forced. Jesus, however, acknowledges how he feels, but after praying, he continues with the Father's will. It is during our trials that we can bring our deepest sorrow and hurt to the Lord. We give them over to him and express our desire to follow his will. Rather than deny the emotions and try to push through with God's will on our own, we should seek to acknowledge our feelings and then submit them to the Father's will. It is a small distinction, but it is important in how we function as humans, processing our emotions and bringing them to the Lord.

The disciples' temptation is to give into sleep, and they fail in their responsibility to support Jesus just as they will deny Jesus and scatter when he is arrested.

Matthew 26:47-56

After Jesus prays, Judas arrives ready to betray him. Judas kisses Jesus as a sign to the guards that he is the man they will arrest. A kiss is a way to greet a friend, which contrasts with the huge betrayal of Jesus. He again greets Jesus as Rabbi. Both of these things show that he did not turn away from Jesus' warning at the last supper. Jesus responds by calling him "friend," which may be confusing. But the Greek he used, *hetairos*, does not imply the same closeness as *philos*, the usual word for friend. In fact, *hetairos* is used by Jesus when describing parables where someone has taken advantage of a privileged relationship.

Matthew 26:57-68

Jesus is taken to stand in front of the Sanhedrin, which is the supreme court of the Jews, and Caiaphas the high priest leads the council in questioning Jesus. At first, the council attempts to use false witnesses to convict Jesus. Then, his statement, "I am able to destroy the temple of God" is misquoted and taken out of context (it appears in John 2:19-21). Finally, we get to Caiaphas's questions to Jesus. "What is it that these men have testified against you?" Jesus remains silent because he knows what they say is false, and his silence fulfills Isaiah 53:7 and places responsibility of his death on his accusers. Caiaphas, however, wants Jesus to respond to the accusations so that he can be charged and tried for treason. "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Caiaphas charges Jesus directly to answer if he is who he says he is. Again, this is so he can be charged, but this time with blasphemy. Jesus answers, "you have said so," which, you will recall from earlier, places responsibility back onto the person asking the question. Not only does Jesus declare he is the Messiah, but that he is the divine "Son of Man" from Daniel 7.

¹³ "I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days

and was presented before him.
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus claims to be this figure from Daniel 7 that sits at the right hand of God and is given dominion and authority over all nations and peoples. The high council is very familiar with Daniel 7, so this response elicits more anger than a simple “Christ, the Son of God” response. Jesus is the Son of Man, but the council refuses to believe. Instead, Caiaphas shreds his robes, claiming, “blasphemy.” Interestingly, a high priest is forbidden to shred his robes, but Jesus’ claim made him so angry he did. If Jesus was lying about his divine origin, then he would have deserved death based on the Jewish law, but the irony is he will be executed for telling the truth.

An important thing to note is how Jesus phrases he is the Son of Man. “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” In answering them. Jesus gives them a prophecy about the Son of Man, one that he will fulfill. The way this will be fulfilled is by the council executing him. So, his answer is a prophecy that they will fulfill by crucifying him. They set into motion the Daniel 7 fulfillment of the Son of Man. This is a remarkable claim by Jesus, but it is true. Sometimes the power of this claim is lost on us who were not being raised in a Jewish background. This is part of the reason it is so important for us to read our Bibles as the biblical authors teach us to.

Matthew 26:69-75

Peter at first displays confidence by being so near to where the tensions are the highest. He is sitting outside the high council where all the anger and action are, but when he is questioned personally, he immediately says he does not know Jesus. Just as Christ predicted, Peter denied him three times. As the rooster crowed, he felt immense shame as he remembered Jesus’s warning. Although Peter was the only disciple to stay with Jesus to this point, even he feared for his own life when put to question. His denial is remarkable but not unforgiveable, but his denial appears to stay with him and shame him until he is forgiven.

The Main Point

Jesus prepared himself and the disciples for the crucifixion. He gave the first Lord’s Supper and then submitted his will to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. In this passage,

we see complexity and beauty of who Jesus is as the “Son of Man,” which confirms for us the divinity and power of Jesus who we can be united with through salvation.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Daniel 7:13-14 – The Son of Man prophecy.
- 2 Samuel 15:30-31 – David prayed for deliverance from a betrayer on the Mount of Olives (interesting similarity).
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 – Paul gives instruction for taking the Lord’s Supper.

Week 10

Matthew 27 – The Death of Jesus

By Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

“Less is more.”—such was the principle of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, German father of minimalist architecture.

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”—so said the pig in George Orwell’s 1945 classic Animal Farm;

“I can resist everything except temptation.”—a relatable quip by Oscar Wilde.

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”—a reassuring word by the prime minister of Egypt, Joseph, to his ten older brothers who had sold him into slavery years earlier.

Each of these quotes describes the phenomenon of paradox, which is defined as, “a statement, situation, or proposition that seems to contradict itself.”

Consider this paradox: The most heinous crime comprehensible, committed against the most innocent and worthy individual possible, is instrumental in bringing about the most extravagant blessings conceivable, for the most unworthy imaginable.

Matthew 27 describes this crime; the good news follows in chapter 28.

Read Matthew 27 together.

Study Questions

5. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
6. What does this passage teach me about me?
7. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
8. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. When you regard the pride shown by the religious leaders who sought the death of Jesus, do you recognize anything of that trait in your own character? Do you have a proper fear of where it can take you?
2. This chapter gives a full-fledged picture of the humility and restraint of Jesus, the perfect lamb, slain for the forgiveness of our sins. Do you feel that you have a properly balanced view of the power, righteousness, and glory of the risen Jesus? How do these attitudes and concepts affect our attitudes and actions?

3. Can you think of a time when you've been used by God against your will to accomplish a purpose of his? Or, is there a time when you've been sent a "check" by God that you either regarded or ignored?
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Commentary

Matthew 27:1-10

As Chapter 27 opens, it is now early morning and the Sanhedrin is reconvening to make a show of formally ratifying the determination of their illegal kangaroo court held the night before—that Jesus deserves death. But there's a complication. A few years earlier, Rome had taken away their power of execution, which constrains them to seek permission from the oppressive Roman procurator Pilate. He alone has power to pronounce the death sentence. They bind Jesus and began the mile-long trek to his house.

We are told that this spectacle of seeing Jesus actually condemned by the Sanhedrin creates regret in the mind of Judas. He seeks out the chief priests and elders who had bribed him, and confesses that he has "sinned by betraying innocent blood." Perhaps he had expected Jesus to extricate himself with a clever defense, or make a show of power as the conquering Messiah. Whatever his mind was, he now realizes that he has made a grievous error and is oppressed by the awareness of his sin.

But hear the loathsome reply of the holy men to that confession: "What is that to us? See to it yourself." No attempt is made by the priests to hear the confessor and guide him through the process of repentance. Having gladly cooperated with him in the sin, they remain determined to see it through.

Here, we see exemplified that when a course of sinful action is decided upon, even highly religious humans find ways to ignore all checks the Lord might graciously put in their paths. There was an opportunity here. The priests could have paused and heard Judas out. They could have considered his regret and reconsidered their own plans. But instead, the Jewish rulers cruelly turn their backs on him. And regretful though he is, Judas neglects the essential task—to seek the available forgiveness of his Master. In despair, he throws down the silver in the Temple, goes out, and hangs himself.

The only further consideration given to the matter by the hard-hearted priests is to decide what to do with the "blood money." Rule followers to the end, and careful not to violate the prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:18 against accepting ill-gotten gains into the Temple treasury, they do exactly as foretold in Zechariah 11:12-14: They designate it for the "charitable" purpose of buying a field in which to bury foreigners (as well as their own guilty feelings).

Matthew 27:11-25

Jesus is brought before Pilate, who endures a raucous recitation of the false charges against Jesus from the religious leaders, and then asks his first question: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Of course, this is not a straightforward question, because Jesus stands before him beaten and bound, and clearly does not appear to be any sort of a normal king. So Jesus responds with the non-straightforward answer: "You have said so." And as the leaders carry on their attempts to overwhelm Pilate by continually shouting out unconvincing and baseless accusations, he is amazed that Jesus makes no attempt to answer them. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth."—Isaiah 53:7.

Knowing that Jesus came into Jerusalem just a few days ago triumphant and popular, and suspecting the religious leaders of jealousy, Pilate likely begins to calculate the best way to manage the situation so as to avoid a riot. He turns to the usual custom at Passover time of freeing a Jewish prisoner, and offers the choice of the popular Jesus, or the notorious rebel Barrabas. Naturally, he reasons that the crowd will choose the innocent holy man over the criminal. But the leaders have prepared for this, and use all their authority and prestige, as well as hired agitators, to turn the unruly crowd against Jesus. The tumult grows.

As Pilate struggles to find his way through this complicated predicament, he receives an unusual message from his wife. She reports that she has been discomfited by a dream about “that righteous man” and urges Pilate to have nothing to do with him. Here again, we see Providence providing a check against a sinful act—even for a heathen—in this case, by use of a dream. Perhaps in consideration of his wife’s warning, Pilate argues weakly for the release of the innocent prisoner, repeatedly telling the Jewish leaders that he can find no fault in him.

But the clamor against Jesus only grows, and eventually Pilate is hectoring into appeasing the mob. He agrees to condemn Jesus to the cruelest punishment the Romans have ever devised—the dreaded death of the cross. Then, knowing that he has pronounced an unjust sentence, he makes a dramatic and absurd show of publicly washing his hands before them and declaring that he is “innocent of this man’s blood.” Of course, that’s nonsense—his complicity is as complete and damnable a sin as that of the Jewish leaders, whose own bloodlust is revealed by their chilling reply, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”

Matthew 27:26-31

Barrabas is released and Jesus is scourged—not with 40 strokes as limited by Jewish law, but with the crueler technique of Rome. The lashes were carried out without pause by two soldiers alternating strokes from either side. The leather cords contained fragments of sheep-bone and iron balls, designed to open deep wounds through the skin and into the skeletal muscle. The usual result was heavy bleeding and sometimes even death, and the severity of Jesus’s flogging may well have been the reason he remained alive for only a few hours upon the cross. Having deep familiarity with the Scriptures, Jesus had to have known this was coming, as predicted in Psalm 129:3, Isaiah 50:6, and Isaiah 53:5. In fact, being intimately familiar with all the travails of the Suffering Servant foretold in Isaiah 53, he is most certainly dreading those travails as they follow, one after the other, throughout the course of the brutal day. “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”—Isaiah 53:5.

Following the scourging, he is taken into the governor’s headquarters and the “whole battalion” of over 400 soldiers gather to participate in a riot of barbarous mockery. He is stripped, so as to experience the shame of nakedness, dressed in a scarlet robe, crowned with a crown of thorns, given a “reed” to serve as a scepter, and derisively hailed as “King of the Jews.” He is spit on and struck on the head, for extra perverted merriment. Then, when preparations for the crucifixion are complete, he is stripped again and led away, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.” Of note, this is occurring at just the same time that the traditional paschal lamb is to be slaughtered in preparation for the Passover meal.

It is a difficult but useful exercise for believers to meditate—slowly, deliberately, even while reading this—upon the love, courage, and self-denying discipline exerted by our Savior on our behalf as his impending crucifixion drew near. To consider that this humble Lamb of God is

also the most powerful figure in the universe—“the Maker, made to die”—is more than a paradox. It’s extraordinary, nearly unbelievable, surreal.

Matthew 27:32-50

By this time, Jesus has experienced a sleepless night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, abandonment by his disciples, and an emotionally and physically abusive trial at the hands of the Jews in the court of the High Priest. He has suffered through a dreadful scourging nearly to the point of death at the hands of the Roman soldiers. And he has probably had nothing to eat or drink through it all. Thus he is undoubtedly in a dangerously weakened state as he is now forced to bear the cross upon which he is to be hung. Fearful that he might die before the crucifixion can be accomplished, the soldiers draft Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross out of the city to “the place of the skull,” Golgotha.

Upon arriving, Jesus is offered wine mixed with “gall,” another name for myrrh, which was added to the wine as an analgesic. He refuses it. Many commentators suppose the reason to be that Jesus had no intention of avoiding even a trace of the suffering that had been prescribed by the Father for the forgiveness of the sins of mankind. The soldiers proceed to crucify him, brutally nailing his hands and feet to the cross, and then stand him up between “two robbers,” thus fulfilling the prophecy that he was “numbered among the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). They cast lots for his garments, also in fulfillment of prophecy. At the direction of Pilate, a sign is placed over his head, with the charge against him. It reads, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews”—hardly a charge, in reality a declaration of truth—demonstrating once again how God repeatedly uses even those acting in direct opposition to his will as instruments in carrying it forward.

The reviling continues to pour in from all quarters—from the common people, who have been convinced by their leaders that Jesus aspires to destroy their great Temple; from the leaders themselves, who neglect their Temple duties to taunt him to save himself; and even from the criminals on either side—all to the complete abasement of Jesus, who silently endures it all. Three agonizing hours pass slowly by as the Son of God weakens and suffers in fulfillment of his mission. And as his life ebbs away, darkness unnaturally descends upon the land, even in the middle of the afternoon—as if to demonstrate, in the words of the 17th century commentator Matthew Henry, “the frowns of heaven, which our Lord Jesus was under, in the midst of all these injuries and indignities of men.”

At the ninth hour (three o’clock in the afternoon), Jesus cries out loudly in Aramaic the lonely and desperate question first asked by David in Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some may find this question disquieting. Has the God of heaven truly forsaken his beloved son? Was Jesus in error by even suggesting such a thing?

Surely not. Jesus understood with crystal clarity why he had come down to Earth in the flesh—*expressly* to bear the punishment for the sins of mankind and *exactly* to be forsaken by the Father. And forsaken he was. He was delivered into the hands of his enemies. He was subjected by them to unthinkably cruel treatments and taunts. He was given no ministering angel to bring comfort, as had been provided at the Temptation or in the Garden. He was denied the reassuring voice of his Father from heaven, the voice that had led him his whole life. As the hymn says, “the Father turns his face away,” too holy to countenance the one bearing the sins of the world. Innocent and alone, Jesus experiences the full wrath of God. Surely this separation from the fellowship of the Father, as he bears the entire iniquity of the world, must be the most painful

injury of all. And because of his work, those of us in Christ will never experience the depth of despair he knew during these dark hours.

Some, hearing him pronounce the Aramaic term for God (Eli), mistakenly assume he is calling out for Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, to come to his aid. A soldier gives him some sour wine on a sponge to drink, and he accepts it this time, perhaps so his dry mouth might be moistened enough to make possible his final loud and triumphant cry, “It is finished!” as he finally yields up his spirit and dies.

Matthew 27:51-56

At exactly the appointed time, the perfect Lamb of God is sacrificed for the sins of the world. By the hand of God, the curtain of the temple is torn in two, from the top (near heaven) to the bottom (near Earth). No more is there any impediment to entry into the very presence of God, for Jew or Gentile! The truly perfect sacrifice, prefigured for centuries by the unblemished paschal lamb, has been offered and is accepted! Our Messiah, our Savior, has shed his blood, claimed us as his own, and washed us spotless! And now, as our perfect High Priest, he ushers us, safely clothed in his very own righteousness, into the direct presence of our glorious Holy Father!

Extraordinary events mark the moment: The earth trembles, bearing witness to both the horror of the wickedness committed against the sinless one as well as the triumph of his accomplishment! The rocks split open, representing the Rock that was rent for us, from which living water will continually gush forth! The tombs are opened and the bodies of many of the saints are raised, to bear witness after Christ’s resurrection of his victory over death! And so impressive are these events that even the heathen centurion overseeing his crucifixion, and those with him, “were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’” Matthew tells us that many of the women who had followed and ministered to Jesus are witness to it all from a distance.

Matthew 27:57-66

As evening arrives, Joseph of Arimathea approaches Pilate to request that he be given charge over the body of Jesus. Joseph was a wealthy and prominent member of the ruling council, a secret disciple of Jesus, and had dissented from the vote to condemn him. He had apparently relocated his family to Jerusalem, because we are told that he intended to bury Jesus in a tomb he had recently had cut into the rock for the use of his own family. This was a generous gesture, since under Jewish law, to bury a criminal in a tomb was to render it desecrated and forever unsuitable for burying any other respectable person.

Pilate consents, and Joseph wraps the body in a clean linen shroud, places it in the tomb, and rolls a great stone over the entrance. His contact with the dead body of Jesus has made him ritually unclean and therefore unable to gather with others in celebration of the Passover, but he has acted righteously. Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” are present and observe. The hour of the Sabbath approaches, and they will have to delay the further, traditional anointing of the body.

The next day, the chief priests and Pharisees approach Pilate and entreat him to make the grave secure with a guard of soldiers. Their spoken concern is that the disciples of Jesus will steal the body and then claim that Jesus has risen from the dead, “and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate already provides a contingent of soldiers to keep order at the Temple, so he directs them to utilize those soldiers as the guard over the grave, however they see fit. Satisfied

with his answer, they do exactly that. The stone is sealed, the guard is set, and once again the purposes of God are served, by rendering implausible any future contention that the body of Jesus might have been stolen by his followers from the tomb.

The Main Point

The love of God, expressed by the willing self-sacrifice of his perfect, beloved, obedient Son, was carried out exactly according to his glorious eternal will and designs—despite the evil intent of all who conspired to make it happen. Our God is an awesome God! Nothing and no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth can subvert his perfect will!

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Psalm 22 – a link between the Old Testament and the Passion of the Christ.
- Isaiah 50:6 – prophecy regarding the treatment of Jesus.
- Isaiah 53 – the Suffering Servant passage.

Week 11

Matthew 28:1-20 – The Resurrection

By Sebastian Schmidt

Introduction

Have you ever asked yourself why church services are mainly held on Sundays? I always thought it was Sunday because Sunday is the Sabbath day. But I was wrong. Saturday is the last day of the week and the correct traditional Jewish Sabbath day. According to the Bible, Christ's resurrection took place the day after Sabbath (see Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1, Acts 20:7, or 1 Corinthians 16:2). Therefore, Sunday is the first day of the week. Since the 1st Century, Christians have met on Sundays because it is the Lord's Day. Two significant biblical milestones happened on a Sunday: The first day of creation and Christ's resurrection.

However, does that mean that Sunday is the only good day to worship Christ? Shouldn't Sunday be the new Sabbath for Christians as it was the Saturday for Jews? Not necessarily. The Bible tells us that we should set aside one day of the week to rest our bodies and soul while we spend time worshiping our Creator. Every day of the week can be used to follow the biblical command to set aside a day for the Lord. There is no particular place, nor is there a special time required. He wants our hearts and does not want us to follow certain rituals or schedules to burden us. This should not be used as an excuse to not meet with other believers at all. Hebrews 10:24-25 clearly tells us that we are not to neglect to meet together.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), and people who know Him and accept Him as their Savior and as the only way to salvation can rest in Him. Hebrews 4:9-11 talks about the Sabbath as a hope that born-again Christians can rely on at all times, not only on a specific day of the week. This is great news. If we know Christ as our Savior, we can be sure about our final destination every hour of every day. This should help us to get through the week, no matter the circumstances. We can rest assured that Jesus made a way for us to spend eternity with Him, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

Be reminded that we cannot work our way into heaven! We cannot add anything to what Christ has already accomplished with His death and resurrection. All people are sinners; apart from God, they are spiritually dead and will be separated from God forever on the day of judgment. Jesus already accomplished everything we should hope for as Christians—to be made right again with God, like Adam and Eve before the fall. We will not be judged according to our transgressions, but be accepted by God through what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. He was punished by His own Father to pay for our sins once and for all—for all past and future transgressions of all the people who believe that only Jesus can reconcile us with God. Jesus's resurrection proves He is what He claimed to be, the Son of God. In John 10:18 He says of His life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

If we believe in Him, Jesus will reconcile us with God the Father, and we will be resurrected into the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God, where there is no more fear, pain, sickness, or anything else which keeps us in bondage, for all who believe that Jesus fulfills the true Sabbath. He is our hope and rest while we are still earth-bound sojourners today.

Read Matthew 28:1-20

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why?
 2. Do you trust that Jesus has the power also to raise you into His kingdom on the last day? Why?
 3. Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit wanting you to go somewhere else to spread the gospel? If so, did you go, or did you find excuses not to go?
 4. Have you ever evaluated your church activities in a way to see how much they are in step with the final task – The Great Commission?
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Commentary

28:1-10

On Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus' death, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (most likely the mother of James and John) went to see the tomb. Other gospel writers are more specific about why the women went to the tomb. Mark mentions they brought spices to anoint Jesus' dead body because they buried Him in haste on Friday, shortly before the Sabbath started. They probably just wanted to finish where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus left off on Friday.

Interestingly, they were expecting a dead body in the tomb and wanted to give Jesus a proper burial. Furthermore, Jesus's disciples did not even come to check out the tomb. Jesus told them several times that He would be resurrected on the third day. Instead of looking forward to the miracle happening, they were mourning together as if they would do for other close family members. They were not even considering that Jesus could return from the dead.

If we look at what happened, knowing what we know now, we sometimes think to ourselves, "how could they be that foolish?" His disciples spent over three years with Jesus, yet they still did not understand. That reminds me of myself. How many times did I think I understood the gospel and thought from now on, I know how to do things right, and just a little later, I fail again in the same matter? It is good to see, and it gives me hope that my case is not lost when even the disciples sometimes struggled to take Jesus at His word.

When the two women arrived at the tomb, the earth shook as an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the gravestone away, and sat on it. This scene was so frightening to the Roman guards that they shook and became like dead men. I think it is worth mentioning that the angel did not move the stone to let Jesus out of the grave but to let the two Marys see that it was empty. The angel even invites them to check out the grave and the place where Jesus lay. It was

evident that Jesus had risen from the dead and already left the tomb before the angel rolled the stone away. Jesus proves later that He can walk through walls when He meets His disciples in a locked room for the first time after His resurrection.

The angel lets them know that Jesus has risen. He is the Son of God! He is the one whom He claimed to be! Further, the angel tells them to quickly go and report to the disciples that He has risen. On their way back, Jesus meets them and commands them to go to the disciples to tell them what happened and that He will meet them in Galilee.

Wow, this is great. Jesus does not appear first to the Jewish leaders or even to his disciples but appears to two women followers whose testimony would have been unimportant in their society. Once again, it shows how much Jesus values and cares for those who might seem unimportant to others.

28:11-15

The resurrection is the essential story of our Christian faith. If the resurrection were not true, we would be playing religious games like all other man-made religions. We would be better off enjoying everything the world offers, living selfish lives, and maximizing our legacy. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, He would not be who he said he was, and the whole story would collapse at this point.

This is why people still try to prove that the resurrection is made up. Examples of this are, that Jesus' dead body was just stolen by his followers or that the two Marys simply mixed up the tombs and were checking for Jesus in the wrong place. Others say that Jesus did not die and was unconscious when they buried Him and later regained consciousness, leaving the tomb unnoticed by the guards. All three excuses are unlikely for various reasons.

Anyway, one of the guards went to the chief priests and told them what happened. The most important thing for the leaders must have been to cover up what happened and come up with a story that something other than a resurrection happened. They must have been so afraid, distressed, and in a hurry to find a plausible story that they came up with an unbelievable one. This is a moment where I would usually advise family and friends to sleep on it to get a clear mind. But luckily, they did not take their time and spread the word that the best guards in the world, who only had one task—to prevent someone from stealing Jesus' body—did not recognize how it was stolen. The story says that the guards accidentally all fell asleep. Even the movement of a 1 to 2 ton gravestone did not wake them up so they would be able to chase after the thieves? This implausible story proves that Jesus' dead body was not stolen and that He escaped the grave without needing to roll the gravestone away. In soccer, this is called an own goal.

28:16-20

Jesus has all authority over life and death. He had just proven that with his resurrection. He took his life up again, telling this to his disciples several times before his crucifixion. If we believe this is true, we ought to follow this Jesus, for He has the keys to eternal life in the presence of God.

If Jesus is the Son of God and therefore has all authority over everything existing, He also has authority over everyone who has ever lived on earth. As Christians, we proclaim that Jesus is our ultimate authority and that He is our Lord. This is a beautiful statement, but it only bears weight if we can honestly answer the Lordship question: "Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." It is especially beautiful if we understand that we did not decide this, but

God the Father drew us near to Jesus. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:44).

Either you repent in your time on earth and become a disciple of Jesus, or you do not. He is and always was in charge of all people who have ever lived on earth because He created them. If this is true and Jesus is already Lord over all people, only those who commit to His Lordship and repent of their sins before He returns will enter the kingdom of heaven! All others will be thrown into the lake of fire, and their spirits will be separated from God for eternity. If Jesus’s story is true, this will be their reality, even if, on the day of judgment, they recognize that He does and always has had authority over them.

The first thing Jesus commands his disciples after his resurrection “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). I am not sure about you, but if I happened to come back from the dead, I am pretty sure that the first conversations with my loved ones would carry a lot of weight and purpose. Christ’s command to his disciples stands until this day and applies to everyone who follows Him.

If we believe in eternal life in the kingdom of our Lord, we must admit that this future should drive all we do in this fallen world. This is a challenging task since we are still held captive in our sinful bodies. However, this is the only reason we are still here on Earth and not already in Heaven. There is no doubt that Jesus dealt with the issue of sin 100% when He gave His life for us; there is nothing we can add to this. Jesus could have wrapped up the earth back then to establish His everlasting kingdom—the new heaven and the new earth—right after His resurrection. Instead, Jesus invited us to help establish His Kingdom and spread the gospel to people worldwide. We cannot change hearts as God can, but we are invited to make him known to all nations of the world. Jesus promised that He would return after the gospel had been taught to all nations of this world (Matthew 24:14).

Yes, you are right when you say there are so many mission fields right in front of our doorsteps, and I believe that God puts us exactly where we are supposed to be to proclaim the gospel to our family, friends, coworkers, neighbors and other people in our surroundings. Maybe this is precisely where God wants you to be active. Nevertheless, there will be people in every church whom He will call to go on short- or long-term mission trips to reach the unreached. We should make every effort to go or to support missions efforts. But what does unreached mean? I often made a mistake in the past thinking about some little tribes which live somewhere in the rain forest and have never seen other people outside their tribe. And for sure, they are in need of hearing the gospel, too. However, there are so many different regions on this earth where almost no one knows Him because people have no access to Bible-believing churches. Just look at nearly all the countries in the Middle East. If Christians do not go there and tell the people, they will most likely never hear about Jesus in their entire life. Remember, we are not the ones who change hearts. This is God’s business. Until Jesus returns for good, He left His bride, the Church, behind to finish one task—to make disciples of all the nations. Our responsibility is to tell them about Jesus to fulfill the last command Jesus gave us before He ascended into Heaven.

Even if we are not the ones who go on missions, we at least have to support the ones who go, be it financially or with prayers. This reminds me of the little prayer cards at Anchor, which introduce us to these unreached people groups. To pray for them is the least we can do. Pray that God opens their hearts and sends disciples into their lives so that they hear about the gospel and, by God’s grace, repent from their sins. We cannot live as cultural Christianity wants and ignore the unreached. It would be contradictory to all that Jesus taught us.

Please pray to God and ask Him which part He intended for you to play in this final mission and to give you the strength to live your life accordingly. Christ promised us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. If you are already saved, can you imagine how hard life would be without Christ? As believers, we can trust in Christ's love and that He died for us to reconcile us with God for eternity. This rest in Him and His promise that He will put an end to all bad things is priceless and, at the same time, exclusive to the ones who know and follow Him. Look at all the people around us who do not know Christ because no one has shared the gospel with them. Can you imagine how hopeless they must be? Would it not at least be fair to let them know about the hope we have in Christ?

Do not be afraid, but be willing to share the gospel. See it as an opportunity for the lost to have a chance to be saved. Look back at your own life. We were all spiritually dead in our transgression before He saved us. Do not get stuck in your comfort and enjoy judging the unsaved. They are just sinners as we are. They need to hear the gospel!

Even the apostles struggled initially and were afraid to move on, thinking that Jesus died and would not return and everything was over. They hid in the upper room and locked doors so that no one could find, arrest, or even kill them as they did with Jesus. Out of nothing, Jesus appears in their midst with His resurrected body to show them that He is still with them. What a comforting scene and promise that they did not waste the last three years of their lives for a lost cause. What a motivation for the apostles to start the Great Commission. Jesus will also be with us on our mission! "I am with you always to the end of the age." If we follow his command, He will work all things together for our good and, ultimately, for His glory.

Provided with the Holy Spirit, the apostles rocked the world and spread the gospel because they committed their whole lives to the final command of Jesus and left everything behind to follow Him. As a church and as individuals, we must frequently ask ourselves what we are doing and why we are doing it? If it is not to advance the Great Commission and, ultimately, the Kingdom of God, we may spend less time doing these activities and focus more on what Jesus commanded us. At the end of the age, we will stand in front of Jesus, and he will tell us how we did. There is nothing we can do to lose our salvation, Jesus will still accept us if we truly repent from sin and put all our hope in Him and not in our deeds. However, would it not be much better if He tells us on the last day: "Good and faithful servant. Great job with doing precisely what I have commanded you?"

The Main Point

Be steadfast and rest in what Jesus has accomplished on the cross and the hope He gives us through His resurrection. He has the credentials; He is the Son of God; He has all authority! Therefore, we need to respond to His leadership. He has commanded us to fulfill our part in the Great Commission. Use your time on earth wisely and obey the one who saved you.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Luke 9:23 – Deny yourself and follow Jesus.
- Luke 14:33 – To be Jesus's disciples, we must leave our old life behind.
- James 4:4-6 – Friendship with the world is enmity to God.
- Colossians 3:16 – Dwell in the Word and share it.

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – We are sojourners in this world. Stay strong and keep your focus on eternity.
- 2 Timothy 3:12 – Persecution of Christians.
- Revelation 21:4 – Jesus will make an end to all dire circumstances.

Week 12

An Overview of Matthew

By Harvey Edwards, IV

In studying the book of Matthew, we have seen how he has presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the expectations of the Old Testament and of the promises of God so that we might believe in him and be saved, and that we might respond by following him with all of who we are as we await the day of his return. From the opening genealogy, Matthew begins to identify Jesus as one from the lineage of Abraham who will bring blessings to all of the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3) and one from the lineage of David and therefore anointed by God to rule an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:16) by ushering in the Kingdom of God and setting all things right. He is the answer to the implicit questions in the Old Testament of how God will rescue his people from sin and death and restore his creation.

Matthew tells us who Jesus is at the beginning because he is a different kind of king than humanity has expected. Matthew shows all along how Jesus is fulfilling the expectations of Scripture, but in ways that are surprising to us. We expect a king to come with all the visible trappings of his station, but Jesus defies this expectation. Jesus' birth is miraculous in that he is the Son of God who has taken on flesh, is born of a virgin, and fulfills the Old Testament prophecies, but he is born with little recognition. While Jesus' birth is recognized by wise men as important, these men are Gentiles. Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, and the Jewish leadership reject him. In fact, at his birth, the Jewish king, Herod, attempts to have him killed. Jesus and his family are forced to flee to Egypt.

Even from the birth narrative, a pattern of belief and rejection develops and becomes more prominent as Matthew's gospel moves forward. As we get to his public ministry, Jesus demonstrates that he has an authority unlike any before him, but he uses his authority differently than anyone before him. He doesn't come to be served—he comes to serve. Jesus says in Matthew 20:28 that he comes to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many. Jesus' teachings about the kingdom are just as surprising. He teaches that the kingdom of heaven belongs not to those who exercise power here, but who instead trust the Lord and his promises. Those who are blessed are meek, poor in spirit, and even persecuted if the persecution is for righteousness' sake. He goes so far to say it is a blessing to be persecuted on his account. Jesus' teachings and actions provoke a response from people. He leaves no room for ambivalence to him. One can only reject him or cling to him as Lord and Savior.

As Jesus' teachings and ministry progress, we see that he is talking about a kingdom that is not of this world, and it is one none of us are worthy to be a part of on our own. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." A man-made righteousness is of no value in the kingdom of God. But this does not mean that the kingdom is unavailable. Instead, it is only available through Jesus. Jesus implies this when he says things like, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17) and "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23). In these passages, Jesus teaches that he is both the fulfillment of God's promises and one with the Father, exercising the

right to judge. This teaching becomes explicit by the end of the gospel when Jesus says things like, “But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64)—identifying himself as the God-Man of Daniel 7. Finally, we see Jesus demonstrate his authority over all things when he raises himself from the dead, defeating sin and death. By the end of Matthew, there is no mistaking who Jesus is—the Son of God who has taken on flesh to reveal the Father and to live the life of perfect obedience and righteousness—and what he would have us do—believe in him that we might be saved, and to live our lives in such a way that we point others to him. We see this in how Matthew closes his gospel with Jesus’ final command to his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If we honestly read the gospel of Matthew in context with the rest of Scripture, we cannot help but see Jesus as the Son of God who has taken on flesh to fulfill the promises of God to make a people for himself for his glory. Our king humbled himself and suffered and died in our place so that our sins might be forgiven, and we might be counted as righteous. We must only believe. Jesus has defeated sin and death and demonstrated his authority to rule over all creation for eternity. The king has come; he has initiated his kingdom; and at the proper time, he will return to bring about its fullness. At that time, only those who have trusted in him for salvation from their sins will take part in his kingdom. Until that time, we are to live according to his character—we are to live in light of the king and kingdom.

Study Questions

1. What does the passage say about God, who He is, and what He does (Father, Son, and Spirit)?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Why do you think Matthew goes to such extremes to show us that Jesus is the Christ expected in the Old Testament?
 2. How does this prepare us to understand what Jesus accomplishes on the cross?
 3. What does Matthew want us to do in response to his gospel? What does that mean for our lives?
 4. How does living out what Jesus teaches about the kingdom bring us into tension with the world as it is now? How does this play out in your life?
 5. Does your life display a belief that Jesus is king? Are there areas of your life that you have not yet submitted? What is stopping you from doing so?
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The Main Point

Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the Son of God who fulfills the promises of the Old Testament. We should repent and believe and then live our lives in such a way that we are accomplishing the mission he has given us: making disciples.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-19 – God makes a covenant with Abraham.
- 2 Samuel 7:1-17 – God makes a covenant with David.
- Daniel 7:13-14 – Daniel sees one like a Son of Man who is given an everlasting throne by the Ancient of Days.
- Revelation 5 – The king worthy to open the scroll and bring about the fullness of God's plan of salvation is the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, and the Lamb who was slain.

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