

## **DEVOTED TO JESUS PROLOGUE**

### **WHY READ ABOUT JESUS?**

That is probably the \$10,000 question. Of what value is it to today's person to read about someone who lived so long ago? Isn't anything that happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century absolutely irrelevant in today's fast paced world? The common thinking is that the church has become almost an obstacle given the way we live today. So each person reading these devotions has to come to grips with this central question. Why should I read about Jesus?

The answer to that central question lies in the fact that people in today's society have even less ability to cope with life than those say 50 years ago. I suppose that is because the world we live in continually depersonalizes us as individuals. It's all about information and efficiency. While it is true that we have more information, you have to ask yourself the question, "So what?" There has never been a correlation between happiness and knowing more. With the Earth's population surpassing 6 billion people, each person has much less significance than those who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is also true that we've become more efficient. We can beam out thoughts over the internet and have it half-way around the world in a matter of seconds, but does that make us happier? I'm reminded of a line in the movie, "Sabrina," where the main character says, "More isn't always better, sometimes it's just more."

So how is Jesus relevant? The truth is people haven't become any more adept at coping with life than they ever were. One only has to look at the increases in suicides, divorce and crime to understand that this flood of knowledge doesn't automatically give us a successful life. One has only to look at our failures at human relations, our inability to get along with others or even ourselves, to understand the need for the answers that Jesus gives us. As I write this I find that today's social media has made us less polite and less able to find the good in others. Because the internet is largely anonymous, our society has found that we can tear each other down and not have to bear any consequences.

So what can we find when we approach Jesus Christ? I suppose the bottom line is that we find answers. We find the answer to our guilt when Jesus said, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'" We find peace of mind when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." As the population of planet earth grows, we find a new way to live with other people in the examples that He set in his daily life.

Each day that you read this devotion, you are going to be challenged to apply what you read about Jesus into your daily life. After all, that is really where it counts isn't it? If you just read about Jesus, what good does it do? It isn't good readers that Jesus desires, it is disciples. I just have the feeling that God is not going to be that impressed with what I know when I stand before Him on the last day. If that were true, God would be really impressed with the Scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, yet Jesus had a lot to say about people who talk about the truth, but don't live it. I would challenge you to read a

portion of this book each day with an open mind and an open Bible. Each day there will be scripture for you to read and then we will talk about what you are reading. At the end of the day as you meditate on what you have learned, you will be asked to write down the answers to a couple of questions. The first is to write down the things you learned about God that day. The second asks you to write down the changes you sense that God is telling you to make with what you learned that day. It is my prayer that you will not only learn something about the life and times of Jesus Christ, but also that you will allow God to change you in the process. You cannot come into the presence of Jesus Christ without being changed. That's the work He did the few short years He was here. That's the work He continues to do today. So I invite you to take this journey with me. I have always believed it to be a journey worth taking. I believe you will also benefit from this year long journey in ways you cannot now imagine.

Ray Tuttle

## **WHAT WILL WE BE READING ABOUT THIS MONTH?**

Though we will begin this month in Perea, we will walk with Jesus as He travels to Jerusalem for the final time. For the vast majority of this month, we will be looking at the last week of Jesus' life. By the end of this month you will have a greater understanding of the events that transpired each day as Jesus walked towards the cross.

The final week was filled with intrigue as the Jewish leadership tried to trip Jesus up and discredit Him with the crowds that seemed to hang on His every word. They realized that Jesus was much too popular for their comfort level. To their thinking it was too much of a risk that Jesus would say the word and a really good riot would erupt. If there was one thing the Romans hated, it was a good riot. Such things tended to bring out the soldiers and the Jewish leadership might very well lose all of their power and prestige. To their thinking this Jesus fellow had to go.

We will also see during the final week, Jesus will give His final series of parables. It is no surprise that the theme of these parables is all about the end times. We will be taking a look at each of them as well as all of the end time teaching that Jesus did during this final week.

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**Developing Long Term Vision**  
**Luke 19: 11-27**

We talked yesterday about one possible application for Jesus' Parable of the Ten Minas. Today, we will be taking a look at another aspect of the parable. Since it has been an entire day since you read the parable, it might be wise to turn in your Bible to Luke 19: 11-27 and give this section a reread. Did you see the second story that lies within this parable? It concerns the nobleman's trip to a distant country.

It was the opinion of most of the people standing in Jesus' midst that when Messiah came, He would usher in a single world government that would be based upon the righteousness of God. The abuse and corruption of their present government would become but a distant memory as everything would be made right throughout the entire planet. We see this kind of thinking even among the disciples as they spent a lot of time jockeying for position within the upcoming administration. Everyone was thinking in the short term except Jesus.

Jesus was speaking a lot about Jerusalem at this point. The city seemed to dominate His thinking, yet for very different reasons than the disciples believed. That was why the gospel writers talked a lot about the confusion among the disciples whenever the subject came up. They just couldn't reconcile the talk about dying with the vision of the Messiah that they had always heard about. In their minds, the disciples could almost visualize

Jesus returning to Jerusalem in power and not only taking Israel from Roman oppression, but also subduing the world with the power of God. He who had stilled the storm, fed large numbers of people and brought the dead back to life would prove no match for the measly power of Rome. Jesus knows that He has to bring clarity to their hearts and minds about what was soon to happen. The real danger was that if the disciples were to be allowed to develop their own ideas about the near future, their faith might be permanently injured when the real intent of God came to fruition. The same thing would have been true of those who followed Him in the crowds. It was out of those multitudes that people would come who would soon spread His gospel throughout the world.

In Jesus' parable it took quite a bit of time for someone to travel to a distant country, do some important business and travel back home. It was not like now when you just board a charter flight and a few hours you can be anywhere on earth. Even in the idea of the servants doubling what their master had just given them takes time. That's because the careful investor does not go for the quick and the immediate because he understands that spectacular returns involve great risk. This nobleman is described by Jesus as being a harsh man. If you were in charge of this man's money, are you going to go to Las Vegas and put every cent down on red to win?

The picture Jesus gives here is obvious to those of us who are looking at it from the vantage point of history. At the point in time that you and I find ourselves, Jesus is still in that far off country He describes here. To believe He is coming back, one only needs to understand the character of God and His Son. There is not a single instance in the

entire Bible where God ever breaks a promise. He is not like your earthly father who promised and then failed to deliver. He is coming back. That fact is as sure as the new dawn coming each and every morning. The only difference is that the next time He returns, things are going to be a bit different.

From the Parable of the Ten Minas, we get the idea that the return of the nobleman brings a time when his servants are called to account for what they did while he was gone. What was missing in the minds of both the disciples and the crowd was the fact that when the Messiah returns, they are also going to be called to account. How they lived their lives while He was gone matters a great deal. We also see a difference between how the nobleman dealt with his servants and how he dealt with those who opposed his rule. I'm sure most reading this parable would rather be the servant who hid the money than one of those who was in opposition to his rule. The same thing will be true when Jesus comes again. Make no mistake about it; the one who rejects Jesus' rule in his life is an enemy of God. God's plan is going to happen whether you believe it or not. You can take today's reading as one more reminder for you to make sure which side of the fence you are on. As I once again remind myself of what Jesus had to say in this parable, I know I wouldn't want to be caught still sitting on the fence when the end comes. Then, once you make your decision for Jesus, you need to develop a long term vision so that you will continue doing the task He has given you until He comes back.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Would Jesus be happy with the way you lived yesterday?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 2nd**

**The Beginning of the End**  
**Galatians 3: 19**

If one looks at all of the weeks that have come and gone down through the millennia since man has kept track of history, none have had the kind of impact that the final week of Jesus' life had on the direction of world history. As I gaze back at that last sentence, it does seem a bit lofty, but it is true regardless. The last week of Jesus' life here on earth almost reads like a mystery novel coming to its climax. We have seen that the Jewish leadership had already united behind the idea that this Messiah wannabe had to go. We see Jesus had resolutely set His face towards Jerusalem with one purpose in mind, to die for the sins of all mankind. It was almost as if two cataclysmic forces were about to collide and one could only brace for the impact.

To be sure, a lot of events in the life of Jesus are about to take place. There are those who have said that these events were meant by Jesus to force the hand of the Jewish leadership and to make them take action. Of course it is a far distance between saying you want Jesus dead and actually doing it. Perhaps the Sanhedrin needed a strong push to actually carry out the deed. My thinking is that view belittles the sovereignty of God. The events that we will be talking about Jesus' final week needed to happen. All of them are important if we are to gain a complete understanding of the life of Jesus Christ. If

you look at the Gospel of John, you will notice that of the 21 chapters that his book is now divided, the last week of Jesus' life occupies 10 of them. If the last week of Jesus' life were just about His death, why would John take so much space to describe its events?

More importantly, if you look at the Bible as a whole, this week is its linchpin. Take this week out of the Bible and the whole story falls apart. From Genesis to John's Revelation the entire point of the Bible is God reaching out to man to bring His rebellious creation back into the relationship that God had intended from the beginning of time. From the moment Adam and Eve decided that it was better for them to go their own way, God set in motion the events of Jesus' last week on earth. If one takes a look at God's dealings with Noah to the giving of the Law to Moses, each event in the Old Testament was a precursor to the events of Passion Week. As Paul said to the Galatian church, "What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come." (Galatians 3: 19) What Paul is saying here is that the reason God gave Moses the law was so that it might awaken in us our need for a savior. It was never God's intent for us to gain His favor by complete obedience to a law that could never be perfectly obeyed in the first place, and God wasn't going to flood the planet again. The final week in Jesus' life had to happen in order to complete the story of God's redemption of people.

I can remember taking many trips with my family when I was growing up. One thing about my dad that I will always remember was that once he had it in his mind to go home, nothing this side of nuclear war was going to stop him. I can remember not once,

but twice running out of gas twenty miles from home because he wouldn't stop to fill up the tank. He was on his way home and that is all that mattered. His family knew that so we drank very little liquids on the way home because we knew he was not stopping for any restroom breaks.

The reason I told you that story is that I don't want you doing the same thing with the Life of Jesus. The final steps of this journey are actually more important to where you are going than the first steps. It is those steps where you will see where Jesus actually paid for the sins of all mankind. It is those steps that give you the right and the privilege of entering into the presence of a Holy God. It is in those very steps that we gain the right to spend an eternity with God. So, relax and let's take time to savor each step up to the hill called Calvary.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How are you doing in staying on track with this study?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 3rd**

**A New Home**  
**John 11: 55 to 12: 1**

Because of the housing shortage near the military base where he was stationed, a young doctor and his wife and three children had to live temporarily in the cramped

quarters of a hotel. A friend said to the doctor's six-year-old daughter, "Isn't it too bad that you don't have a home?" To which the philosophic young one replied, "Oh, we have a home; we just don't have a house to put it in." In the short time that Jesus lived on earth, He never owned a house. One can't even find record of him renting a permanent dwelling that He could call home. As Jesus, Himself, said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said these words, not because He was looking to rent a house or that He thought it important to have a place one called home, but to illustrate that perhaps we place too important an emphasis on a house and perhaps that is one area that will prevent someone from completely being His disciple. You see, Jesus always taught that there is a cost to following Him.

As we read from John 11: 55 to 12: 1, we see the anticipation that existed in Jerusalem on this Passover celebration. We also read that Jesus arrived first in Bethany. On the surface of it these two events seem to have nothing in common. Yet these events will set the stage for the final week in Jesus' life. As we have talked about before, Bethany was a small town on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Since Jerusalem could not be seen from the town, there was a sense that you were away from the confusion and the noise that marked Jerusalem, especially at Passover time. It was hard to believe sometimes that you were less than an hour's walk from downtown. The peace and quiet was that remarkable.

Throughout the next week, Jesus would spend His evenings at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. As we have just read, in Jerusalem people were

clamoring after Jesus, each wanting something from Him. After a grueling day, Jesus retired to a place of seclusion where He could rejuvenate. He would seek out a place of quiet where He could reconnect with His Father as He prayed for the strength to get through another day. His physical needs were met during His stay in Bethany as well as His spiritual needs.

Back in Jerusalem, it wasn't as if the city was ringed with men holding rope just waiting for Jesus to arrive. What John gives us here is a picture of the various opinions people held of Him. There were some who genuinely wanted to see Him, wanted to hear Him and perhaps see a miracle or two. There were others who wanted nothing less than to be rid of this nuisance. Did the Jewish leaders want to arrest Jesus the moment He stepped into one of the city gates? Here we are told that is the word they had spread among the populace. Yet as we see the week unfold, that was obviously not their intention. For if it had been their actual plan to have Jesus arrested at the first part of the week, why did it take them a whole 7 days to accomplish this simple task? My thinking has always been that it is one thing to say you want Jesus arrested. It is quite another to actually do it.

So if there is one thing to take out of today's reading it is the fact that Jesus felt the need to maintain a place of solitude away from the pressures of life. Perhaps that is an example for us to follow? So you have to ask yourself, "Is there such a place in my life where I can retreat when life becomes too difficult to bear?" Perhaps that is your home? Some homes are places of refuge others are not. Perhaps a place of solitude is a nearby

park or a lonely road where you can walk in the evenings. Wherever that place is, you need to find it and to frequent it often. I like to take long walks of various routes around my house. It is during those times that I get to think about my life and to have long talks with God in order to get His input on where my life is going and areas in my life that need to change. I come back from a vigorous hour of walking both physically tired and mentally refreshed. Both are actually good for me. Whatever the place, you need to find it in order to keep your sanity and to reconnect with your source of power and peace. Remember in God you can find both. So my advice to you is to find that place of peace and make plans to visit it today.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Have you picked out your place of peace yet?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 4th**

**An Unused Donkey**  
**Matt. 21: 1-7**

When I was growing up my family spent many a summer camping in the beautiful Yosemite Valley. One year my father surprised my sister and me by taking us to the stables and renting a couple of donkeys. My dad led the first donkey on which I was riding and my sister was riding the other donkey which was tethered to mine. We started along the trail to Mirror Lake and were well along before my donkey stopped dead in the

trail and refused to move. We had no idea why the donkey stopped. No one there spoke donkey so we will probably never know why. I can still remember my father putting his face in the donkey's face and yanking on the bridle with all his might to get the stubborn animal moving again. It happened a few more times, but eventually we were able to return the rented donkeys back to the stable. I suppose that it is in episodes like the one we experienced that have given the donkey a rather negative reputation in our society.

Having that picture of a donkey in my mind, I have always found it hard to understand why Jesus chose to ride such an animal into Jerusalem during His triumphal entrance. I don't know, it just seems to be an anti-climax kind of thing to the picture one would expect to see on such an occasion. That's because the reputation of a donkey is far different today than it was in the first century. Today, we are taking a look at Matthew 21: 1-7. We will be looking at three key areas that this donkey would have been a symbol of as it carried Jesus into Jerusalem.

To be sure, Jesus' mode of transportation this day was prophesied by Zechariah as noted in Matthew 21: 5. In order to fulfill this prophesy, Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead of Him to borrow the animal for the short time the Lord had need of it. In ancient times the donkey was considered a noble beast. I suppose that opinion stemmed from a sense of gratitude for all of the work the animal had done for people over the years. In fact, the animal was ridden by noblemen and emissaries when they wished to enter a city in peace on some diplomatic mission. It was the riding on the donkey that demonstrated to the local officials that the official was entering the city in peace. The contrast was

when a king would enter a city as its conqueror, in which case he would be riding on a stallion. In the case we are talking about today, Jesus was entering Jerusalem in peace. This would have been the first indication to the population that Israel's Messiah was not coming as they had expected. The donkey would have told the average person that Jesus was not coming to forcibly kick the Romans out and restore the kingdom that they were seeking.

The second piece of symbolism that we find in Jesus' choice of transportation was that the donkey has always served people. As I went back in history, I couldn't find a time when the donkey wasn't used to carry the burdens of people. In the same way Jesus was showing the people of Jerusalem that He was coming to serve them and to carry their burdens for them.

Finally, the donkey symbolized the sacred purpose for which Jesus entered the city. This particular donkey had never been ridden before. It was always required that if an animal were to be dedicated for service to God that it be both without blemish and that it be unused. An example of this can be found in 1 Samuel 6: 7, where the Philistines sent the Arc of the Covenant back in a cart pulled by two cows that had never been yoked. This mode of transportation would have shown the people the sacred purpose for which the Messiah was riding into town.

I guess what impresses me most about Jesus, as He is riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, is the amount of thought and preparation that was taken so that the



population was able to understand exactly the kind of Messiah God was sending to them. He didn't sugar coat it or hide who He was in order to gain popular support. Sometimes when we are witnessing to our friends and relatives about our Lord, we tend to present a lopsided view of the King of Kings. We talk about Jesus' love, His acceptance of us, the free gift of salvation and all of the good things that come from having a close relationship with the Creator of the universe, but tend to gloss over the "Lordship" part. My advice to you is to never be afraid to present Jesus openly and honestly. If God is truly drawing someone to Himself, it's not going to matter. Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the costs of discipleship and the difficulties in getting through the narrow door and still people followed Him. We need to take His example and do our best to emulate it when we are talking about Jesus with the people we love.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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When you share your faith, is it a lopsided view?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 5th**

**Hosanna**

**Matt. 21: 1-11, Mark 11: 1-11, Luke 19: 28-44, John 12: 12-19**

The story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is one of those few events where all four of the gospel writers give us their particular insight on the events of that day.

That means that in reading all four gospels, one can see the event from four different sets

of eyes. While it is true that Luke probably wasn't present, he talked to people who were, but Mark lived in Jerusalem and was no doubt in the crowd. The other two gospel writers were disciples and would have occupied a space immediately behind Jesus. You can find our story in Matthew 21: 1-11, Mark 11: 1-11, Luke 19: 28-44 and John 12: 12-19. If you have the time, you might want to read all four accounts.

Apparently word of Jesus' arrival had preceded Him as a large crowd had gathered even before Jesus set foot in the city. Jesus was already coming with a large crowd following Him as He joined the teeming throng making their annual trek into Jerusalem for Passover. If you would have been there, the first thing you would have noticed was that the atmosphere in Jerusalem that day was electric. It seems that for days all anyone in town could talk about was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It appears that a large number of people seemed now to be convinced that this Jesus was, in fact, the long awaited Messiah. As Jesus approached, the multitude began to do several things at once. They covered the road with their own garments as a show of support. They waived palm branches, which was customary when one was welcoming a triumphant conqueror into a city. It was almost as if they were saying, "Watch out Rome, you are going to get yours." I guess they still weren't getting the truth about the kind of Messiah God had always intended to bring to Israel. To understand where the crowd was mentally, you only have to take a look at the reaction to His entry into Jerusalem.

Their very words showed where the crowd was mentally concerning the events that were happening before them. The word, Hosanna, means to save us we pray. When the

people cried out, “Hosanna to the son of David, they were using one of His acknowledged Messianic titles. In the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” we see them acknowledging that Jesus was coming in the power and with the full blessing of the God of Israel. Finally, when they cried out, “Hosanna, in the highest,” the multitudes were now acknowledging the source of power that appeared in Jesus when He stood at the entrance to Lazarus’ tomb.

What we are witnessing should have been, for Jesus, a complete vindication of everything He stood for. Instead, as he reached that turn in the road where the entire City of Jerusalem suddenly appears at His feet, He breaks out in loud wailing at the fate that He knows lays before the City of David (See Luke 19: 41-44). The Jerusalem that Jesus sees is not the one that now is before Him, but the one the Romans will leave some thirty years after all of the shouting of that day had ceased to exist. Jesus always understood the hearts of the people that He came in contact with. That was never truer than on that particular day. The people in Jerusalem that day were shouting for a king, for someone whom they believed would deliver them from the oppression of Rome. They were not looking for a savior who would deliver them from the oppression of their sin and bring them into an everlasting relationship with the God they claimed to worship.

The same thing exists right here, right now. I have no doubt that there are those reading this today who approach Jesus in exactly the same way. You are attracted to Jesus for all He can do for you and not for who He is. You might even acknowledge Him as king in the sense that you long for anything or anyone who will right all of the wrongs

that are present in your world. You can almost imagine a world that is free of corruption. You can almost taste a world where justice reigns supreme, but you haven't taken a real close look at what exists within your own heart. You can't imagine living a life where you are not completely in control of your destiny. If that describes where you are right now, then you would have been perfectly at home in that crowd. While you might not see anything wrong in that position, you have to remember that it was the very same crowd that would cry out "crucify Him" within just a few days from the events of our story today. Jesus did not come into this world to meet your expectations. He came into the world to meet God's expectations. Jesus does not want, nor does He need, your voice rising in praise. He wants your life. You can shout until you lose your voice, but unless you are willing to give your life over to Him so that He can make it into that which it always should have been, it is all for nothing. After all, that has always been the point of God becoming flesh and living among us.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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As you looked inside your heart today, what has to change?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 6th**

**An Innocent Fig Tree**  
**Mark 11: 12-14**

Most people who read the account in Mark 11: 12-14 think that perhaps we caught Jesus on a bad day. I know that not all people are morning people. You know the kind who wake up with a smile, but start to drag as the sun goes down. Actually that was not the case at all. As in a lot of stories about Jesus, this one has a spiritual dimension to it that is, perhaps, not apparent upon first glance. What you have to realize is that the fig tree served in the Old Testament as an emblem of the Jewish nation. One can see the same kind of symbolism in Joel 1: 7. That imagery can also be found in the Jewish Talmud. So now go back and read our section in Mark and see if another meaning leaps out at you.

This event occurred on Monday of the final week of Jesus' life. Remember that I have already said that for that last week, Jesus spent the day in Jerusalem and then traveled to the other side of the Mount of Olives to Bethany to spend the night. I'm sure that He availed himself of the hospitality of Mary and Martha while He was in Bethany. Jesus' custom seemed to be that He would have risen before sunrise and would have gone off somewhere to pray. Since Jesus had risen and left for Jerusalem quite early, there apparently was no time for breakfast. So in the beginning of Mark's narrative, we see that Jesus felt the pangs of hunger. In the distance, He notices the leafy branches of a fig tree. Now Mark tells us that it was not the time for figs, but Jesus sees the tree and goes over to inspect it anyway. After all, perhaps there would have been left some of the fruit from last year that would have been still good. Upon seeing no fruit, Jesus pronounces judgment upon the tree. We know from Matthew's account at the other end of this story that the tree withered and died the very next day.

So what is the spiritual story that Jesus is trying to teach us? In life, we see a lot of people who talk a good game about their life in Jesus, but have very little reality to back the talk up. It was like the leafy appearance of the fig tree suggested the possibility that fruit existed on it. One could make an extremely good case that Jesus was referring to the Jewish nation as a whole. I tend to take a broader approach and tend to apply it to all people. Jesus saw potential in that tree from a distance just like you see in a person who falsely professes a faith that doesn't really exist. It was only upon closer inspection into the life of that tree did the real condition of the tree become known. When we see someone professing faith in Jesus, we expect there to be fruit in their life when we move close to them.

Imagine our surprise when we take a look under the leaves and find only more leaves. This tree failed to live up to Jesus' reasonable expectation. You can camp out on the idea that it was not yet time for figs, but this tree didn't even have unripe fruit on it. Its situation was not going to change later in the year. It was occupying ground that could have been used for a better purpose. Instead of serving the needs of men, this tree deceived men. That is the real reason for the harsh response by Jesus. In a prior address, Jesus had advised that people who deceived others spiritually would be better off if a giant millstone was tied around their neck and they were tossed into the nearest deep body of water.

So, the obvious application for us to go into here is what kind of fig tree are you? It is relatively easy to deceive people. I've known cases where even close family members have been deceived by someone. It's just that there is no way that you can deceive God. The problem is that in deceiving men, you only risk embarrassment and a loss of trust if you are found out. It is far more severe and permanent when you are caught trying to deceive God. Just ask our fig tree if it was all worth it. Perhaps now is the time for you to bow your head and do some honest business with the One who knows you better than you know yourself. You will be surprised at the peace that will settle over your heart when you're done.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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In what areas of your life are you deceiving God?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 7th**

**Back to the Ranch**  
**John 12: 20-30**

In a recent training session that I attended, the instructor used this phrase a lot. She even developed a hand gesture for it to remind us that it was time to get back to the ranch. She would stick out her index finger and draw a backwards "C." That hand gesture meant that we were to steer the conversation back to what we originally intended. Sometimes it is easy to get side tracked in life. We go along with specific goals in mind,

but then we find ourselves reacting to the need of the moment. Soon the goals that we were moving towards are but a distant memory. The next time that happens draw a backwards “C” in the air to remind you that it’s time to get back to the ranch. Jesus didn’t draw a backwards “C,” but in today’s reading we see Him doing the same thing in bringing His disciples and His ministry back to the ranch. It can be found in John 12: 20-30.

After Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem for His final week of ministry, His popularity had risen to new heights. John quoted the Pharisees in saying, “The whole world has gone after Him.” Now a couple of Greek seekers approach the disciples in hopes of gaining an audience with the new celebrity. They are called Greeks, not because of their nation of birth but because of their way of thinking. The Greeks were into philosophy in a big way. They were always after the latest and greatest ideas in order to further their knowledge base. Jesus was just another idea to be grasped to these men. Now there are some people I know who would have loved nothing better than to spend an afternoon convincing these men of their need of a savior, but there was a more important mission on Jesus’ mind at the moment. He had a world to save. That’s why you see Him shifting gears almost immediately. In other words, Jesus’ main focus for His time that week was to die for the sins of the world, not an abstract debate about faith.

Jesus starts to take His disciples back to the ranch by giving them a lesson in horticulture. If you take a seed and essentially kill it by placing it in the ground, the seed will cease to be. In its place will become a plant that will produce seeds in abundance.



From the perspective of history, that is exactly the result that will occur by the end of that week. Up to this point all of the attention and focus has been on Jesus. After this week, the focus will be distributed among the people who have dedicated their lives to being His disciples. Word will spread much more rapidly because it will come from multiple sources. That will happen if the disciples take to heart what Jesus said in verses 25 and 26. Take notice that there are two things the disciples have to set their hearts to in order to be in the business of seed spreading. They have to set their hearts on the things of heaven and off of the things having to do with their own physical lives. Second, they have to set their hearts on following the lead of their Master. If they do that, the world will not be the same.

What follows is a very short prayer by Jesus where He shifts the focus where it needs to be. "Father, glorify your name," He exclaims! It is at that point that God verbally answers Jesus' request as there was heard a voice from the heavens that was described as both an angel speaking and as thunder without clouds or lightening, that accepted the glory that was just offered. Jesus explained, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine." He didn't need to be reminded of the relationship that He had with His Father. It was to remind those in attendance that fame and notoriety were not what Jesus was after. Everything He did was for the glory of His Father in heaven.

I had a pastor once who liked to use the phrase, "The main thing is that we keep the main thing, the main thing." I don't know where he came up with that phrase, but it has always stuck with me. For him the "main thing" was always the Great Commission

found in Matthew 28: 19, 20. It's easy for churches to get off track. There will always be some ministry that needs attention or some problem that needs fixing. In my life there is always something else that will rob my attention from what is really important. In today's Bible verse, Jesus is teaching me that I need to stay focused on what is eternally important. I need to stick out my finger, draw a backwards "C" and tell my self that it is time that I get "back to the ranch." In other words, I need to set my heart on heaven and follow Him. Everything else is just a distraction that will prevent me from living the life that Jesus wants me to live.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Is there an area in your life where you are "off track?"

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 8th**

**Light Versus Darkness**  
**John 12: 31-36**

If you were living in Jerusalem in those days, you would have already developed a road map as to what would be happening in your country over the next several days and months. After all Jesus had just entered Jerusalem and accepted your accolades that He was Israel's long awaited Messiah. The only thing left was for Him to throw the Romans out and usher in the Golden Age of Israel. After all, that's what you have always been taught, so it must be true. It would never have even dawned on you that you had been

taught wrong! It was in order to counter that kind of popular thought that Jesus spoke the words that we are going to be taking a look at today. Those words can be found in John 12: 31-36.

It has always been popular to believe that the world as it exists is a good place to live. It does have some problems associated with it, but all in all we enjoy living here. I suppose that's because we don't know any different. Jesus sees a real flaw that existed in the planet; the wrong ruler was in charge. In His opinion, it was high time for a leadership change. Now there would have been no opposition to that idea in the first century. It's just that most people thought Jesus might be referring to the Roman government or possibly Herod's entire family. Unfortunately Jesus was talking about Satan's rule of planet earth and Jesus' task that week was to begin the process of retaking His creation. As we have talked about on many occasions, He was not going to go about things in the manner in which the people expected. What Jesus describes in verse 32 is another picture of the events that happened centuries before as described in Numbers 21: 6-9 where poisonous snakes had moved into the camp of Israel biting people because of all of their groaning and complaining. Moses, at God's command, had a serpent made out of bronze put on a pole so that anyone who looked upon the serpent would not die from the venomous bite. That episode was a picture of what would happen to Israel's Messiah the first time He came on the scene. Three years ago Jesus had told Nicodemus the same thing. It's still true today. There must be payment made for all of the wrong that man does in his lifetime.

In the Gospel of John, the writer uses the contrast between light and darkness a lot. In his very first chapter, he identifies Jesus as the light to all men (vs. 9). He records Jesus telling the crowd that He is the light of the world (8: 12). He develops the idea of that light coming into the world and how the darkness must flee from it (3: 20). Here is one more use of that illustration in John 12: 35, 36. Jesus adds something new to the picture here. He uses two verbs to describe what we need to do with the fact that Jesus has come in order to be a light in this world. First He says that we must believe in that light. I said earlier that everything that makes up your relationship with God always comes down to the bedrock of belief. In other words, the foundation of our relationship with God is always belief. That never changes. Remember in John 14 when Jesus said, “You believe in God, believe also in me.” It’s the same idea. Belief here in the original language is in the continuous tense. That means that belief is something that you continually do. It is not a one time thing.

The second thing that Jesus adds to the picture is that you believe to become. Notice in verse 36 Jesus says, “Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” In the original language the “becoming” is a one-time thing. In other words, once you first believe it is at that point that you become the sons of light. Salvation comes to you at a single moment in time but belief is a life time experience. That’s how God always intended it to be. Just because you believed at one point in your life, it doesn’t end there. You can’t pray that Jesus will come into your life and then go back to the way you lived before you said that prayer. You will miss out on too much. It would be like buying a super bowl ticket and leaving the game before the kick-off.

Jesus' intent was for us to be people of light living in a world of darkness. That's what Jesus meant when He said in the gospel of Matthew, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Jesus made it quite clear the kind of life that we are to live while we are still on this planet. The only thing left for us to do is to take this moment and do a wattage check to see how much light we are actually giving out. If we find our wattage to be a little low today, perhaps we need to get connected back into the power source.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What do you believe God is going to do through you today?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 9th**

**Confused With Facts**  
**John 12: 37-50**

I once heard a story about a huge crowd that was watching the famous tightrope walker, Blondin, cross Niagara Falls one day in 1860. He crossed it numerous times, a 1,000 foot trip 160 feet above the raging waters. He asked the crowd if they believed he

could take one person across. All assented. Then he approached one man and asked him to get on his back and go with him. The man refused. Belief is a funny thing. It's almost as if we need several levels of the word. Did the people in that crowd really believe if they were unwilling to climb on Blondin's back? Unbelief is a flaw that exists in all of us that tends to increase with age and experience. It seems the older we get the more we tend to look for the trickery in everything that comes our way. People in Jesus' day had the very same problem. It's what Jesus addresses in John 12: 37-50. I get the impression that Jesus was addressing a section of the population who were expressing the old adage, "Don't confuse me with facts, I've already made up my mind."

Notice how unbelief even occurs in the presence of miracles. Jesus never did a single miracle in the wilderness where no one could see. Every one of the thousands of miracles was done in the presence of a multitude of witnesses, yet still the people refused to believe. These miracles showed the heart and the compassion of God and still Jesus found Himself rejected by the very people who had benefited from God's mercy in healing their infirmities and suffering.

Unbelief rejected the things that God had to say to them. That's what Isaiah was talking about when he said, "Who has believed our message?" The words that these people were rejecting came not just from something that had been written hundreds of years before, but these words were also spoken right in their presence. Yet their hearts were not in the right place when it came to the relationship they had with God. That's why God had caused them to fail to understand the very words spoken in their presence.

It all starts with a proper heart attitude. Remember the words that the writer of Hebrews said, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” They didn’t believe God because they didn’t know or want to understand Him.

There were even those who believed and yet that belief failed to make its way down to their feet and to their mouths. To be sure they could make a mental ascent to the things that Jesus was saying, but when they looked around, they found that they had too much to lose if they openly acted in concert with their beliefs. It’s almost as if you can visualize Jesus here sadly shaking His head in wonderment at their short-sightedness. They have come so close only to refuse to take the brass ring.

What Jesus says to close this dialogue concerns the consequences of unbelief. He describes a time when everyone will give an account of what they did with the words and the miracles of Jesus. Who among all of this group of people having heard the words of Jesus are going to stay in the darkness and who is going to come into the light? That’s the question that Jesus asked of the people standing in that crowd in Jerusalem. Of course the words of Jesus ring just as true today as they did two millennia ago. Everyone reading these words must come to grips with them. Where do you stand when it comes to what you believe about Jesus? Even the person who has professed a faith in Jesus has to take a look at their own level of faith in Him. Are you like the ones Jesus describes here who believe but refuse to change because you are afraid of all that you think you will lose?

This is one of those sections of the Bible where you really need to pause right now and talk to God. The Holy Spirit stands ready right at this moment to show you where you stand with God. Why not let Him do His job? What is there to lose, or is what you believe you have to lose more important to you than all God wants you to gain?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What is God telling you right now?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 10th**

**A Second Cleansing**  
**Matt. 21: 12, 13**

I suppose that the main thing that I object to in cleaning the house is that it always has to be done the next week. The same thing is true of laundry. You empty the hamper, wash and iron all of the clothes and put them away, only to begin to fill the hamper once again. It just seems to me to be a never ending process. What is even more aggravating is when you have to do the same thing with people. For most of the time in our family, our house has had two smaller people living with us called our children. I can't tell you the number of times life lessons had to be repeated over and over in the vain hopes that those lessons would finally be caught and we could move on. I imagine that is the same way Jesus must have felt as he entered the temple that Monday morning. As you recall,



He began His ministry by cleansing the temple of all of the vendors who were busy about the business of cheating the Jews coming to worship in that temple. Now, as if to put a capstone on His time on earth, Jesus closes His ministry in much the same manner. In fact, if you now turn to Matthew 21: 12, 13 and compare it to the first cleansing in John 2: 13-16, there is very little difference in the physical descriptions given by both gospel writers for two completely separate events.

Now I know that Jesus had been in the great temple of Jerusalem on numerous occasions between these two events and the chaos that existed within the Court of Gentiles had not been addressed. What we see in Jesus' second attempt to set the temple on a more proper course is God giving them one more chance to get it right before He finally dealt with it.

If you will recall the last time we dealt with a temple cleansing, we asked the question as to why the Jewish leadership hadn't arrested Jesus right on the spot for such an insult into the way they did "church." At that time, I said that the practice was extremely unpopular among the common people. It seems they had a strong objection to being cheated a few steps from where they worshipped. So you have to ask yourself if the practice was so unpopular, why would the Jewish leadership allow it to exist at all? The answer to that question must lie in the money that was made by both the people who manned the stalls and for those who rented the space to them. Alfred Edersheim, in his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, even goes so far as to suggest that the family of the High Priest probably was paid a kick back for allowing the practice to

continue and to flourish. When I read Edersheim's book, I found myself agreeing with his take on the matter. All too often money is the chief motivator for why things are done that probably should not be done.

I can remember a time when I was unemployed and money was really getting tight. I got a call from an employment agency with a great job opportunity for me. I could start work in the morning at a salary right in my range. The only problem was that the company specialized in distributing pornography to the world. I have to tell you I was sorely tempted for a moment or two. My mind ran through all of the justifications that I could muster. After all, such a place would have a lot of people to witness to about Jesus. It was at that point when the Holy Spirit checked my thinking and made me realize that I had to put my trust in the fact that God knew exactly what my circumstances were. In fact, He knew them far more than I did, and that He would continue to provide all that I needed. I thanked the agency for their call and politely declined their position.

This is but one example of where an opportunity was presented that looked real good on the surface, but in the end would lead to real harm. The real issue is always, who controls your life and your future? That is always the bottom line. One can always find a way to justify almost anything in life, but the "who is in control" issue. Do you depend upon Jesus, day in and day out, for all of your needs? If so, you will never be seriously tempted to enter an area that will eventually lead to a downfall in your life or your witness. Is Jesus the first place you go to when someone approaches you with an "opportunity?" The closer you stay to Jesus, the easier these kinds of decisions will be.

Though the Lord of Life will enter into your life to clean it all over again, that's not a good way to live your spiritual life. It's far easier on you if you do a little daily life cleaning.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What part of your life did you clean up today?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 11th**

**Temple Healing**  
**Matt. 21: 14-17**

With the temple area now cleansed and purified of all of the vendors and the accompanying chaos, it can now be a place for teaching and ministry. One can only imagine the scene as those who are usually seen as the dregs of society, flocked into the Court of Gentiles. What made the sight all the more unusual was the fact that those with physical infirmities were normally forbidden to enter into the temple area. It seems that with Jesus, they felt a freedom that they had not felt before. I suppose to a lot of people present at the time, it was only fitting that the area that was once a place of merchandizing and profit was now a place of healing. The people saw and felt the power of God descend on a place as person after person walked away whole; set free from whatever disease had held them in bondage. We now find ourselves in Matthew 21: 14-17.

At this point who comes on the scene, but the chief rulers and rabbis who were most upset at the way things were turning out. After all, they felt they were witnessing a couple of millennia of “we’ve always done it that way” upset. Matthew records that at the sight of all of the wonderful things that were happening, these men came on the scene and they were indignant. Now for those of you who are interested in all things Greek, the word used here that is translated “wonderful things” is used nowhere else in the entire Bible. For some people today as well as in the first century, God’s house is that natural place for “wonderful things” to happen. It’s just that these religious leaders didn’t agree with that kind of thinking.

So what do these religionists find to complain about? They complain about the sight of a group of children saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” As you remember from a couple of days ago, Hosanna is best translated as a prayer of salvation. The question they ask Jesus almost sounds like they were accusing Jesus of somehow manipulating these children to do His bidding. Obviously these religious leaders were not parents themselves. Jesus merely points out that the words coming out of the mouths of these children were coming directly from God, Himself. These words came as a direct fulfillment of the prophesy, given by David, in one of my favorite psalms, Psalm 8: 2.

If you break down the main objection that these religionists had that day, you come up with three probable causes for their actions. They were probably upset that Jesus had disrupted their usual way of going about God’s business. Church ruts are the hardest

things to break out of. I had a pastor once who told me that a rut is nothing more than a grave with the ends kicked out. Many a board has told a new pastor, “We have our own ways of doing things.” Oh, they try to put a spiritual spin on it, but it really boils down to a challenge to the status quo.

A second reason for their objection may have been they really had objections to the whole idea of Jesus being proclaimed as Messiah. As a group they had rejected that notion and wanted nothing more than to render Jesus irrelevant. Unfortunately the events of that day were going in the opposite direction. There is nothing more annoying than a group of children upsetting ones plans. At least, that’s how they viewed it.

A possible third reason for their objection might have been that their temple was being polluted by the rabble that Jesus was allowing inside. We said earlier that these people were forbidden even to enter the Court of Gentiles. The rabbis had always taught that the reason for their infirmities was the sin that was rampant in their lives. Such people should never be allowed in such a holy place. Unfortunately that attitude is seen a lot in today’s church. There is all too prevalent an attitude today that thinks that the church is only for saved people. Once they are saved it’s all right to help them, but not before. Funny, I just don’t see that practiced in Jesus’ ministry. Aren’t we supposed to be emulating Jesus in all of the ministries we do?

I don’t know where you fit in all of this. In my mind, Jesus is the example that I want to set my life up against. While it is true that I come up short of that example too

many times, I still feel I need to try. Perhaps we need to do all we can to ensure that Jesus remains a central part of whatever church we are attending.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What areas of your life fall short of what Jesus wants of you?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 12th**

**Discerning Motives**  
**Matt. 21: 23-27**

In Matthew 21: 23-27 we read about an official delegation sent out from the Sanhedrin with the express purpose of discrediting Jesus with the people who were now hanging on His every word. It is now Tuesday of Jesus' final week and the events of the day before were still being felt. Normally the Jewish rulers allowed considerable freedom to meet, teach and to converse within the Court of Gentiles, but this Jesus was another story. Everything that He had done the day before was a direct challenge to their power and their authority. In the view of the Sanhedrin, if they did not challenge Jesus, it would be seen by some as a tacit approval of all He did the day before. In order to effectively deal with Jesus, they had to challenge Jesus' message and thereby show the people that His power could not possibly have come from God.

Since all authority to teach in Israel came out of a rabbinic commission, they wanted to know if He was speaking from such authority and which rabbi gave that authority to Him. Since they knew that no rabbi in the land had given Jesus any kind of authority to teach, it was their hope that they could convince the crowd that Jesus' power didn't come from any recognized authority within the Jewish religion, but Satan, as they had contended all along.

Did you notice in today's Bible reading that Jesus did not directly answer their question, but posed a question of His own? He then tied His own answer to that question. He pointed them to John the Baptist and to the source of John's power and authority. If you think about it, both men's power came from the same source. Jesus' question puts the Jewish leaders in a bit of a quandary. You can see their dilemma as they meet privately in verses 25 and 26. Aware of their predicament, they plead ignorance as to the source of John's authority, a plea so grossly dishonest that Jesus was justified in refusing to answer their original question.

All that lay behind the dilemma the religious leaders faced will be present throughout this week. They were dealing with an extremely explosive situation that threatened not only their power but also their very lives. It was Passover and the population of Jerusalem was swelling as people from all over were gathering for the celebration. Within that crowd would have been people whose lives had been changed by Jesus. Within that crowd were people from all over the known world who had heard about Jesus and now wanted to take a look for themselves. Psychologists will tell you

that when rats are bunched together beyond a certain point, they get extremely aggressive and volatile. The same thing is true with people. In such a situation, a mob can form at the drop of a hat and things can explode in a moment of time. I'm sure it was foremost in the minds of the Jewish leadership that present right next door to the temple was the Fortress of Antonia with its heavily armed Roman garrison. If the Roman army had to restore the peace in Jerusalem that day, the sight would not look pretty.

So where do we take the event we have been talking about today and apply it into our daily lives? If you are a Christian who lives their faith, there will be two different types of people who will come to you to gain an answer to the hope that lies within you. There are the people who truly want to know what makes you different, and there are the people who only want to discredit you so that they can live their lives exactly the way they want. It only took Jesus one question to expose which of the two He was talking to. It might take you a few questions more, but the Holy Spirit is good at revealing the truth of any situation. For the true seeker, the Bible tells us that that same Holy Spirit will guide us to say what those people need to hear. When you are confronted with the second group of people, Jesus gives us an excellent model in today's reading. We find that it is alright to walk away from the situation without responding to their demands. Never believe that you will somehow argue a person into the Kingdom of God. As we have talked about before, entry into the Kingdom is a choice that begins in the heart. It only happens when God draws people to Himself. Sometimes your best course of action is to excuse yourself and commit yourself to pray for this person that God will begin to



draw Him and perhaps the next time you see your skeptical friend, He will be in a better position to hear with his heart the things you feel God has for you to say.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Who does God have you praying for today?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 13th**

**The Parable of the Two Sons**  
**Matt. 21: 28-32**

Yesterday, we were talking about Jesus as He dealt with a challenge to His authority to teach the people in Jerusalem during the final week of His life. This challenge came from a group who are described by Matthew as religious leaders and teachers of the Law. As we read on in Matthew 21: 28-32, we see that Jesus tells them a parable that exposes their lifestyle of disobedience to all that God wants of them. The parable deals with a single aspect of what is normally done during the process of parenting.

Now parenting is something that I think that I know a bit about after having raised a couple of children. I don't look at myself as an expert, but I have done the task. In my experience getting children to obey you must be an art form. Of course, some children obey their parents more readily than others. There are children who just seem to be born

compliant and perfectly willing to live in the comfort and security of fulfilling their parent's requests of them. Others come out of the womb demanding their own way and will only obey their parents if they are forced to or see that they will benefit in some way. I believe if you read this parable, you will see one of each kind of child in Jesus' story. In my experience, there is present in the compliant child a streak of rebellion that lies just below the surface. That rebellion is not quite as overt as the defiant child, but it is there regardless.

As you read Jesus' parable, you will see a father with but one demand; that his sons spend their day working in the family vineyard. When you look at the original language, the words appear in the emphatic imperative tense meaning that there was no equivocation or hint of compromise in the father's words. The only thing he wanted of each son that day was that he go and spend his day hard at work. Now perhaps these boys had other plans for the day. Perhaps they had already committed to their friends that they were going to "hang out." To the father, prior plans were meant to be cancelled and his will be done. To such demands, each son had a different response. The first initially refused. Now I'm sure what followed could be likened to a volcanic eruption, but we are not made party to the tirade that would have followed. We are told, however, that this son later thought better of his original decision and ventured out into the vineyard to spend his day working.

The second son was a bit more devious. He pleased his father by initially agreeing to cancel his plans, but then he played hooky and went out and did what he had originally

intended for his day. While that son avoided the initial tirade, he was not going to avoid the wrath of his father that occurred at the end of the day when the lad's deed was brought to light, probably by his brother because most brothers I know seem to see it as their right to point out the faults of the other to whatever parent happens to be within earshot.

The question Jesus now posed to these religious leaders was which of these two sons actually obeyed his father? Notice how Jesus artfully made these intelligent men condemn themselves. Even they recognized the fact that ultimate obedience is better than feigned obedience. They probably had no idea at that point that they were condemning themselves, but Jesus did bring the point home quite nicely in verses 31 and 32. What Jesus gives here is a complete vindication of His cousin, John the Baptist. Like the second son, they gave a nodding ascent to John's ministry in order to curry favor with the people who thought John the Baptist to be a prophet, while inwardly they continued doing exactly what they wanted.

So the only question that remains is which son represents you? When you sense God asking you to do something when you have other plans for your day, which response most describes you? I suppose if you are like most of us, you will remember times when you gave your Heavenly Father both responses. As you have now read this passage in the Bible, which response glorified God and which response is viewed by Him as disobedience? Of course neither response given in this parable to us represents the ultimate correct response. For his servants, there can only be one answer, "Yes Lord."

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Which of these sons represents you?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 14th**

**The Parable of the Landowner**  
**Matt. 21: 33-46**

Over the last several years we have all experienced the insecurity that exists at our jobs. If you have held your job over ten years, you are now the exception, not the rule in today's business world. That reality is felt from the company janitor right up to the president. If you don't produce, you're history. One can really see this phenomenon in the world of professional sports, where even if you do a good job, it probably won't be for the same team your entire professional career. It seems that we have lost that sense of security in life that once existed as we claw our way to the top of the heap. In a certain sense, the Jewish leaders that we have been dealing with over the last few days are about to go through a similar change. They are under the false illusion that once they get rid of Jesus, their lives will return to normal. What they don't realize is that God has quite a different plan in mind. Today we will be taking a look at Matthew 21: 33-46.

After Jesus had finished telling these men the Parable of the Two Sons, He immediately launches into the Parable of the Landowner. Though the audience is the

same, the message of this parable is quite different. The parable involves a land owner who invests capital in his land in order to be able to profitably lease out that land to a group of farmers. Unfortunately when it came time to reap a return on that investment, the current group of farmers had other ideas about what to do with the profits. They reject the entire idea of profit sharing and resorted to violence in order to keep all of the fruit for themselves. That violence even extended to the land owner's son as they killed him in order to make their possession of the fields more permanent.

The obvious lesson that Jesus was giving here is a criticism of how Judaism had always treated the people God had sent to them. When Israel had wandered from the path that God had directed for them, He would send a special representative, called a prophet, to speak forth God's thoughts on the subject of the nation's wandering. Since the people of Israel were already in a rebellious mood, they usually reacted by exercising a bit of violence upon God's messenger, thereby removing the source of irritation, so they could go about their lives in relative peace. Generations that came after that prophet would then build large tombs for these "great men" and actually mourn their loss and spend a great deal of time studying their words.

Once more, Jesus allows His target audience to bring judgment upon themselves. For the men standing there that day will hear the very same words coming from the mouth of the God they believe they serve as He takes away all they have claimed spiritually and gives it to someone else, His church. To bring His point home, Jesus quotes Psalm 118: 22, 23 as He points to Himself as the capstone that the psalmist was

talking about. Jesus pronounces that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from such men and given to others who will bear fruit for that kingdom.

So what does all of this have to do with me? I am one of those people who believe that the entire way God deals with His creation dramatically changed at the death of Jesus Christ. I believe that God no longer deals with the nations of the world and now only deals within the hearts of individuals. In the New Testament, you will find scripture after scripture that teach that once you accept the free gift of salvation, that gift can never be taken away from you. To that idea, I wholeheartedly agree. Yet I also believe that if I am given a task by God and fail to do it, He will find someone else. He will find someone else to receive the blessing of seeing God work in marvelous ways. I also believe that He deals the same way with churches. If you look at the history of any church, you will find times where they were walking in lock-step with God and the impact of their ministry changes their world. You will also find times when they refused to step out in faith, when they preferred the safe and secure, and had God leave and go somewhere else to get His job done. Hopefully that church realizes their error before it dies and turns back into the arms of a forgiving God and has a chance to, once again, change the world.

You may find yourself currently doing great things for God, or you may find yourself currently sitting on the sidelines. The difference lies in your willingness to hear God, step out in faith, and follow Him wherever He might lead you. What is truly wonderful about God is that He never loses faith in you and is always willing to let you

back into the game. The choice is yours to make the next time He calls upon you. Are you going to get back in the game or continue to sit on the sidelines?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What is God telling you to do right now?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 15th**

**The Parable of the Wedding Banquet**  
**Matt. 22: 1-14**

To the group of Jewish Leaders and Scribes, it appears that Jesus told yet another parable that holds a unique application for our lives. At your first reading of Matthew 22: 1-14, you may walk away puzzled at what Jesus is trying to say. You see similarities when you compare this parable to the one He told earlier that we call the Parable of the Great Banquet that is recorded for us in Luke 14: 15-24. Yet this parable is much different. In order to bring the main point of the parable into focus, let's review what the symbols mean. The king is God, the Father. The son is, of course, Jesus Christ. The wedding banquet refers to that great day of redemption to which we all look forward. When Jesus talks about those who were bidden, the original invitees, He is talking about the Nation of Israel. The people on the highways who were invited instead of Israel are the nations of the Gentiles. Finally, the wedding garment that is required attire at this

great banquet is none other than righteousness. It is a requirement for those who would stand in the presence of a pure and holy God that they be clothed in righteousness.

As you read through the parable again with the symbolism now explained, perhaps the meaning will come into sharper focus. Jesus is, once again, giving those Jews present another clue that the status quo is about to change. It will no longer be the exclusive privilege of the Jews to be known to the world as God's people. Since the leadership of the nation is bent on rejecting and killing the Son of God, that title will now be given to a new class of people. It will no longer matter into what family you are born. The only thing that will matter is that you accepted the invitation that you are given to join in the great wedding banquet and that you are willing to put on your clothing of righteousness.

In Jesus' parable, you will notice that there is one present at this banquet who does not belong there. If we remember that many of Jesus' parables used the oral technique of end-stress, we find that we must focus on the improperly attired guest in verse 11. The man certainly comes to the attention of the king as he surveys the scene of his great banquet. So who is this man and how did he get into the banquet without the proper clothes?

In this parable, the king enters the banquet hall and visually inspects those in attendance so that all may be perfect for his son's entrance. It was not the king's wish that anyone in attendance detract from the event to come. This man's attire did detract. Though it was apparently not noticed by the other guests, this man had somehow slipped



in. He had not taken the time or trouble to change into clean and appropriate clothing. One can only wonder at why this man had no respect for the king and his wishes regarding his dress. Perhaps he thought that no one would notice. More likely, he had no respect for the king's intelligence. The king's only question of this man was why. This man, being caught, found himself absolutely speechless. At the king's command, this man found himself thrown into a place that is often used by Jesus to describe hell, a place of eternal darkness and torment.

When we look at this man, we are looking into the face of hypocrisy. When we look into the face of this man, we see many who attend our churches and sit next to us who only go through the motions of giving God the worship He deserves. If we were able to see deep down into the recesses of their lives, we would see that they were clothed differently. For they love all of the things this world has to offer more than they care for the King of Kings. Their idea of sacrifice is to work tirelessly for more toys and more security in this life. They have no respect for the King and His call to take up their crosses and follow Him. They claim they believe in God, but care nothing for the obedience that God wants of them. Yes, our churches have these people within their walls every week.

Yet the parable tells us that God will take a careful look around with eyes that see far more than we can see. It is impossible for anyone to think that he can slip one over on the King. For the Bible clearly says that everything that is done in secret will be shouted from the mountain tops. The challenge for each one reading this parable is to make sure

that we are wearing proper clothing when we attend His banquet. There is only one place where we can acquire the righteousness that is required to gain entry into God's great banquet; that would be at the foot of the cross of Jesus. As we accept His payment for all this is wrong in our lives, we become clothed in His righteousness. Only then will we be able to enjoy the greatest feast the world has ever known.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Which of these participants are you?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 16th**

**Render Unto Caesar**  
**Matt. 22: 15-22**

For people living in the United States, April 15<sup>th</sup> has a special meaning. I'm not saying the day has a good meaning. I just said it is special. For that is the day that our income taxes must be either paid or put off temporarily. It is the deadline at which we all must deal with in some way. Now I have never met a person who looked forward to paying their taxes. I'm sure there are some out there. It's just that I have not met anyone who thought that way. What is true now was also true in Jesus' day. You would have to survey a lot of people in order to find someone who genuinely enjoyed paying taxes to

their Roman oppressors. With that in mind, it is now time to open your Bible to the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Matthew and to read verses 15 to 22.

The first thing that strikes you about these verses is the fact that we are seeing the Pharisees in the same general area as the Herodians. It would be the same thing as seeing the Pope appearing together with the President of Planned Parenthood today. As we have talked about earlier, the Pharisees were laymen who sought to bring back religious purity to Israel through the complete obedience to the entire Mosaic Law, including all of the oral traditions and were dedicated to the paying of the tithe. The Herodians were a political group who promoted the family of Herod the Great and wanted his descendants to rule Israel forever. The only thing that could explain such an odd combination would be the fact that both groups deemed Jesus to be an even larger threat to the status quo than each other.

As we talked about earlier, the payment of Roman taxes was not a popular thing to do in that time. We also know that it was Jesus' popularity with the people that kept both the religious and civil authorities from arresting Him. So someone comes up with the brilliant idea to put Jesus in a classic "no win" situation in order to solve both group's dilemma. After all, if Jesus admitted that it was lawful for the Roman government to collect their taxes, He would lose His popularity and then could safely be arrested by the Pharisees. If He said that paying taxes to the Romans was not lawful, the Herodians could handle the elimination of Jesus. For it was the zealot's outcry in that time for the population to stop paying taxes to evil Rome. Jesus would be labeled as just another

zealot and would suffer the same fate as all of the zealots Rome caught. For it was the zealots in Israel that kept the Roman crucifixion squads from becoming bored.

Do you notice the deference that these two groups pay Jesus? I'm sure that it was done to disarm His suspicions. Their reference to His integrity and that He taught the ways of God without thought to His own safety were meant to entice Jesus to commit Himself without reserve. In other words, they were trying to set Jesus up for a great fall.

Yet neither their words, nor their flattery proved any temptation to Jesus as you read His answer. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Politics and religion can exist at the same time and place. For each of them exists in a completely different realm. There is nowhere in scripture where we are told to disobey the government unless that government is in direct conflict with a command from God, Himself. Notice that both groups walked away from Jesus that day amazed at the insight of His answer and disappointed that they had failed in their task.

Both the Apostle Peter and Paul taught that government can aid in the spreading of the gospel (see Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). It is the role of government to keep order and peace within the population, which is a good thing. It is also government which is ordained by God. We support our government no matter how bad it is because that is what God wants us to do. Regardless of whether the government is for or against Christianity, the gospel still spreads. Remember that was what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Yeast. As I said earlier, both the government and Christianity exist on

entirely different plains. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are commanded to obey the government and promote peace within our community so that we are free to tell everyone about Jesus. As is true throughout scripture, you are only responsible for your own actions. The government will be held accountable for its actions. It's not wise to ever get tripped up by worrying about what someone else is doing.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you tend to blame the government for what goes on in your life?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 17th**

**Heavenly Marriage**  
**Matt. 22: 23-33**

As we continue taking a look at the life that was lived by Jesus Christ on Tuesday of His final week on earth, we come to an episode where He was challenged by the liberal thinkers of His day. The Sadducees believed in only the physical world around them. To them, if one could not perceive something with their five senses, then it could not possibly exist. Take a look on any college campus in America and you will see a lot of Sadducees occupying the great seats of learning. In Jesus' day, these men did not occupy high positions in the School of the Rabbis, but they tended to congregate in the political seats of power. The High Priest and his cohorts were all Sadducees. Why not take a moment to read Matthew 22: 23-33?

Here we see these great liberal thinkers taking their turn at attempting to trip up and publicly discredit this supposed teacher from Galilee. They come to Jesus with a philosophical question that, in their opinion, highlighted the total absurdity of one believing in any life after death. They used a passage that is found in Deuteronomy 25: 5-10 where Moses commanded that if a man dies without any children to continue his name and inherit his property, then his wife shall marry his brother, so that both children and property can stay in his family. To the liberal way of thinking if you took that Law to its logical extreme and believed in the resurrection of the dead, there is a great conflict. For how could a single woman be married to multiple husbands in the afterlife? Obviously either Moses was wrong when he gave that law or there can be no life after death. Since Sadducees held Moses in highest regard, the obvious conclusion was that there is no such thing as life after death.

In Jesus' response we see a two-fold answer to their query. The first thing Jesus does is to criticize their lack of understanding of the Torah, the way God is manifested in the world today. Second, He criticizes their lack of understanding about God's power, which represents God as He will be manifested in the future. Jesus teaches us that the world to come will not be a reproduction of what the world looks like right at this moment in time.

If you go back to Genesis, God gave the institution of marriage for two basic reasons; as a cure for loneliness and as a means to populate the earth. Since neither issue

will exist in heaven, there is no reason for its inhabitants to marry. Heaven is always described as a place where your relationship with your creator will be far different than it is today. If you read Revelation 21, you get the idea of the continuous presence of God there. In heaven, the idea of a God who will never leave us nor forsake us has its ultimate fulfillment. If God is continually present, how can one ever experience loneliness? If those who inhabit heaven have put on the incorruptible body that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15, there will be no death, so there will be no reason for people to replace themselves by having children. That is why Jesus describes a place where His creation is no longer given in marriage because marriage is no longer needed by them.

Jesus then defends the entire idea of life after death by pointing the Sadducees to the scriptures with the intent to show them the absolute absurdity of their position on the resurrection. He quotes Exodus 3: 6. Notice how He takes a verse from the Pentateuch, which the Sadducees had always believed to be the absolute word of God, and uses that section of scripture to prove how wrong they were. Jesus points out that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Once again the Jewish religionists are thwarted in their attempts to discredit Jesus. In fact their questions are having exactly the opposite affect. Jesus' stock is rising higher and higher in the eyes of the people each time He passes one of their tests with ease.

I suppose there are those reading this who are happy that marriage will not exist in heaven and those who enjoy being married and not quite sure how they will exist outside of that relationship. What you have to keep in mind is the very nature of God. Since

God loves you more than you can possibly understand and He originally meant marriage to be the ultimate in human experiences, He must have something really special for eternity. I promise you that whatever God has in store for us in the future will be much better than anything that we can experience right now. After all, whatever He has in store has to last for a lot longer than anything that exists here.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Are you disappointed that there will be no marriage in heaven? Why?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 18th**

**Greatest Commandment**

Matt. 22: 34-40, Mark 12: 28-34

As each challenge from the Jewish Leadership was met by Jesus, their perception of the threat He poses to their nation and their way of life increased. To their way of thinking, there has to be a way to break Jesus' hold on the people. Think about where they are mentally. As each moment passes, more people arrive in Jerusalem for Passover and the threat that the mob will want to proclaim Jesus as their Messiah and overthrow Rome becomes more of a possibility. As the situation becomes more desperate, the Pharisees choose among themselves their best and brightest expert in the law and send him into the fray to debate Jesus in an attempt to ridicule His lack of knowledge and to take Him down a peg or two in the people's eyes. Unfortunately what those Pharisees



did not know was that the man they chose apparently had his heart touched by the master. I get that idea when I compare the accounts of Matthew and Mark of the same event. Perhaps you may get the same idea from reading Matthew 22: 34-40 and Mark 12: 28-34.

I have read a lot of commentaries from people that I trust and none of them talk about either the Pharisees or the Sadducees believing that one commandment was greater than another. All of the rabbinic writings of that time seem to say that the rewards for obeying God's law were the same no matter which of the commandments were under discussion. In their next attempt to discredit Jesus, they hope to trap Jesus into some kind of prioritizing of God's law. Their feeling was that would open Him up to ridicule and finally discredit Him with the people. Yet in Jesus' response to the lawyer's question, He invokes the very words that every devoted Jew offered daily to God, "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord God is One." The devoted Jew would then go on to recite the first commandment as he sought to demonstrate his worthiness of coming before his Creator. In other words, Jesus uses the words of this Pharisee's own daily devotions as an answer to the man's question. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "You answer your own question every morning as you attempt to bring God into your day. Do you even understand what you are saying every day?"

Jesus then follows that thought with the idea that as it is necessary for God to be the object of one's love, so is God's ultimate creation to be the object of one's love. As Matthew records the event, Jesus says that the second commandment is like the first in the sense that loving your fellow man is not less in importance to loving God, but is

equally important. Everything else in the entire Torah hangs off of these two branches of truth. In other words, if it were possible to perfectly love God and to love men, obedience to the rest of the law would fall right in line, for all of the commandments spring from those two ideas.

Given Jesus' answer, this expert in the law finds himself agreeing with the wisdom of what Jesus just said. One can imagine the inner turmoil of the other Pharisees who were standing in the crowd that day. They were hoping for a great debate where their superior knowledge of God's law would prevail and Jesus would be forced to shrink out of sight in disgrace and humiliation after being defeated by the Pharisee's best and brightest. Instead of a great debate, they find their champion agreeing with the enemy.

This legal expert understood what was important in life. He was not engaging in some unimportant debate over minor portions of God's law. What Jesus was talking about was at the center of all he believed. For this expert of the Law to enter into a debate over what Jesus had just said would mean that he would have to deny everything that he had ever taught and believed. Jesus touched this man at his core. The man knew it and so did Jesus as He pronounced this man not far from the Kingdom of God.

As the rise of denominations within the Christian faith proves, we can debate and argue over a lot of minor issues. Yet there are a few core beliefs that remain constant. These core beliefs are what make us who we are. For example, we can argue over what style of music best glorifies God, but we will never argue over how one enters the

Kingdom of God. We can debate the proper use of the gift of tongues, but never argue over the adequacy of the blood of Jesus to take away sin. The next time you are tempted to put down someone from another denomination, it might be wise for you to concentrate on those areas where you agree as those areas are usually the most important.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What issues tend to trip you up when dealing with other Christians?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 19th**

**A Final Question**  
**Mark 12: 35-40**

I went to college a long time ago. What I do remember about college is that my professors asked me a lot of questions in an attempt to get me to think about various aspects of my major. What I don't remember was the final question they asked me. Perhaps I don't remember that question because I was in a rush to leave college and start my life. More likely I don't remember that question because I didn't realize that it would be the last one that I would hear. The religious leaders in our story today are asked one final question by Jesus, and I'm sure they "blew it off" just like they sidestepped every other time Jesus tried to make them see that their view of life and of God was wrong. We are in Mark 12: 35-40 if you would like to take the time to read it and become more familiar with what we will be talking about.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, we have seen Him ask questions of those who stood in opposition to what He stood for. His point has always been to bring light to the errors in the way they thought in an attempt to shake them up just enough to motivate them to investigate His claims. When God reaches out to His lost creation, He often brings questions from those representatives He sends to minister that are designed to point His lost sheep towards Him. God continues to bring questions to the hearts and minds as He attempts to shape a person's thinking so that they will be brought to a point where they can accept the truth about their Creator. At some point, known only to God, the questions stop coming and judgment is then pronounced.

So what was this final question that Jesus asked these religious leaders? The question revolves around the source of Israel's Messiah. Messiah was often referred to as the Son of David. That means that Messiah was generally thought to come from David's line, so that He would be seen as coming from human origin. Jesus' question reveals the fallacy in that line of thinking. He points out that it was not logical to think that David would refer to his own offspring as Lord and fall down and worship at his great grandson's feet. That thought was absolutely unthinkable in the culture that existed in the first century. Yet if you go back and think about Jesus' origins, you can't help but notice that He exactly fits the only possible solution to this dilemma. If only those religious leaders would take the time to do a close inspection, they might come away from that investigation as changed men.

We can stay in the “if onlys” all we want, but Jesus doesn’t. As these religious leaders refused to answer His challenge to exercise their brains, Jesus pronounced the judgment of God. In the warning that He gives the people witnessing this event, we see a terrible truth. It is as if a great spotlight was being placed upon the lives of their hard-hearted leadership so that all present could see the hypocrisy which surrounded their lives. Their motives for living were being exposed and judged as wrong in the sight of the God they supposedly served. These men lived with the sole purpose of having their egos fed by the masses. They lived a life where they seemed to care more about what people thought about them than what God thought about them. In the end, Jesus declared that a severe punishment was the only thing that awaited them. These men had reached the end of God’s rope.

I see a lot of people who put off making decisions until it is too late. They believe that there will always be more time to think about it. Unfortunately that is not always the case. One thing I know about the insurance world is that you have to buy it before you need it. After the calamities of life hit you, there is not an insurance company in the world that will sell you a policy so they can pay out a lot of money covering something that has already happened. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. In every church in the world, there are people sitting there who have grown quite adept at “playing church.” In the beginning they came and listened to what the pastor had to say, but now they just tune him out. After all, coming to church once in a while makes you feel better and gives off a good benefit for your reputation in the community. You don’t even realize that the questions that God had at one time asked of you are no longer coming.

You can't even remember what that final question was. If I take what Jesus had to say in today's passage as true, the only thing that absolutely lies in your future will not make you feel better. Yet that same God does not want you to suffer that kind of punishment. We still live in a time when it is possible for someone to turn from the way they have been living towards the God of second chances. That will not always be the case, but it is the case right now. If what I just said describes you, perhaps now is a good time for you to change the direction of your life?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you need to change directions in your life?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 20th**

**A Widow's Gift**  
**Mark 12: 41-44**

A large church needed a new building. They were all agreed about that, but whenever they began to plan to build, the members got into all sorts of disagreements about how and what to build. The minister was at his wit's end and appointed a day of prayer, to which very few members came. But one devout woman went and took her little five-year-old girl, as she had no one with whom to leave her. As they prayed, the child began to understand that it was about building a new church. When they went home, she asked many questions about it, and then she was very quiet. The next

morning her mother missed her, and in a frenzy went to find her. It was not hard to follow her little foot tracks to the minister's house, and there in the front yard was little Mary with her wheelbarrow, a toy one, and in it were two bricks. She was talking to the minister, and the tears were running down his cheeks. She had brought the two bricks to start the new church. He told the story in the morning service on the following Sunday. God touched hearts, and multiplied Mary's two bricks into a beautiful new church building (story from The Sunday School Times.)

There are many stories out there about sacrificial giving, such as the one we find in Mark 12: 41-44, where we find ourselves today. Apparently the barrage of challenges that Jesus had to deal with over the past several hours had taken their toll. As He travels the few short steps from the Court of Gentiles and into the Court of Women, one can almost sense the weariness of the day has overwhelmed Him. In the shade of the surrounding porticos, He slumps to the ground. From across the courtyard, He has a perfect view of the temple treasury where He sees the thirteen trumpet shaped chests used to accept the alms from the people that were used to help the poor.

As he watches the people approach and drop coins into a chest, He begins to discern the motives of each giver that day. He sees the overly religious stop by with a large fistful of coins to drop one by one into the chests. The man drops each coin in such a way so as it would noisily clang its way down the flute of the opening and into the chest. He sees people dressed in fine clothing drop a couple of coins in and walk away satisfied that they had done their religious duty for the day. He watches others scurry past,

obviously on their way somewhere else, with hands over their pockets as if trying to prevent any money from accidentally escaping and finding its way into a chest.

Finally Jesus notices a poor widow approach the treasury area. With her eyes gazing at the heavens, this woman lets two small copper coins drop into a nearby chest. The coins are so small and light that they make hardly a sound as they make their way into the chest. Jesus finds Himself touched by the woman's generosity. He understands how difficult it is in that day for a widow to live. He discerns that this child of God has just given everything she had to help those less fortunate. The scene touches Jesus to the point that He finds that He must point out her gift to His disciples as a way of forever memorializing her generosity to the world.

I have known many financial counselors in my life. It's not hard for me to believe that none of them would have advised this woman to give her gift. In their arguments, they would have pointed out how much or how little the wealthy had given and also showed her a budget of her upcoming expenses that would not have allowed such generosity. Everything about this woman's gift made no sense. Yet there she was that day dropping those coins into a chest. I suppose the only thing not taken into account was this woman's belief that God would take care of her and that her future was firmly held in His mighty hands.

How about you? Which of the people in our story do you find yourself most identifying with? Do you find yourself giving even when money is tight, or do you only



give the money left over at the end of the month? Do you find yourself giving generously to enable God’s work to continue or do you reach in your pockets to drain it of any loose change that may be in there? As Jesus pointed out, your giving says more about your belief in God than all of your worship and church attendance combined.

Think about that the next time you write a check to your church.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Which of the people in our story do you find yourself identifying with?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 21st**

**Seven Woes**  
**Matt. 23: 1-39**

After reading Matthew 23: 1-39, the temptation is to sit back and wonder if this tirade was just the ending of a really trying day for Jesus. To gain a better understanding, one has to take this teaching within its context and see where it fits in the whole of Jesus’ teaching and the events that had led up to Jesus’ condemnation of Jewish leadership as a whole. When Jesus points the crowd to the “teachers of the law and the Pharisees,” He is talking about that part of Jewish Leadership who had the most impact upon their spiritual lives. It was to the rabbis and the Pharisees that the common Jew looked for spiritual guidance and direction when life became a bit hard for them. The Sadducees and

Herodians took care of the civil government side of things that would affect the Jew's life.

As you read the first few verses of the chapter, you might get the idea that Jesus is admitting that these religious might have the right way to gain entry to the Kingdom of God. At first glance, I wanted to understand why Jesus didn't reject the entire package. After all, things would change radically over the next couple of months. Then I began to realize that Jesus here is separating the truth of God's word from its messengers up to that point in time. For right then, the way into the Kingdom of God ran through the teachings of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament. What the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees were teaching about such was correct for its time. The problem lay in the fact that these men were not practicing what they were preaching, and that is, by definition, hypocrisy.

As we began this final week of Jesus' life, He triumphantly entered the city to the cries of the entire Jewish population. The next day he went into the temple and turned it from a market place into a place of teaching and healing. The third day the Jewish leadership had tried and failed to discredit Jesus with the people in order to avoid a nasty confrontation with Rome that they all saw coming. What we have in Matthew 23 is a line drawn in the sand. We have a total recognition that God, through His son, had rejected the entire spiritual leadership of His people.

The seven woes that Jesus pronounces against the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law are as follows: 1.) They bar the way into the Kingdom of God for themselves and everyone they have influence over. 2.) They make a convert to Judaism twice as lost as they are. 3.) They teach and believe that the gold in the temple is more valuable and holy than the temple or the God who is supposed to reside in that temple. 4.) They practice tithing down to the minutest detail but forget the more important things like justice, mercy and faithfulness. 5.) They look solely at the external ceremonies and totally forget about what goes on inside the heart of man. 6.) They exhibit a wonderful outer façade that does not match the corruption and disease that exists within. 7.) They have the same tendency to kill God's messengers as their forefathers had done.

What I take away from this chapter is how important God views the leadership of His people. You might think that you aren't currently a leader in your church, but I would have to disagree. A teacher of pre-kindergarten kids is a leader of God's people. An usher leads and directs people to worship. The church is full of leaders and you are probably one of them. Anyone who influences another about their view of God is a leader in God's eyes. The only question that remains is what kind of leader are you? Take a moment and run back over those seven criticisms of false leadership. Do any of them apply to you at times? If you are honest with yourself, you are probably more of a Pharisee than you would like to admit. The next time you are on your way to do an act of service for God, take some time out to pray that God would purify your heart and mind and make you into a tool that He can use for His glory. The alternative might be that the next time Jesus utters these types of words; He might be looking directly into your eyes.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Did you ask God to purify your heart today?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 22nd**

**Buildings Don't Last**

**Matt. 24: 1, 2**

When I visited London, England, my wife and I attended an organ concert at Westminster Abbey one evening. As we left the Abbey and headed towards the Westminster tube station, we caught sight of something that I will never forget. The tower of Big Ben on the edge of the Parliament building was aglow. It was not lit by artificial lights, but by the setting sun. Actually what was glowing was the gold edging that decorates the great tower. It was a sight that actually took my breath away. Of course, wouldn't you know, I had left my camera in the hotel room.

At the end of a very trying day, Jesus and the disciples were treated to a similar scene and gasped in wonder at a scene where God's daily wonder of the setting sun met the splendor of what man can build. The temple that was built by Herod the Great was described by both Josephus and the Jewish Mishnah as a magnificent structure. Herod built it to both placate his Jewish subjects, who always objected to the fact that their king was not Jewish, and to show Rome that he was a man who could get things done.

It was a massive structure, much larger than any temple that had ever occupied the sacred mount where Abraham had been willing to sacrifice his son. We know from early in the Book of Acts that the temple area could hold the four thousand men who were saved at Peter's invitation, plus thousands of people more who didn't respond. The main structural component of the temple was white stone that was decorated with gold throughout. It was probably the reflection of the polished gold by the setting sun that had so impressed the disciples that day. Herod surrounded the temple with several porches where people could gather and be taught. The ones we know about are Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch. Each porch was supported by pillars large enough that it would take four men, reaching arm to arm, to wrap their arms around a single pillar.

Despite all of its magnificence and cost, Jesus in Matthew 24: 2 gives us a glimpse of the future for this building. The fact is, a visitor to Jerusalem today cannot even walk within its ruins. There exists today only a ruin here and there and nothing to give the idea that it was once even a building. As Jesus said, this generation of people who had rejected God's invitation to enter His kingdom would see this magnificent structure pulled down stone by stone by the Roman army.

As I think about the great Jewish temple, my thoughts drift to that same trip to England where I stood midst the ruins of a massive cathedral in Glastonbury that was from the sixteenth century and wonder about the future of my own church. I spent a great deal of effort and prayer energy to see my church build a new worship center. Yet I

know that even that building that graces our city will not last forever. The only building that will last forever is the one that God will build. It's the one where I know I will spend eternity.

That's what happens when we put our faith in wood, marble and stone. It just isn't permanent enough. Oh, it might last for our lifetime, but what of our children and grandchildren. At some point, they are going to take what I spent time building and tear it down only to build something new and shiny.

The only thing that they will not be able to tear down is the legacy of faith that I have left them. My children and grandchildren will not be able to tear down the sight of their father and grandfather bowing in prayer or worshipping God. They will not tear down the sight of a life lived in faith. The things that will transcend the generations are the ways you demonstrate your belief in God by the daily living out of your faith. Buildings don't last, but memories of a faithful parent or grandparent always will.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What legacy are you building?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 23rd**

## **Signs of the End**

### **Matt. 24: 3-34**

When I was in college and taking an ecology class, my professor taught me that when a scientist looks at an ecosystem, the theories that come out of that ecosystem are very much determined by his own background and prejudices. Two scientists looking at the very same ecosystem can come to completely different views concerning the future of that system solely based upon their own backgrounds. My belief has always been that the same thing happens when examining the more difficult passages in the Bible. I say that because we now approach one of the most difficult sections in the entire Bible in Matthew 24: 3-34. After reading this passage, you will probably agree Jesus leaves us with more questions than He answers.

What confuses a lot of people is that they don't realize that Jesus' words were in direct response to a question that was on the minds of the disciples. They basically wanted to know three things, 1.) When will our temple be torn down? 2.) What will be the sign of your coming? 3.) What will happen when time as we know it ends? They assumed that those three events would be intertwined in one cataclysmic event. From our vantage point, we know that there are at least two events that Jesus was referring to in His answer to the disciples' questions. Both the tearing down of the temple and the period of time known as the "Great Tribulation" are times when God severely judges sin. Yet Jesus' reference to the "abomination that causes desolation" seems to be referring to the beginning of the Great Tribulation based on how Daniel describes the Anti-Christ in Daniel 9: 24-27, 11: 31 and 12: 11. There are many who would like Matthew 24: 15-24 to have been fulfilled in 70 A.D. That way Christians living now don't have to worry

about the possibility of going through such hard times. Yet the tearing down of God's temple in 70 A.D. and dealing with the unbelief that existed in Israel, was only the closing of a single chapter in the history of God's dealings with His creation.

I believe that Jesus gives us a brief history of the entire church age in verses 4 to 14. Starting in verse 15 and going through 24, He is talking about the events that will happen during the Great Tribulation. Do you think that the church will have to endure the kind of persecution that Jesus describes here? That depends on where you stand in the "Pre-Tribulation/ Post-Tribulation" debate. Yet regardless of which position you believe, the fact that God's people will have to endure this period of time is not generally debated. Even those who believe the church will be taken away before the tribulation agree that there will be those who are saved during this time who will go through the trials that Jesus describes in these verses.

So what do we take from all of this confusion and debate. Obviously I cannot attempt to give you an extended preview of the end of the world in such a short space. What I can do is to offer you this comfort. Has God ever failed to protect and take care of His people? Even during the days of Noah, God took care of His own people and made sure they were held safe from the judgment that rained down from the heavens. Even during the days of the great persecution that came from Ahab and Jezebel, God still used his man, Obadiah, to keep His prophets safely hidden in a cave and well fed. That's not to say that individual believers haven't been called upon to give their lives for their faith. What I am pointing out is that God's people, as a whole, have always operated



under God's provision and protection. So whatever happens in the end, know that all things are under His control and you are very valuable to Him. Also when you read Matthew 24: 27, you can also have some comfort that there is no way that the end will come and you will somehow miss it.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Did you find any comfort from today's reading?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 24th**

**Unknown Hour**  
**Matt. 24: 36-51**

I have run into people who thought they knew the time when Jesus was going to come back. One such man reasoned that Jesus told us that the day and the hour were held secret by God, but that didn't mean the month and the year were unknown. So he proceeded on the assumption that he knew the month and the year and proceeded to almost bankrupt his company based on that prediction. Unfortunately that month and year happened several years ago and Jesus didn't come according to this man's timetable. Such are the hazards of taking Jesus' words in a literal sense and not looking at the meaning of what Jesus was trying to say. We are still in Matthew 24 and today we will be starting at verse 36 and going to the end of the chapter. I would invite you now to take your Bible and read these verses.

The problem we have with this section of the Bible is that people tend to get hung up on who is going to be taken and who is going to be left. Some will argue that the Christians will be taken when Jesus comes for His church. Others argue that at His final coming you want to be in the “left” group. As you read the entire passage in its context, you will quickly understand that Jesus’ point is not to give us a detailed description of the events of that day, but to leave us with the understanding that at whatever time God chooses for Jesus to return, it would be wise for us to be in a “ready status.”

The first illustration of the point Jesus is trying to make is the story of Noah. It’s not that the people of Noah’s generation didn’t have any warning of the upcoming judgment. The book of Genesis tells us that Noah and his family warned them of what was to come. You almost get the idea that Noah’s neighbors were so busy scurrying about their lives; they didn’t even give his warnings a second glance. It seems to me that Jesus’ church in the world today is doing much the same thing and getting similar results. To be sure, there are people in the world today who are entering the Kingdom of God every day, but what about everyone else?

Jesus gives two other illustrations aimed at two different types of people. The first concerns the homeowner protecting his house against theft. If you knew the exact hour the thief was coming, wouldn’t you borrow an extra guard dog or two? Perhaps you might even hire a couple of off duty police officers to further protect yourself from the thief. Jesus’ use of the pronoun, “you,” in verse 44 tells you He is talking to those

already in the Kingdom of God here. After all those are the people He is talking to at that moment.

The second illustration is about an evil servant whose master has gone away for a very long time. Since the servant doesn't believe the master is coming back in his lifetime, he begins to act in a normal manner for him. His actions say that he believes that he will never be held to account for his mistreatment of his fellow servants. Unfortunately that belief is proved false as the master does return and does render judgment by assigning this wicked servant to the pits of hell.

As is true of everyone reading this today, I have lived a number of years and have not seen Jesus' return. That return is still a future event. So what does it mean to live a life of expectancy as Jesus advises us to do here? I believe we are to continue spending all of our efforts seeing to it that His kingdom advances. We make all of our plans so that our lives are focused on being a witness that Jesus would be proud of so that others would understand that it is Jesus who makes the difference in our lives. We are faithful, just like Noah was faithful, and we never lose heart or begin to believe that His return is never going to happen. To me, that is living a life of expectancy. To me, that is what the life that Jesus is describing in this section of the Bible is all about.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Are you ready for Jesus' return?

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**The Parable of the Ten Virgins**  
**Matt. 25: 1-13**

We will be looking at another of Jesus' final group of parables. All of these parables concern themselves with the end of time and the return of Jesus Christ to earth for the final judgment. Yesterday, we looked at a couple of parables where Jesus talked about the necessity of remaining in a state of readiness for that coming. Today's parable has a slightly different twist to it. It would be a really good idea for you to turn in your Bible to the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew and read the first 13 verses.

At first glance, this parable seems to be fairly straight forward. The bridegroom is obviously Jesus, but the identity of the virgins could be seen as somewhat of a mystery. All of the virgins are the same in their identity, their task and the fact that they were providing their own equipment to do the assigned job. The only difference is found in the fact that five of them were wise enough to bring oil for their lamps and the other five were described as foolish for not bringing any oil.

The lamps in question would have consisted of a round saucer like vessel that would have contained the oil or pitch needed to keep the lamp lit for long periods of time. The wick would have been planted within the oil or pitch to draw within its fibers the fuel for burning. This assembly would have been mounted to a long pole so that the way

would have been adequately lit for the bridegroom. It was a common custom of that day for there to be ten of such lamps that would have been used for the wedding ceremony.

You can almost imagine the ladies as they rushed out to take their places, confident that the ceremony was about to begin. The only problem was that the ceremony didn't happen right away. For some unexplained reason, the bridegroom was delayed and did not come for several hours. Jesus describes the delay as long enough for all of the girls to fall fast asleep. Suddenly there is the great announcement, "Here is the Bridegroom," As each of the ten girls lit their lamps, the ones who had brought oil had a much easier time of it than the ones who had forgotten to bring oil. The foolish girls lit the wick, but without any oil soaking through the fibers, the light soon flickered out. The parable ends as the foolish girls ran off to buy oil and thereby missing out on their entrance into the wedding feast.

So what does this parable mean to me right here, right now? One could look at these ten girls as living out what Jesus talked about in Matthew 5: 15 where Jesus said, "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." The lamps represent the testimony of your life in the world. In the Bible, oil is often used symbolically to represent the person of the Holy Spirit. That being the case here, one could say that in this parable Jesus was describing five people who foolishly didn't accept Jesus' offer of salvation. In other words, the absence of the Holy Spirit in the five foolish girls would mean that they might have attended church all their lives, but they never bothered to enter into the Kingdom of

God. Perhaps they thought they had more time? Perhaps they thought that the mere possessing of their lamp and showing up at the wedding would be good enough? Jesus' point throughout His ministry is that good works and saying the right words are not good enough to gain entrance into His kingdom.

There are two lessons to be learned in this parable. The first is the same as we had in yesterday's reading. It is paramount for those already within the Kingdom to always be ready for the Master's imminent return. The second lesson speaks against the false belief that one always has time to make this life changing decision. The point Jesus is trying to make to you is that you do not have any idea how much time there is left. We all stand but a single breath away from eternity. Your time may run out before you have a chance to grasp hold of His kingdom. Now is not the time for you to be on "vacation" from all that God wants you to be. As the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian church, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." It's not tomorrow, it's right now.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Which of the two applications strikes home for you?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 26th**

**The Parable of the Talents**  
**Matt. 25: 14-30**

We happen to live in a results oriented world. Throughout corporate America and the world economy, capitalism has taken its toll on the human condition. Now don't misunderstand me, I am completely in favor of capitalism, but in my experience all systems in this world have their downside. If my company doesn't continually change to meet the expectations of the customers, it will begin to die. There will always be some other company that will attempt to do it better or cheaper than mine. The race we all run continues until the day we retire, assuming the pressure doesn't kill us before then. Given the constant stress to achieve, we often hope that we will find a time of release when we attend church on Sunday. To be sure, we come home after spending time in worship renewed and built up and we cherish that about Christianity. Then we come to Matthew 25: 14-30 and we wonder if what Jesus is teaching here isn't the same thing that we see the other six days of the week. Is Jesus telling me that if I don't produce as a Christian, I'm going to suffer the same fate as the third servant?

As you read this parable, you notice there are four main characters, a master and three of his servants. The master in this story we understand is Jesus, Himself. The servants are those who call Him Lord. To each servant, the master gives a certain portion of his wealth with absolutely no instructions as to what to do with it. We are told that the first two servants took that money and doubled it during the master's absence. The third servant buried his treasure in the back yard and took a vacation. When the master returns and calls his servants to account for what they had done while he was away, the first two servants present the outcome of their efforts and are sufficiently rewarded. The final servant, in a spectacular rationalization of his laziness, makes up some story about the

hardness of his master as a justification for his lack of effort. Did you notice how the master used this servant's very words to condemn him? If the servant really believed what he said, he would have put that money on deposit in a banking institution and at least drawn some interest. The third servant is condemned and sent to a place whose description Jesus normally used to describe the place we know as hell.

We talk a lot about our belief that salvation is a free gift that comes from God through His Son, Jesus Christ. If that is the case and this final servant had accepted that free gift to enter His Master's house, then is it possible for one to lose their salvation if they don't produce for the Master? James, the half-brother of Jesus, dealt with the same issue. He writes, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder" (James 2: 14-19.)

When someone truly believes in Jesus to the point where their entire life is surrendered to the Lord of Life, there are certain changes that begin to be made within that person's life. For one, the Holy Spirit moves in and takes up residence. The Apostle Paul talked about it in 1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20 when he said, "Do you not know that your



body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The compassion and the works that James is talking about come as a direct result of God taking over someone's life. It is a natural outcome of God directing the life of one of His creation. What Jesus, James and Paul are describing is the course that always happens after someone accepts Jesus' free gift and enters the Kingdom of God. That did not happen in the life of the third servant. He says he believes, but that belief is just like James describes the demon's belief. Satan and his minions know for absolute certain who Jesus is. There is no doubt in any of their minds, but that belief does not translate into entry into God's Kingdom. I believe that George Washington lived and was the first president of our country. Yet that belief does not outwardly change the way I live my life. That's the kind of belief that Satan has. It's a "so what" kind of belief.

What separates the first two servants from the third is that they allowed the character of their master to permeate their lives and they were never the same again. As they allowed their master's influence to take over, they both became more like him and began to do the works that the Master did. That is what the master rewarded. The only way anyone can know that they have entered the Kingdom of God right now is to look at the product of that belief. Take a moment and look back over the years. Do you see any change in your life? Is there a difference in the way you react to stress? Is there an increasing level of love for those less fortunate? Do you enjoy serving God more than yourself? If you are a member of the Kingdom, these types of things will be present in ever increasing volumes as Jesus lives out His life in you. If they are not present, then

perhaps you need to go back to square one and examine what you are going to do with Jesus.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you really enjoy serving God more than yourself?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 27th**

**Sheep and Goats**  
**Matt. 25: 31-46**

I have seen today's passage, found in Matthew 25: 31-46 used in a lot of different ways. Some use the passage to evoke a spirit of fear within the hearts of people who are sitting on the fence about Jesus. After all, we don't want to be goats do we? Others use this passage as a means to motivate Christians to do the kinds of things that Jesus lists in 35 and 36. In either case this event is taught as a time to fear unless you are doing the right kind of things. Isn't it funny how Jesus never used the word "fear" to describe a Christian's relationship with their Heavenly Father? That's why I have a general problem with the normal interpretation of our Bible verses for today.

As we begin our journey into the meaning of this section of the Bible, we first notice that the scene takes place at the final judgment, which is also known in Revelation 20: 11 as the Great White Throne Judgment. The one doing the judging is described as

the Son of Man, whom we know to be Jesus. The description of the power and majesty that surrounds Jesus tells us that He will be nothing like what the world has seen before. The one whom they have ignored and marginalized will command everyone's attention at that moment. Every person who has even briefly occupied space on earth will be brought before Him and will be separated into two distinct groups. Notice, however, the separation that occurs is between sheep and goats. It is not a separation based upon the deeds done. It is based solely on who they are. The first group is described as sheep who call Jesus their shepherd. Under the guidance of the Good Shepherd, these sheep have naturally done the types of things that Jesus would have done had He had physically stayed on earth. The second group is described as goats that would not follow anyone, but usually did only what their little hearts desired. In other words, the sheep acted like sheep and the goats acted like goats.

Notice also that as the sheep are judged, it is for blessings only. For Jesus says here, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Since those who have accepted Jesus' payment on the cross have all of their sins forgiven, there is nothing left to judge. They are then free to take hold of their inheritance which has been prepared for them since the beginning of time.

The goats suffer a much different fate. They are judged according to what they have done through life. Since those deeds are not covered by Jesus' blood, that's all that is left. If you want a different perspective on their fate, you need only read Revelation

20: 11-15. The passage reads like the old television show, This is Your Life. One can only imagine the agony that will be felt as all of a person's secret thoughts are brought into the open for everyone to see. If everyone were really honest with ourselves, we would have to think that undergoing such exposure, so that even our very thoughts are made public, would be something to be avoided like the plague.

It is obvious that Jesus' motive in giving this illustration is to once more put before His creation the great choice that each of us has to make. It sometimes seems that Jesus did that a lot. I suppose that is because of the terrible consequences that lie behind the wrong choice. If God were to go to all of the time and agony of sending His only beloved Son to His creation in order die on a cross so that His creation can even have a chance to be sheep at the final judgment, then it would only follow that the alternative must be really bad.

Actually I am glad that He keeps the choice ever before us. I took quite some time trying to decide before I finally entered the narrow gate. Then after entering that gate, I had a number of mentors who saw to it that I understood what entering that gate meant in the way I lived out the rest of my life. I will always be grateful to both the people who pointed out the gate to me and to my early mentors. What I must do now is to show that gratitude for the people who came before me and to continue the work they started by showing others the narrow gate and mentoring them to live a life that is worthy of the calling that Jesus gives us. How about you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How can you show gratitude towards those who mentored you?

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**THE FINAL WEEK**  
**October 28th**

**Mary Repents**

**Matt. 26: 1-13, Mark. 14: 1-9, John 12: 1-8**

It had been a busy week at their house. They had been blessed with having Jesus and His disciples there each night as He did His business in Jerusalem during the day time hours. The preparations for the evening meal were well under way. Martha was her usual busy self. She ran a tight ship with all of the servants. It didn't take long for one to realize that you didn't get in Martha's way when she got like this or you would be run over. Lazarus occupied his usual place in a corner out of the way. He wasn't quite the same as before he had died. Though he never spoke of the time he spent in the tomb, he did spend a lot of time deep in thought. And then there was Martha's husband, Simon, poor Simon, bravely battling the leprosy that made him an outcast in society. He hadn't been able to worship in the temple for such a long time. In Jesus it seems that Simon had found a different way to commune with God. That's why he made the effort to dine with Jesus each night in order to hang on each word that came out of the Master's mouth.

As Jesus had arrived and the meal was served, Mary took up her usual place as close to Jesus as she could possible get. She couldn't explain it, but when she was at Jesus' feet, everything else just seemed to shrink into insignificance. Yet tonight, there seemed to be something different about her Master. Perhaps it was the look in His eyes or the tone of His voice. Mary couldn't help but think that something significant was about to happen to Him. She wanted to wrap her arms around Him and tell Him that everything would be just fine, but something else kept popping in her mind. She kept going back to their conversation in the garden before Lazarus came back. Why had she criticized and doubted her savior? She loved her brother deeply, but why had she taken his death out on Jesus as if He had somehow failed her? Her feelings of guilt rose to such an extent that she found herself suddenly running to the back of the house. What could she do to show Jesus the extent of her sorrow at how she had behaved on that day? As she pondered these things, her eyes locked on a jar of very expensive perfume that had been a gift from Martha. Suddenly she knew what must be done to free her from her guilt. Grabbing the jar she rushed out to the central dining area and dropped at the feet of Jesus.

With a sorrow that rose from the very depths of her soul, Mary began weeping uncontrollably at the feet of Jesus. Quietly she began pouring the oil on Jesus' feet and wiping it off with her hair until the entire room was filled with its sweet fragrance. She heard the critical voice of Judas questioning the wisdom of her expensive offering, but she didn't care. It was true that such an expensive jar could have been sold and would have supported a great many of the poor. Yet the release she felt as she poured out her

soul and with it the guilt that had held her hostage was more than worth it to her. Besides, Jesus was now defending her deed before the entire crowd. Mary didn't understand His words about how she had prepared His body for burial, but she did appreciate the fact that her deed had not gone unnoticed by Him. She also appreciated the fact that the heavy burden of guilt was now completely gone and was replaced by a joy that she had not felt in a very long time.

Perhaps you can identify with the way the Mary felt that night? There is nothing as heavy as a burden of guilt. It may be that you have been carrying that load around for so long that you have forgotten what it was like to be free of it. Well, I'm here to tell you that there is a way for you to be forever free from its weight. Your freedom lies in the same place that Mary found her freedom, at the feet of Jesus. Just drop to your knees and gaze into the eyes of Jesus. You will find it easy to pour out your soul to Him and to ask for that cleansing forgiveness that He so freely wants to give you. One thing I will promise you is that if you allow Jesus to free you from your burden of guilt, your soul will be filled with a joy that cannot be described. I will also promise you that after your burden is lifted, you will want nothing more than to serve the Master for the rest of your life.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How did you identify with Mary?

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**A Deal With the Devil**  
**Matt. 26: 14-16**

We've talked about it before. The Jewish leadership wanted Jesus to permanently exit their lives in the worst way. So when Judas arrives with an offer to hand Jesus over to them, they couldn't resist. Matthew 26: 15 tells us that they counted out thirty pieces of silver and gave the coins to Judas as payment for his services. Now I have always wondered why thirty pieces of silver? These men prided themselves on knowing the Torah backwards and forwards. Surely they had read at some point in their lives the words found in Zechariah 11: 12 that had always been regarded as a prophesy that concerned Israel's coming Messiah. If you read the entire section of the Bible around that verse in Zechariah, the description bears a remarkable resemblance to the events surrounding the end of Judas' life. I don't know. It just seems to me that perhaps they should have given Judas twenty-nine pieces instead. That way the prophesy wouldn't have been fulfilled.

You follow that logic if you believe that Jesus intentionally set out to fulfill all of the Messianic prophesies that pointed to Messiah. To be sure there are some that He had direct control over, but others like the one in today's story, Jesus had no control over whatsoever. The reality was that it was God, the Father who was firmly in control of all of the events that now surrounded His beloved Son.



If you think about the entire event of Judas, you have to be more than a little bit puzzled by it all. Why would someone who had been that close to Jesus for so long turn his back on the Master and betray Him? If you are truly honest with yourselves, there have been times in your life when you have wondered if Jesus were truly the one to put your trust in. Something has gone terribly wrong in your life and you are left filled with doubts about the course your life has taken so far. You ask yourself, “If Jesus really loves me, why did this happen?” Now as you confront the person of Judas, you wonder if in those moments you would have taken the very same steps. Dr. Alexander Bruce in his book, *The Training of the Twelve*, pondered the reasons for Judas’ actions. Dr. Bruce asks some rather revealing questions.

Did Judas love money more than the Master? It was noticed by the gospel writers that Judas was the group treasurer and that he regularly helped himself to the group’s wealth. If that was the case, surely he could have negotiated a better rate than what were probably thirty silver shekels, each weighing less than an ounce? One has to believe that there was usually more money in the group’s money bag than that.

Today, we refer to this man as Judas Iscariot. Have you ever wondered why this was the only one of Jesus’ disciples to have a last name? Actually, it wasn’t Judas’ last name at all. What you are reading is seen in Aramaic as Judas Ish Keriioth, which is more accurately translated Judas man of Keriioth. Keriioth was a town in northern Judah that was likely the home town of the man now known as the great traitor. That would make Judas the only disciple who was not a Galilean. Perhaps in all of the jockeying for

position in the Kingdom of God that had gone on amongst the disciples over the last several months, Judas has come to believe that whoever the greatest was in the kingdom, it was not going to be someone from Judea.

Perhaps our answer can be found in Jesus Himself? As we read through each of the gospels, it becomes apparent that Jesus knew from the beginning that He had a traitor in His midst. It would not be a stretch to believe that Jesus knew from the beginning of time who would betray Him. Perhaps the human side of Jesus had somehow treated Judas differently than the others. I know myself if I suspect someone does not have my best interests at heart, I tend to back away from that person. Maybe that was what happened here and Judas sensed it. If Judas felt that Jesus had rejected him, it could have prompted Judas to do what he did.

For whatever reason you may wish to believe, the result was the same as Judas entered the temple alone and made his deal with the devil. All that he had heard over the preceding years stood rejected as he turned his back on Jesus. His reputation over the last two millennia has been permanently set by this one action. Do you think you could do the kind of things that Judas did? That's something you will have to take up with God.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Could you do the kind of things that Judas did?

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**The Preparation**  
**Mark 14: 12-16**

In most countries of the world the condemned are given a last meal before their date with the executioner. Though this one was not given or acknowledged by the civil government of the day, we will now begin to take a look at Jesus' last meal here on this earth. We have come to Thursday of Jesus' final week. It was a day like all of the other days that week that began in nearby Bethany at the home of Mary and Martha. Most of the disciples spent the day with Jesus in the house. Jesus was, no doubt, resting in order to build up strength for the ordeal that He knew would soon begin. It was Passover and the evening would bring the initial traditions that marked the season. It would be a day where in every house in Israel a search would be made by candlelight through out the house to rid it of every trace of leaven. Since leaven was symbolic of sin, the picture for all of Israel would be one of ridding one's life of sin so that each would be worthy to identify with their forefathers who lived in the time of Moses.

As we rejoin our story, the disciples are puzzled as to how and where they were to eat of the Passover feast which would take place at the very beginning of the week's festivities. In Mark 14: 12-16, we see a glimpse of the relationship that still existed between Jesus and His disciples. He was still the Master and they were confident enough in that relationship so that they waited until that very day to even begin worrying about the upcoming event. In the disciples I see so little of the impatient waiting upon God that

I sometimes have to deal with in my own life. Luke tells us in chapter 22, verse 8 that it was Peter and John who were sent to make the preparations. They were told to go into Jerusalem and there they would meet a servant carrying a large water jar who would lead them to the house where they were to make the necessary preparations.

That the house belonged to a disciple of Jesus is obvious. Space in crowded Jerusalem at Passover was at a premium. Every nook and cranny that could hold a small group of people had been booked for months. Yet this man kept his large upper room vacant in case God had need of it. Tradition has it that this man was none other than the father of John Mark, the writer of the second gospel. As Peter and John entered the upper room, they saw that it was already set up for the task at hand. They probably would have seen the table already in place with the low slung seating, suitable for reclining at table as was the custom of the time. Also in place were probably the wine for the four cups, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs necessary for the ceremony.

At that time, historians tell us that the paschal lamb was procured at the temple in a rather elaborate ceremony. Since they were in a bit of a rush, Peter and John would have hurried to the temple so as to be part of the first of three groups of pilgrims that now entered into the Court of Women. What followed was a three-fold blast of a trumpet signaling that the lambs were now being sacrificed. The group would have been ushered through the rather large Nicanor Gate into the Court of Israel. As they entered, a large group of Levites would have begun chanting the great Hallel, consisting of Psalm 113 to 118. The worshippers would have joined in on the first verse of each of the Psalms and

would leave the rest of the Psalm for the Levites to chant. One can only imagine what was on the minds of Peter and John as the Levites got to Psalm 118 and chanted, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” The last time they had heard those words must have seemed to have taken place much longer than four days ago. So much had happened since that day.

The paschal lambs would have been flayed and cleansed with the parts that were to be burned on the great altar removed. What was left of the animal was placed upon staves and carried back to the upper room on the shoulders of Peter and John. With everything in readiness, the only thing left was to wait for the arrival of Jesus and the rest of their fellow disciples.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What example from Jesus’ life can I apply to my own?

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**THE FINAL DAY**  
**October 31st**

**Knowing and Doing**  
**John 13: 1-3**

As we have journeyed together through the four gospels, have you noticed that there is nowhere where any of the writers have given us a description of what Jesus looked like? In any crime drama, the first thing the police want out of an eye-witness is a

physical description of the perpetrator. Yet a description of Jesus is just not there. I understand that in giving a physical description one would have been limited the artistic skills of hundreds of painters and sculptors over the centuries, but is that the real reason for such an omission? Actually I don't think so. I believe a description of what Jesus looked like is not there for the simple reason that it is not important. For example, would it change where someone spent their eternity if they knew what Jesus looked like?

What is important for people to know, whether they are currently inside the Kingdom of God or not, is how Jesus thought. It is the thought patterns of people that determine what they do. In other words, you will never act differently than you think deeply. Now I want you to think for a moment about that last sentence. Solomon, the wisest man the world has ever seen said, "For as a man thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23: 7). Jesus pointed to the heart as the source for all things unclean when He said, "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Matthew 15: 17-19) So if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you must think the way Jesus thought.

I say this because we often overlook the first few verses in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of John as we race to see what happened at the beginning of the Last Supper. Yet these first 3 verses are pivotal if we are to understand what was behind Jesus' actions that night. So let's now take a moment to read John 13: 1-3 and see if we can gain some insight into

Jesus' motives. Did you notice how often John uses the word "knew?" What kind of things did Jesus know? First He knew that it was now time for Him to return to heaven. He knew all of the pain and suffering that would be His over the next 24 hours. He had known it since the world began. Second, Jesus knew how deeply He loved those who had chosen to follow Him. They weren't perfect, yet Jesus loved them anyway. Third, He knew that God had put everything within His power. What was going to happen that day was done with the full permission of Jesus. At any moment, He could have stopped it and there would have been nothing anyone could have done about it. So why didn't He? We would have. At the very moment the first nail pierced our flesh, we would have said, "Enough!" He didn't stop His execution because He knew that He had come from God and was now returning to God. He knew that His pain was necessary if there was ever going to be a solution to man's constant rebellion against the will of His creator.

Now we are going to stop right there because the next verse begins with the word, "So." What we will be talking about tomorrow comes as a direct result of the things that Jesus knew. Take a moment to review the things that Jesus knew that motivated Him to take off His clothes and do the job of a slave. Is there anything in that list that you do not know? Now I am not talking about your giving a mental assent to these ideas as if it were some philosophical debate. I'm asking do you know these things deeply? Remember what I said earlier. You will never act differently than you think deeply. When you are confronted with an opportunity to serve the less fortunate, what is the first thing that comes into your brain? Are you thinking about all of the other things that you

need to be doing with that time, or does your mind picture the creator of the universe stripped down to just a towel around His waist?

If you want your life to go in a different direction, you have to start at the source of your actions. I have found that the times in my life where I have wandered are those times when I am not daily in the Word of God. I am not talking about reading a few verses in the morning when I am half asleep. I'm talking about those times when I am meditating on the deep truths that are found within the Bible's pages. I'm talking about those times when the Holy Spirit is actively teaching me how to apply the words that I am reading. It is during those times in my life that I find myself becoming more like Jesus in what I do. The challenge that I take from our time together today is to spend more time meditating on God's word. How about you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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When are you going to spend more time meditating on God's word?

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